



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

“Songs of Happiness and Change.
Aspects of the Oral Tradition of Tīj:
The Major Women’s Festival in Nepal.”

Verfasserin

Pratibha Chelaparampath

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, im Juni 2011

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 387

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Diplomstudium Indologie

Betreuer:

Prof. Dr. Martin Gaenszle

Contents

Contents	I
Note on Transcription, Transliteration, Translation and Abbreviations	III
Preface	V
1. The Tīj festival	01
1.1 Overview of the Study	01
1.2 Some Relevant Aspects of South Asian Women's Culture	02
1.3 Introduction to The Tīj Brata: The Fasting Festival for Women Only	12
1.4 The Research to Date	16
1.5 The Methodology and Plan of Study	26
2. The Tīj Festival 2008 in Nepal: What Does the Festival of Tīj Offer the South Asian Woman?	32
2.1 Tīj, an Annually Repeating Performance	33
2.2 The Poudyal Household and the Maternal Senior Female Member of the Family	34
2.3 The Singing and Dancing at home	37
2.4 The Morning <i>pūjā</i> in the Veranda	38
2.5 The Pashupatinath Temple Complex	40
2.6 The Evening <i>pūjā</i>	44
2.7 The R̥ṣi Pancami Celebrations	47
2.8 Tīj Offers the Women a Means to Produce and Experience Cultural Values	50

3. The Tīj Songs and Their Analysis 52

3.1 “ <i>Āyo nayā lahar</i> ” (Song No:1)	53
3.2 <i>Tījko rahar āyo barīlai</i> (Song No:02)	73
3.3 “ <i>Sohra singārgarikan ho</i> ” (Song No:03)	81
3.4 “ <i>Bola bola bola didi bahini</i> ”(Song No:04)	85
3.5 “ <i>Herana lālumai ma kati rāmrī chu</i> ” (Song No:05)	90
3.6 “ <i>Maitīghar...maitīghar...maitīghar...</i> ” (Song No:06)	99
3.7 <i>Sāno māyālāi bāṭōmā bheṭ bhayo (let bhayo)</i> ” (Song No: 07)	105
3.8 “ <i>Kāṭdina gorulāi ghāsa barīlai</i> ” (Song No:08)	109
3.9 “ <i>Ahile ko Tīj pani hāmro lāgi āeko cha</i> ” (Song No:09)	115
3.10 “ <i>Nepālmā gaṇatantra āeko cha</i> ” (Song No:01)	117
3.11 An Overview of the Songs	120

4. Conclusion: The Missing Link of *Sukha* Songs 122

4.1 An Overview of the Issues in the Tīj Songs	122
4.2 The Dynamics of Song-Tradition	124
4.3 The South Asian Woman is Not a Voiceless Puppet.	125
4.4 A Positive Representation of the Feminine	126
4.5 The Interweaving of the Different Dimensions	127
4.6 <i>Āyo nayā lahar</i> : Some Aspects of ‘Folk Feminism’	134
4.7 The Open Questions in the Genre of Women’s Song Tradition	136

Photos: Tīj Festival 2008	139
----------------------------------	-----

References	141
-------------------	-----

Abstract: English	143
--------------------------	-----

Abstract: German	144
-------------------------	-----

Biodata	145
----------------	-----

Note on Transcription, Transliteration, Translation and Abbreviations

I first transcribed my recordings of Nepali songs in Devanagari, and then transliterated them. I have employed a standard system for transliterating the Nepali, Sanskrit and Hindi words. They are italicized and presented with diacritics. Proper Nouns and the name of towns etc, are reproduced in roman type without diacritics, and they are written in the conventional manner as they appear, rather than as direct transliterations.

Reference Dictionaries

- Apte Vaman. Shivaram. 1970. The Students Sanskrit- English Dictionary. Motilal Banarsidas. Delhi.
- McGregor, R.S. (ed.) 1993. The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary. Oxford University Press. Oxford.
- Turner, R. L. 1961. A comparative and etymological dictionary of the Nepali Language. London, Routledge.

Abbreviations

- Nep. Nepali
Skt. Sanskrit
Hin. Hindi

Preface

My visit to the Kathmandu valley in the monsoon months of August and September 2008 was fruitful in several aspects. This work studies and analyses the Tīj festival, 2008 and some of the songs I documented in the course of the three day women's festival. The methodology of study has been participatory observation. I describe and analyse the festival of Tīj principally through three different lenses, that of myself, the Poudyal family whom I accompanied during the festival, and thirdly the numerous songs and interviews I documented in the course of the festival

The backdrop of Tīj portrayed here is the Kathmandu Valley. The household *pūjā* place, the neighbourhood *āgani*,¹ the square in front of the Pashupatinath Temple complex, the river Bagmati, the streets on the way to Pashupatinath etc. are some of the scenes of the Tīj festival which I documented in the course of the festival. In the afternoon, the background of the documentation shifts back to the Nepali household, where the *Tulsi pūjā*, the *Ārati* and the *Pati pūjā* take place, ending with the breaking of the fast in the evening. On the third day, the festival continues with the ritual bathing at Pashupatinath and then moves on to the Tekhudhoban, where we come across endless rows of singing dancing women, who await their turn to get a *darśan* of the Śiva *liṅgam*.

My foremost thanks goes to Prof. Dr. Martin Gaenszle, Institute of South Asian Studies, Vienna for his guidance and support during the entire course of my work. I would also like to thank Mrs. Alaka Chudal M.A. for helping me with the introductions to the Poudyal family, whom I could interview and record during the Tīj ritual celebrations. Mrs. Chudal has also been very helpful in proof reading the Tīj songs and their translations. I should also mention Mrs. Sony Baral for her help with the Tīj songs. Further I would like to thank the Poudyal family for the warmth with which they welcomed me into the midst of their Tīj celebrations; especially Asha Poudyal and Shanta Poudyal.

¹ *āgani* "courtyard"

1.The Tīj Festival

1.1 Overview of the Study

My attempt is to appraise the magnitude and dimension of a women's festival, particularly their folk songs, in understanding aspects of South Asian women's lives. My interest has been to analyse the festival, and the songs for a better perception of certain aspects of culture in the South Asian context such as:

- a. Tīj as a women's festival
- b. The issue of 'folk feminism'
- c. Songs as entry point to the better understanding of the women's world.

This study analyses the Tīj festival and some of the songs recorded during the Tīj festival of 2008. The themes of the songs vary over a broad spectrum. We come across songs calling for social changes, where the everyday problems faced by the women who are unable to cope with the changes in the society, is presented in vivid colours. These songs then gradually present the public with the new image of a 'modern woman.' We have here a good example to illustrate the fact that the South Asian woman does have a voice. She is speaking about her problems, she is aware that there are changes happening in her society, and she asks questions regarding it. She shows her dissatisfaction with the stereotype role she is playing, and the frustrations connected to the figure of the traditional image of 'the ideal South Asian Woman.' I would like to argue that the split-image perspective about the South Asian woman holds no water when we look deeper into these songs.

The study of the women's festival and their oral traditions helps us better understand of the everyday lives and interests of the South Asian woman. I would like to argue that the songs present the women with a medium to portray the issues relevant to her, be it social, political, or familial. The festival of Tīj can thus be labelled as a platform for the creation of certain aspects of 'folk feminism.'

The work tries to throw light on the question if and how the women of South Asia represent themselves. Are there any alternative models available to the existing conception of South Asian feminism? How far do the traditional and the contemporary go hand in hand? How is the image of the South Asian woman different from its western counterpart? What differences and similarities does one perceive in the view of the classical traditions, that of the textual and that of the folk traditions? How far is Tīj and its oral texts instrumental in the creation of a public sphere in South Asia?

1.2 Some Relevant Aspects of South Asian Women's Culture

“The picture of the Indian woman is a mirage. A lot has been written about her, whether by anthropologists, historians, economists, or sociologists. On the one hand she is considered to be *abala* (weak) and illiterate, needing state government support in the form of NGOs and other developmental institutions. On the other hand, she is the *Gṛhalakṣmi*,¹ whose presence lights up every household. In this form she is bountiful, the one who heralds the good times. But, if one tests her patience to the limit, she can become Durgā, the destroyer of all evils (*pāpavināśini*).² Then all men respect her.”³

1.2.1 Some existing debates on women's sub-culture and identity

Our central focus in the coming chapters will question what women do with words. As I shall argue later on, the need is for a multi-layered approach, which is capable of encompassing attention to the agency of particularly positioned speakers and actors. Then, to the relationship between culture as a system of shared meanings and culture, as a set of contested and negotiated meanings. Such an approach is likely to view societies not as structurally fixed entities, but in terms of the processes through which relationships are constructed, negotiated, and contested. Everyday life is open to multiple interpretations, indeterminacies, and ambiguities, and likewise to the different speech strategies of speakers in various positions. To take into consideration only the formal interview statements from women, or the standard observations of women's public adherence to the norms of subordination and hierarchy, we get a one-sided perspective that women are incapable of using verbal strategies to oppose this hierarchy.

¹ Gṛhalakṣmi “the Lakṣmi of the house”

² *pāpa* “sin, crime, vice“, *vināśini* „destroyer”

³ Sita Mainali. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

In the coming chapters, I will be asking the question of whether the object ‘woman’ of the male tradition is at all a speaking, imagining, singing, acting person. Does her multiplicity, both in artistic expressions and in everyday negotiations make her all the more whole and strong?

What exactly does one mean by women’s oral traditions? Does it mean 1. Oral traditions sung by women 2. Oral traditions which are about women? My study looks more into the former category. The latter category would deserve a whole analysis in itself. It could handle the separate world of women, or it could interweave with that of the so-called ‘normal world’ (the combined world of men and women) where a parallel reality exists.

We should ask ourselves the question of whether the folk traditions of South Asia can be separated from gender issues. Most of the folk categories, genres and occasions hang totally with the identity of the participant and the observers. Similarly the subject matter of these genres represents, reiterates, and reflects upon or in some way questions the established patterns in the community.

That is, if one asks the question; “Who performs this genre, or who are the actors in the representation of this genre”? What is their age group, religion, caste, ethnic background, gender, economic status, social status, whether married, unmarried, widowed, etc? Likewise one has to ask who the target public is, for this category of genre. Is it open for people of every age, religion, gender, caste, social status, and so on? One asks the question of whether the expression of folklore art is subject to certain structure or is not an open category, to be expressed or celebrated indiscriminately by all and for all.

In the course of my study, it will become clear that the gender issues hold a major hand in the categorisation of folklore art in South Asia. South Asian society, as we shall see, is structured according to appropriate roles for the male and the female, be it everyday life or a formal occasion. Strict divisions are made between the private sphere and the public outer sphere. Festivals which are celebrated in the outer sphere have

different tone, different nuances and focus, and freedom in contrast to those celebrated in the private sphere. Temple areas, city squares, town centres, formerly specified routes along the town roads, and gathering spots such as under the central tree of the village, act as the stage for the public expression of performances, rituals, work spaces, and leisure activities. In contrast, the private house courtyard, the back courtyard, the women's quarter of the house, or private courtyards demarcated for the same purpose for the time being are delineated as 'private spheres.' Meeting points of rivers also hold a very special role in these festivals, with the private and public spheres intermingling, depending upon the context, the accession and the ritual.

This could throw light upon the question of why one comes across separate traditional genres for men and women. The women's genres, therefore, take place in a courtyard, inner room, or cooking area, where male presence is not wished for, the men being barred from their festivities. One may, however, see that the male performances are open mostly to both men and women, except in exceptional cases.⁴

Raheja and Gold⁵ in their writing, "Listen to the Heron's words," have done pioneer work in North India on the women's oral traditions popular in that region. Their book analyses the perspectives found in North Indian women's local traditions and begins to examine their consequences for the lives of these women in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The heron is a graceful white bird of ambiguous moral insignificance in North Indian traditions. Portrayed as a masculine bird, herons guide the lost and the thirsty to refreshing pools in popular stories and epics. Whereas the heron symbolises the predatory hypocrisy in the standard Sanskrit texts, in women's texts a heron's speech tells of alternative moral perspectives on kinship, gender and sexuality. These perspectives are shaped by women, but are sometimes shared by men.

Gloria Raheja lived and did research in Pahansu in the "Banyan tree neighbourhood", in the house of Telu Ram and Jabbar Singh, during the year 1971. Ann Gold, on the other hand, went to India in 1979 intending to live in a village and study religious values, especially those associated with Hindu pilgrimage. However, having set

⁴ E.g. The yearly Shabarimala Yātra in Kerala is exclusively open for males and pre-pubescent females.

⁵ Raheja and Gold 1994:xxviii

foot in Gatiyali, a North Indian Village, the author found the gender differences and its related behaviour an interesting topic to be analysed further.

“I had arrived in Rajasthan in 1979 with various preconceptions about Indian women, and most of them ... drawn from gossip, fiction, and occasionally anthropology were at least partially wrong.”⁶

The book argues how the performances associated with Hindu festivals and the many rituals surrounding birth, children, and weddings are both expressions of and sources for women's positive self-images. Ann resided with well-off Rajputs, and Gloria with prosperous land-owning Gujars. The book wishes to make that interpretive shift; to listen to the truth-speaking heron. Without denying the evident reality of male voices maligning a silent female figure and congratulating themselves, they argue that silence itself is a construct neither monolithic nor pervasive. The authors argue that the object 'woman' of the male tradition, is a speaking, imagining, singing, and acting person, whose multiplicity, both in artistic expressions and in everyday negotiations, makes her all the more whole and strong.

Raheja and Gold's work focuses on the women's oral traditions and women's use of language in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, Northern India. The authors examine the stories, ritual songs, personal narratives and ordinary conversations from the villages of Pahansu, and Ghatiyali. They also analyse the ways in which these speech genres play a role in women's self-perceptions and self-fashioning. The ways in which the same may be understood as constituting a moral discourse in which gender and kingship identities are constructed, represented, negotiated, and contested in everyday life.

The authors share an interest with James Scott⁷ in “everyday forms of resistance” and systems of ideological and material dominance. They focus on the ‘hidden transcripts’⁸ implicit in women's speech and song, which are often veiled, but sometimes overt and public. They also focus on words and actions through which women

⁶ Raheja and Gold, 1994. pp:xxviii

⁷ Scott 1985

⁸ Scott 1990

communicate their resistance to dominant North Indian characterisations of *striyā carita*⁹ and kinship relationships.

The primary effort in their work has been to understand women's language; the words in which they construct and communicate alternative self-perceptions and alternative vantage points on their social world. The authors also, on one hand, wish to analyse the relationship between women's moral discourse and everyday resistance, and on the other hand, forms of power in North Indian social relationships.

A study on kinship is limited so long, as one is able to analyse only the limited viewpoint of the women as they move from their paternal home to conjugal home. One asks the question of how actively are the women involved in the practices of gift exchanges and other kinship relationships, and to which extent they differ from those of their male family members. The above question becomes relevant in typical kinship practices where the employment of specific terminologies, marriage structures, the elaborate exchange of gift giving, and attitudes of respect; where both the male and female members of the family are involved. However, in much of the general anthropological analysis of women's roles, these dualistic discourses and multiple layers of practice have often not been taken into consideration.

Raheja and Gold point out the need for a discourse-centered approach in the study of the social structures in North India. A discourse which is capable of encompassing attention to the agency of particularly positioned speakers and actors. Such an approach is likely to view societies not as structurally fixed entities, but in terms of the processes through which relationships are constructed, negotiated, and contested. Everyday life in their view is open to multiple interpretations, indeterminacies, and ambiguities, and likewise to the different speech strategies of speakers in various positions. To take into consideration only the formal interview statements from women, or on the standard observations of women's public adherence to the norms of subordination and hierarchy, we get a one-sided perspective that women are incapable of using verbal strategies to oppose this hierarchy.

⁹ *striyā carita* "women's nature"

In analyzing women's oral traditions and women's commentaries on them, it soon became apparent to the authors that the women have in fact composed their own mythologies. Though they may not carry the authoritative weight of certain versions of the Ramayana, or other texts, women's songs and stories consistently compose ironic and subversive commentaries on the representation of gender and kinship roles found in the epic texts, male folklore genres, and a good deal in everyday talk. Raheja and Gold's work points to the polyvalent nature of women's discourse, and to the multiple perspectives encoded in them.

The major issue that comes up is the inherent difficulty of retrieving the Subaltern voice¹⁰ from the South Asian historical archive, wherein there was little concern to preserve a record of such voices of ordinary and often illiterate women. Indeed, insofar as they did not speak in a voice agreeable to powerful males, women's voices were often quite literally erased from the historical record. The commentaries on kinship and gender evinced in women's oral traditions are dramatically different from the perspectives most frequently found in textual traditions and folklore genres performed by and for males.

It is precisely because men and women may shift from one perspective to another, that we speak of strategic deployments of these varying discourses. Women may tend to use gender characterizations and valuations differently from men, but we do not find a unitary female voice opposed in all respects to a male discourse. My study permits us to ask questions concerning contextual shifts in meaning and value, sometimes indexed only by an ironic tone, a gesture, a pattern of rhyme in a wedding song. Ethnography, is perhaps more likely than history to bear witness to such fluid and contextual creativity on the part of the women who have all too often been denied the powers of literacy. Women, whose words have been erased from historical records when they proved unpalatable to those who did the writing.

The songs which have been analysed by the authors depict the most memorable experiences in women's lives; leaving ones paternal home and family, and arriving in the

¹⁰ Spivak 1985a

household of a new husband, the domination and hierarchies on the husbands senior relations, the joys of intimacy and sexuality, the birth of children, a husband's betrayal, longing for husband's love, the pleasures of adorning oneself with fine cloths and jewelry, longing for the paternal home and its freedom, and so on. These oral traditions were explicitly addressing the manifold sets of contradictions within the hierarchical sets of contradictions within gender and kinship ideologies of northern India, and in separate regional, linguistic, ritual, festival or genre contexts.

Yet another interesting aspect which has been looked into is the aspect of split-identities of women in Hindu South Asia: the beneficent, caring, procreative and motherly aspects of a woman on the one side, and the dangerous, malign, destructive and threatening sexual potency of women as wives, on the other hand. As as a mother, the woman contributes to the male patrilineal structure, while as a sexual partner, they are seen as a threat to the patrilineal solidarity in a male-dominant structure. This shift in the view of the women's status has brought about certain attitudes of codex in the social structures of South Asia. Female sexuality, considered to be dangerous and threatening must be constantly repressed under structures, and women, notes the author must assume a stance of sexual reticence and *lāj* ¹¹.

However the songs analysed by Gloria and Raheja speak of a lively sexuality, a positive evaluation of sexual pleasures, of eroticism and child birth, which question the so-called split between sexuality and fertility presented in the official versions of women's ideology. Their book raises questions concerning the force, the persuasiveness, and the salience of dominant cultural propositions about patriliney, hierarchy, and women's subordination in everyday experience. The same are not seen as aspects of a fixed and defined cultural system, but as strategically invoked idioms in an ongoing negotiation of personhood and relationship.

The interesting aspect is that when asked formally, men and women would not disagree with the standard understandings in South Asian kinship relations. When asked formally, they are clearly open to ironic, shifting, and ambivalent projections in the

¹¹ *lāj* "shame, disgrace, shyness, modesty." *lāj lāgnu* "to feel ashamed, to feel embarrassed, to feel humiliated, to be shy, diffident, hesitant, to be bashful, coy"

politics of everyday language use, particularly those performed by women, as we will observe later on.

I agree with the authors that the very hierarchical structuring of the society in Northern India, often hinders women from expressing their views in official and political contexts, and in the presence of male affines, who are standing higher in the social ladder. On the contrary, it brings them to develop strategies;

“....by non verbal gestures, intonation of speech, and reading meta-messages in ordinary language.”¹²

What do the Tīj songs presented in chapter 3 inform us about the women’s active resistance? The critical points of the research on the different aspects of women’s language and oral traditions in South Asia have been the multiple views of cultural discourses, the strategic uses to which these views are put, and on verbally artistic speech genres as potential loci of a language resistance.

Women’s gender related traditions need to be mentioned under these above mentioned lenses. Are women’s genres in South Asia, necessarily similar to those for example, in the west? In South Asia, for instance, one comes across predominantly living spheres, which are exclusively male or female, in comparison to, for instance, the West. This naturally leads to more women-oriented and male-oriented social structures.

Here, I think, lies one of the most important keys to the representation of gender issues in South Asia. Women’s traditions have, as we now see, always existed parallel, in the different social layers of the Indian subcontinent. However, the typical approach to portraying a society is by labelling the textual tradition as ‘the classical tradition’, as the correct tradition and the oral tradition as something which is a minor associate of it. This view has gradually been changing in recent times and more studies in the field of oral traditions could help us look deeper into the characteristics of these politics. The Tīj songs recorded and analysed in the coming chapters, will present us with positive evidence that the oral traditions are in no way inferior to the so called traditions. We will

¹² Das 1988:198

see that they lend their own view and understanding to culture, which in turn helps in understanding the society of South Asia.

The study of such folk genres helps us to understand both the heterogeneity and the resistance evident in women's speech. When the concept of 'the South Asian woman' itself is not singular, how can one expect the Indian Woman to have only one voice? When a community represents itself through songs, it is hardly to expect that one hears a single unitary voice, rather one should begin to listen to the myriad of voices expressing themselves.

1.2.2 Women's Rituals (*pūjās* and *bratas*)

Within her study of Indian women's lives, Tracy Pintchmann has noted that even the religious domestic activities performed in the domestic sphere by the Hindu women need not necessarily replicate or affirm the standard domestic ideals. Rather, these activities may function strategically to reconfigure, re-interpret, criticize, or even reject such ideals.¹³ My study of Tīj festival will show that the women indeed are active creators in the production of such ritual cultures, cultures where the role of women has not been allocated its due significance in the earlier researches.

How can one categorise the festival of Tīj? The *Strīdharmapaddhati*¹⁴, the eighteenth century treatise on women by Trayambakayajvan presents three types of ritual categories. The first one is *nitya*,¹⁵ namely, referring to rituals which need to be performed on a daily basis, such as the morning ambulation taken by the traditional householder. The second one is *naimittika*,¹⁶ and indicates those kind of rituals which are to be performed on certain occasions, such as the bath taken by the menstruating women on the fourth day of their cycle. *Kāmya*¹⁷ are the third category of rituals, these being rituals which may be performed if one wishes to obtain some specific blessings

¹³ Pintchmann 2007:6

¹⁴ Leslie 1989.

¹⁵ *nitya* "obligatory"

¹⁶ *naimittika* "occasional or obligatory"

¹⁷ *kāmya* "optional"

accredited to them. Is Tīj a *naimittika* ritual or a *kāmya* ritual? My study below shows that Tīj falls somewhere the borderline between the two. Some women I interviewed laid the focus on the periodicity of the ritual and others emphasised the wish to observe the fast for its benefits. Let us look at two statements:

The *pūjārī* who conducted the Tīj *brata pūjā* for the Poudyal family explained to the gathered women about the correct performance of a *brata* in the context of *mokṣa*.¹⁸

“The correct performance of the Tīj *brata* will ensure that you achieve success, stay a happy *suhāgan*,¹⁹ to attain the heavens and to attain *mokṣa*.”²⁰

What do the women say?

“I perform the Tīj *brata* for the wish of *saubhāgya*²¹, for the well being of my children and family, for our good health, and peace of mind. A *brata* helps me to learn to control my desires, it regular performance improves the character of a woman, and helps to improve her *saṃskāras*. If I perform it correctly and regularly each year, it contributes to the well-being of my husband and family.”²²

As is clearly observable, the first statement from the Brahmin priest is in sharp contrast to the explanation given by Sarita Poudyal, a woman in her mid thirties and the mother of two. The *vidhi*²³ texts promise these *bratas* as an easy means to *mokṣa*. These texts also promise lesser more easily visible fruits, both *dr̥ṣṭa*²⁴ and *adr̥ṣṭa*²⁵. Thus, the compilers of these *nibandhakāra*,²⁶ list the *bratas* as *kāmya*²⁷. We see here the two poles

¹⁸ *mokṣa* “spiritual liberation”

¹⁹ *suhāgan* “a married woman, a woman whose husband is alive”

²⁰ Srīram. Tīj Brata Pūjā 2008. Srīram was the *pūjārī* at the Tīj Brata Pūjā at the Poudyal house.

²¹ *saubhāgya* “happiness, good fortune, prosperity; the possession of a living husband”

²² Santa Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008

²³ *vidhi*, Skt. *vidhiḥ* “doing, performance, practice, an act or action, method, manner, way, means, mode, a sacred precept”

²⁴ *dr̥ṣṭa* “seen, that what is observable”

²⁵ *adr̥ṣṭa* “Unseen, that what is inaccessible”

²⁶ *nibandhakāra* “*vidhi* digests”

of focus. For the *pūjārī*, the *brata* is a step further to *mokṣa*, while for the Hindu women, the spiritual liberation fades into the background, with the family, health, children, spouse, and well-being, taking up the foreground.

This striking difference between the textual stipulations and the verbal answers given by the women I interviewed is interesting. Why would two sources, from the same time period, from the same cultural background, both oral, come up with two answers to the same question? The answer is exactly the point I am trying to make. The orthodox Brahmin *pūjārī*'s answer, moulded to some extent from the *vidhi* text he has been quoting, does help to supply a particular perspective to the practice of these rituals. As Mac Gee²⁸ puts it, it is the living familial wishes, the conjugal blessings, and the well-being, which seem to be in focus among the women. The observance of the practices of this world occupies the women. It is her focus, her territory her main interest, her *dharma*,²⁹ and therefore her opportunity for liberation.

1.3 Introduction to the Tīj Brata: The Fasting Festival for Women Only.

The month of August or September of each year, brings for the South Asians a three day festival in Nepal, which always ends on the fifth day of the brightening moon. By following the rituals and ceremonies stipulated for Tīj, praying to specific gods, and *Ṛṣis*,³⁰ and participating in the song and dance celebrations in the ensuing days, the Nepalese women aspire towards that which is desired by many traditional women in different parts of South Asia,; i.e., a blissful married life, the purification of her mind and soul and felicity and long life for her husband.

Penances and rigid *bratas* are undertaken by the women during this festival, the hardship of which is lightened by bountiful feasts, laughter, and most of all the singing and dancing at the neighbourhood houses. The final stage of the festival, which includes the ceremonial ritual bathing, followed by the *Ṛṣi pūjā*, must fall on the fifth day of the

²⁷ *kāmya* “optional”

²⁸ Mc Gee 1987: 72-88

²⁹ *dharma* “duty, religious duty, caste duty; religion; righteousness, goodness”

³⁰ *Ṛṣis* or *Rishis* “sage, seer, singer of ancient hymns”

waxing moon, and hence, sometimes there is a day's interval between the fasting day and the final day of the R̥ṣi Pancami. In the remaining years, the three days of celebration follow each other consequently.

1.3.1. Tīj: Name form and Tradition

Tīj or 'Teej' festival, locally called 'the festival for women', is celebrated in Nepal, Gujarat, Punjab, Rajasthan, and other parts of North India. Hariyali, Kajari, and Haritalika Tīj are three Tīj festivals celebrated in the course of a year, and are celebrated with exceeding enthusiasm, devotion and jocularity by the women of South Asia. While the Hariyali Tīj is celebrated in the *śukla pakṣa*³¹ of the Śravaṇa³² month, the Kajari Tīj occurs on the *kṛṣṇa pakṣa* of the third day of the same month. The Haritalika Tīj, which is considered the most important of the three, falls on the third day of the first fortnight (the waxing fortnight)³³ of the month of 'Bhadau'³⁴ in the Nepali calendar. It is this final Tīj festival, the one which is most popular in Nepal, which will be our focus of interest.

Many interpretations have been suggested for the name Tīj. One popular interpretation is that 'Tīj' is the name of an insect which comes out during the monsoon season of Śrāvan and Bhadau. While the festival falls in this period, it has been named so. The second answer I received during the interviews, sounded the most plausible, namely, that Tīj denotes that the festival is celebrated for a period of three days.³⁵

Lynn Bennett,³⁶ who did a detailed study of the Tīj festival in rural Nepal in the 1970s and 1980s, writes about the Tīj and the R̥ṣi Pancami festival. Usually celebrated

³¹ *śukla pakṣa* "the bright fortnight" the waxing half of the moon

³² *śravaṇa* "month in the Hindu Calendar July-August."

³³ The Hindu calendar is normally divided into twelve lunar months. The first day of the lunar month is the day following the dark moon or new moon. The lunar months are split into two. The waxing half is called *śukla pakṣa*, the bright half and the waning half is called *kṛṣṇa pakṣa*, the dark half. The full moon day ends the bright lunar fortnight, and the new moon day ends the dark fortnight.

³⁴ Skt. *Bhadra*

³⁵ *tin* "Three" [Skt. *tṛi*, *tri*]

³⁶ Bennett 1983:191

two days afterwards, she connects the name ‘Tij’ to the third day of the lunar fortnight and *pancami* the fifth. Linda Iltis states about the name Haritalika:

“The texts are usually written on Nepali paper (*boṃ*) with one side coated with yellow insecticidal preservative (*haritāla*). Most of the manuscripts are written on individual separate leaves of paper, but continuous fan-fold paper-versions or (*thyāsaphūs*) also exist as well as palm-leaf versions....”³⁷

1.3.2 Dar Khāne Din

The festival begins with a feast on the first day, Dar Khāne Din, where the women are treated to a very lavish dinner.

“Different varieties of *māsu*³⁸ with items including *kukhuro*,³⁹ *mācho*,⁴⁰ *phul*,⁴¹ and *tarkāri*⁴² are prepared and served along with chutneys. *miṭhāi*,⁴³ and *phal*⁴⁴ also form part of the list of delicacies which are served on the day before the fasting, a treat which could often tax the family wallet.”⁴⁵

Seema Mainali⁴⁶ from Thekudhoban further commented;

“The men of the family have to show that all the wishes of the wives are satisfied, even if it means paying a lot of money.”

On this day, trays of sweets and other small items are sent in decorated baskets from the mothers to the homes of their married daughters. In the evening, the women gather together in small groups in the house or courtyard of one neighbour or the other.

³⁷ Iltis 1985:51

³⁸ *māsu* “flesh, meat.”

³⁹ *kukhuro* or *kukhro* “cock, fowl, chicken”

⁴⁰ *mācho* “fish” < Skt. *matsyaḥ*

⁴¹ *phul* “egg”

⁴² *tarkāri* “vegetables”

⁴³ *miṭho* “sweet, delicious, savoury, agreeable”

⁴⁴ *phal* “fruits”

⁴⁵ Radha Mainali. Interview on the R̥ṣi Pancami day, 2008 at Thekudhoban.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

Songs are sung to the accompaniment of drums and clapping, and the merrymaking goes on till the late hours of the night. The fast begins in middle of the night, and often the get-together goes on until morning. Now, the song repertoire is brought out amidst the gathering of women and sung to the accompaniment of specific instruments.

1.3.3 The Tīj Brata Day

The second day is the most important day of the festival, when Tīj fasting is performed on behalf of one's husband. In the villages of Nepal, the same festival is celebrated with the local colourful variations.

“Neither one morsel of food nor drop of liquid may be taken for twenty-four hours. Extremely fastidious, more orthodox women will not swallow their own saliva; it is instead spat put, in order to avoid a sin likened to drinking their own husband's blood.”⁴⁷

The rites of Tīj are to be observed by all Hindu Bahun and Chettri married women and girls who are past puberty. Widows take part partially in the celebrations, as it is supposed to bring special merit to the deceased husband, although they don't wear the customary crimson red *saris* and the other signs of *suhāg*. Seriously ill or physically weak women however are allowed to allocate a Brahmin to undergo the fasts in her place.

Groups of women, dressed in their red *sārīs* assemble in groups around the temple premises, enjoying each other's company. Although weak from the tedious *brata*, and the loss of sleep, the women try to disguise their fatigue, and participate in the singing and dancing and clapping of hands with full gusto.

For those in Kathmandu, it is considered auspicious to take a dip in the Bagmati river in the morning, before changing into their colourful Tīj *sārīs*. This is followed by a *darśan*⁴⁸ of the *Śiva liṅgam* in the temple complex. Either in front of the Pashupatinath temple complex, or at home, the women worship Śiva and Pārvatī in groups. But the

⁴⁷ Seema Mainali. Interview on the R̥ṣi Pancami day, 2008 at Thekudhoban

⁴⁸ *darśan* “ceremonial visit, audience, appearance, vision, dream“ < Skt. *darśana*.

more usual sight is that of women who gather in groups to sing and dance to the rhythm of beating drums and clapping hands.

The women decorate the *thāli* with the items listed out for the *pūjā*, sit in a semi-circle around the *pūjārī*, and the ritual commences. Different *pūjā* items are offered, the *dakṣiṇa* is handed out and finally the *ārati*⁴⁹ is performed. Not one drop of water is consumed by the women in the course of this time. After the *pūjā*, the woman is blessed by her husband, and she then breaks her long fast. We will see a detailed presentation of the Tīj celebrations by the Poudyal family in the next chapter.

“The customs and practices vary from *gāū* to *gāū* and *ṭhaū* to *ṭhaū*. But this is how we celebrate it at home in Kathmandu.”⁵⁰

1.3.4 The Ṛṣi Pancami Rituals

The observance of the Ṛṣi Pancami rituals can be on the fourth day or the fifth day, depending upon the lunar calendar. Only partial fasting is observed here. The sacred temple of Thekudhoban, situated at the confluence of Bagmati and Vishnumati rivers, in the Southern part of Kathmandu city, is the venue of this ceremonial bathing. Symbolic washing of specific parts of the body for the stipulated 360 times, is performed in the correct sequence. After this, the women wait in a long queue in front of the Thekudhoban temple complex, in order to perform a small *pūjā* at the *lingam* of the temple. This heralds the end of the Tīj Ṛṣi Pancami festival.

1.4 The Research to Date

In the following pages, I would like to present the research to date on the subject of Tīj festival. I partly agree with the perspective offered by the study of Holland and Skinner in their work, ‘The Songs of Tīj: A genre of critical Commentary for Women in Nepal’. However, I would like to point out that only particular aspects of the festival have been covered by the above studies. My participatory observance of the Tīj festival,

⁴⁹ *ārati* ”the lamp waved in front of the deity during the *pūjā* ceremonies”

⁵⁰ Sarita Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

moreover brought to light totally different aspects of the Tīj festival. The festival in my opinion, cannot be, as we shall see later on, split into either only ritual or only social scenario. The study to date delegates the Tīj songs as either a.songs sung to the accompaniment of dancing, or b.songs of social and political commentary. The Tīj songs are no doubt fulfilling the above categories too. But, what I experienced in the Kathmandu presented yet another dimension about the women in South Asia, a dimension not yet analyzed for the concepts and values it presents.

I would like to bring back my focus from the Tīj songs to the triple layer of Tīj, i.e., the former being that of the ritual dimension, the second being that of the mythology dimension, and the third one being the dimension of the songs. All the three layers, as we shall see, have their proper place in the picture. The missing element is the obvious, the everyday aspect of the songs, and culture, which is lived from day to day, seemingly unspectacular for the outsider till we take all the seemingly incongruous angles into consideration; It is one which is so blatantly present, that it has been given almost no coverage by the studies to date.

My principal argument, then, will be based upon my analysis of the songs of Tīj, and the interviews and the results they present. The research to date, in my opinion, brings into focus the aspect of resistance in the Tīj songs; the songs being interpreted for their political and social commentary. My study asks the question; how far does resistance play an active role in the songs of Tīj? In which aspects are the songs of Tīj that I documented in Kathmandu offering a resistance to the existing political and social structures? On the one hand, are the women endorsing the ideology of male privilege, while stating a critical commentary on social and political situation of the society on the other? Research reveals that the songs I studied in Kathmandu are not to be confined within these two extremes. My documentation and research of the Tīj festival in a more urban area, Kathmandu, in contrast to the studies of Holland and Skinner in Naudada⁵¹ (named as a mixed-caste Hindu community in the hills of central Nepal), brings to light some new perspectives about the women and their lives. Perspectives, which I hope contribute to the holistic understanding of women's images in South Asia. In my paper, I

⁵¹“Naudada is the name we have give to ten loosely integrated *gāū* (*gaons* or hamlets) that lie along a series of intersecting mountain ridges in central Nepal.” Holland and Skinner 1994:262

would like to bring back particular aspects of the lived-tradition into focus. These are the aspects which are most vulnerable to changes, and hence quite interesting for anthropological and philological studies.

1.4.1 The Analysis of The Ṛṣi Pancami Complex by Lynn Bennett

One of the earliest detailed analysis on the Tīj Ṛṣi Pancami women's festival is by Bennett,⁵² who explores the ways in which the position of high caste Nepali women's in the patrilineal Hindu society, is defined by the social and symbolic roles performed by them. The author points out the existence of a deep ambivalence toward women in the patrilineal ideology expressed by the Hindu ideology, be it economic, legal, political, and religious. Bennett presents us with two models, which she terms the patrifocal and the filiafocal model. Each model revolving around a varied set of standards, values and issues. In the dominant patrifocal system, the affinal women are stratified beneath everyone else⁵³ in their husband's home. The filiafocal model is the alternative parallel structure, where the sacredness of consanguineal women is stressed. Here, argues the author, the patrifocal hierarchy is reversed; the female qualities are ranked over the male, and the younger one is merited with a superior status.

Bennett⁵⁴ states that the Tīj Ṛṣi Pancami complex and the myths surrounding these rituals, demonstrate the patrilineal ideology and the ambivalent view of women while simultaneously aspiring to negotiate some of the strifes and contradictions intrinsic in this perspective. This dichotomy expressed towards women is further enhanced by their association with sexuality. Comparing the Janai Pūrṇi, an all male festival which involves purification through fasting, sexual abstinence, and rigorous bathing, accompanied by worship of the *sapta Ṛṣis*⁵⁵ to the Tīj Ṛṣi Pancami, an all-female festival, where all the

⁵² Bennett 1983:125-164

⁵³ I would like to suggest that it is 'almost everyone else,' and not 'everyone else.' For instance the younger daughter in-laws are further down the hierarchy.

⁵⁴ Bennett 1983:185-207

⁵⁵ The original *Ṛṣis* are traditionally seven. According to one village priest they are: Atre, Kasyap, Biswamitra, Bharadwaj, Gautam, Basista, and Jamadagni. However their numbers increase in certain contexts. One such situation is the explanation of the origin of the *gotra*, each of which is said to be named

above mentioned elements also appear, the author argues how the meaning of the former is amplified by reference to the latter.

Menstrual blood is seen on the one side to pollute the surroundings, in particular the adult initiated males, and hence, considered as something to be handled with strict regulations. On the other side, due to its obvious connection with fertility, it also has some positive connotations.

“It is my contention that menstrual blood is symbolic of affinal women-women in their specifically sexual roles as wife and mother. From the point of view of the patrilineal unit, affinal women, like menstrual blood, are at once necessary and dangerous. They must be brought in to produce children if the lineage is to continue. At the same time affinal women present a threat to both their own husbands individually and to the agnatal group as a whole.”⁵⁶

The fasting during the festival, where the proper undertaking of the *brata* leads to the long life of the husband, suggests that the woman is accountable for her husband's long life. Dancing being considered highly erotic and suggestive in South Asia, respectable women from higher-caste Hindu societies often don't dance. Bennett argues here that the Tīj festival here represents a complete reversal of the Hindu ideal of womanly behaviour. Being '*lāj manne*'⁵⁷ is considered to be a virtue and girls are trained from childhood on to be shy, quiet, and restrained in all her behaviour. Bennett states here:

“...However, this display of the erotic side of female nature is only permissible because on Tīj, it is held in check by the strict purifying fast which the women are undergoing for the welfare of their husbands. On the morning after Tīj women must perform a *pūjā* and make offerings to a Brahman priest dedicating the *brata* to their husband (present, future or in the next life), before they can break the fast. The dangers of female sexuality are thus firmly bracketed by the mutually re-enforcing ascetic and patrilineal ideals.”⁵⁸

after its founding ṛṣi. The number of *gotra* far exceeds seven and includes many names not found on the traditional list given above.” Bennett: 1976:186

⁵⁶Bennett 1983:193.

⁵⁷ *lāj manne* “shy, embarrassed”

⁵⁸ Bennett 1983:198.

The *ṛṣis* are a symbol of patrilineal cohesion, where they provide the link between the festival at Janai Pūrṇi for men, where the sacred thread is purified and the Tīj Ṛṣi Pancami festival where the *saubhāgya sāmān* (women's equivalent of the sacred thread) is purified. In the Ṛṣi Pancami ritual, the women by dedicating their *saubhāgya sāmān* to the chaste wife of Arundhati, are refining their own sexuality. In this manner, it is re-directed in the sole direction acceptable to the Hindu patrilineal concept of world-view: towards their own husbands.

The above statement forms the focal point of argument of Bennett, where she argues that the recurring themes in the Ṛṣi-Pancami complex are two: Former, that the long life of the husband is dependant on the virtue of the wife, and second that the married woman poses a threat to the patrilineal. In Bennett's opinion, the village women who perform the Tīj Ṛṣi Pancami rituals have come to terms with the restrictions placed on them by the commanding ascetic and patrilineal ideology of Hinduism placed upon them. On the basis of the songs and their analysis, I will later on argue, why the above viewpoint is a limited one.

1.4.2 The Mythologies Surrounding Tīj and Ṛṣi Pancami Festival

The mythologies surrounding the Tīj festival have been analysed in detail by Linda Iltis.⁵⁹ The Tīj Brata Kathā,⁶⁰ as well as the Ṛṣi Pancami Kathā, are embedded in the popular Svasthani Brata⁶¹ Kathā, the mythical text which is dedicated to the Goddess Svasthani. The austerities performed by Pārvatī are reproduced by the above text to illustrate the powers of the vow. Iltis states:

“Village women usually perform the arduous Svasthani Brata at least once during their lives-but as the vow can only be performed during the month of *Magh* (Jan-Feb) and requires a month of fasting and worship, it is not performed on Tīj. Instead village women re-enact the first and more traditional part of Pārvatī's austerities in which she worships the sand *linga*”⁶²

⁵⁹ Iltis 1985

⁶⁰ *kathā* “tale, story.”

⁶¹ Iltis uses the version ‘*vrata*,’ whereas the Nepalis use alternately the version ‘*vrata*’ and ‘*brata*.’

⁶² Bennett 1976.

a. The Tīj Brata Kathā

The text narrates how Pārvatī performs the *Svasthāni Brata*.⁶³ Pārvatī's single-minded devotion, austere vows, and her offerings to the Brahmans brings her blessings. Śiva is made aware of Śrī Gaurī's devotion, and in the end, Śiva sends Nārada to win the hand of Pārvatī in marriage.

b. The Ṛṣi Pancami Kathā

The legend of The *sapta ṛṣis* and their wives has been analysed in detail by Lynn Bennett.⁶⁴ This story also appears in the Svasthani Brata Kathā, in the part closely following Śiva's madness after Sati Devi's death. The wives of the *Ṛṣis*, one hundred in number, felt attracted to the wandering Śiva, and decided to follow him. Arundhati, who according to Bennett is the real focus of the entire ritual, however, was the only woman who resists the temptation to follow Mahādev, and thus Śiva grants her the boon of immortality and virility for her husband.

"She is the epitome of the chaste and faithful wife, the *pati brath*,⁶⁵ and myths of her virtue abound in the *Purāṇas*."⁶⁶

Thus, village women interviewed by Bennett, stated that the *pāpa* of having touched a man during menstruation can be removed by Arundhati as she remained faithful to her husband. However Arundhati's myth presented by O'Flaherty⁶⁷ gives us the final answer to the link between the wife's chastity and her husband's longevity, this being one of the central issues of the Tīj Ṛṣi Pancami Complex. "Because Arundhati resists his attempts to seduce her, Śiva gives her the boon of immortality and virility for

⁶³ Refer Ittis 1985 for a detailed translation and description of the *Srī Srī Srī Svasthāni Brata*.

⁶⁴ Bennett 1976:187

⁶⁵ *pati brath*, *pati brat* "devoted to the husband, chaste" < Skt. *pativrata*

⁶⁶ Bennett 1976:200

⁶⁷ Doniger 1991:100

her husband.”⁶⁸ After the *ṛṣis*, it is this virtuous Arundhati who is the target of all the worship at the festival. Bennett interprets here quite astutely:

“... The *saubhāgya sāmān*, then symbolised female sexuality (since they increase a women’s powers of seduction by making her more attractive) and its control (since she may wear them while her husband is alive and presumably her chastity is intact). By dedicating these adornments which they wore on Tīj to dance seductively before the temple of Śiva, to the chaste Arundhati, women are purifying their own sexuality. They are channelling it in the only direction acceptable to Hindu patrilineal ideology-towards their own husband.”⁶⁹

1.4.3 “Contested Rituals, Contested Feminities”

One of the most detailed studies to date of the Tīj songs has been from Dorothy C. Holland and Debra G. Skinner,⁷⁰ who went to Central Nepal⁷¹ in 1990 to study Tīj, the annual Nepali women’s festival, and were struck by the ambivalence between the songs performed at the festival, and the rituals that proceeded and followed the performance. In their opinion, the critical comments, presented in the collective process of song composition and presentation during the dynamics of the festival, offers a medium for women’s critical self-consciousness, and their self-representation in the recent political scenario.

Because of the practices of exogamy and patrilocality, women expected that upon marriage they would leave their natal homes and go to a husband who lived a walk of several hours or even days away. The transition from one’s role as a *didi/bahini*⁷² of the *gāū* to a *buhāri*⁷³ in the husband’s household, was at best a source of dread.⁷⁴

The authors concern themselves with cultural production and the effect of that production, to the projection of identities and subjectivities.

⁶⁸*ibid.*:102

⁶⁹Bennett 1976:200

⁷⁰ Holland and Skinner 1994

⁷¹ The location of study has been named Naudada, a name which will be explained in the following pages.

⁷² *didi / bahini* “elder Sister, younger sister”

⁷³ *buhāri* “son’s daughter”

⁷⁴ Skinner 1995.

“But we also witnessed voices and practices that celebrated different, and in some respects conflicting, ways of being women. In the regional centres of Nepal the conflicts were much more palpable than in Naudada....”⁷⁵

The article further attempts to discuss the question whether ‘the ritual is a site of struggle.’ In their opinion, the ritual is a site for the formation of subjectivities. They argue that the Tīj festival here;

“...represents a case in which a ritual had become a space for the production of alternative, conflicting and conflicted subjectivities, a context in which counter hegemonic femininities were being developed in contest with one another...”⁷⁶

They have pointed their finger to the lack of focus on the Tīj songs, which have, in their opinion been left out of the literature debate. They point out to the unfortunate situation where the songs have not been given their due attention and argue;

“...because our research into their content and into the socio-historical context of their creation and performance reveals that they are neither love songs, thematic complements to the dancing, nor songs of sexuality and eroticism. Nor are the vast majority of them religious songs of devotion congruent with the austere rites of fasting and ritual bathing. Most of the songs we collected are in fact, songs of social and political commentary. This type of critical Tīj songs have been used for many years to call into question the very gender ideology that the women’s ritual observances are thought to endorse.”⁷⁷

It is this shift in focus towards the Tīj songs which gave a new perspective to the then existing study, bringing out totally different dimensions to the study available. Their study examines the songs as vehicles of women’s social commentary on women’s lives and the privileged position enjoyed by men in the South Asian community.

Along with the assistance of the singers and composers, the authors have classified the Tīj songs into three subtypes. These three song categories include *deutā*

⁷⁵ Holland and Skinner 1994: 280

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.* :261

songs, which deal with devotional themes, *dukha* songs, songs of hardship and trouble, and the *ghaṭanā* and *rājñīti* songs respectively dealing with incidents and political issues.

a. *Deuta* songs

The foremost of these categories is the *deutā* songs, ‘the songs about Gods,’ a genre of songs which according to the authors doesn’t enjoy as much popularity these days as before. These songs are either devotional songs dedicated to gods and goddesses, or tales of a particular deity, narrated in verse.

b. *Dukha* songs

Dukha songs, songs of woe, hardship and sorrow are the second subtype of Tīj songs listed out by Holland and Skinner. The numerous interviews conducted by the authors show that these songs were always a part of the repertoire of the songs sung during Tīj.

c. *Ghaṭanā* songs and *Rājñīti*⁷⁸ song

Ghaṭanā songs are songs about a particular incident, whether dramatic or unusual which occurred in the course of the previous year. The earlier *ghaṭanā* songs told of inopportune deaths, natural catastrophes such as hails, locust plagues, and fields destroyed, due to landslides and the ensuing famines etc.

A particular type of *ghaṭanā* song, the *rājñīti* song category has been pointed out in the article as being explicitly critical. These are songs which list out the misuse of power, the unfair legal status of women, and the abuse of positions of power by the political parties. Some of the songs analysed by Holland and Skinner challenge patriarchal views, while others encourage them to react against the injustices perpetrated on women in Nepal.

⁷⁸ *rājñīti* “pertaining to politics, political”

Theories by functionalists evaluate similar rituals as time-pockets of negation, inversion, rebellion, and reversal, which serve to release tautness or bottled-up-emotions in a mode which helps to preserve the established status of the society. The current researches on social and cultural production point out the value of sites of cultural production, where practices of resistance are to be observed.

In some factors, I agree with the authors that these songs are not just aspects where women demonstrate their piety towards patriarchal ideas, but are rather more complex elements. I would be arguing in a similar manner about the rituals of Tīj. These rituals are just one side of the coin. But the holistic meaning can be understood in its right perspective, only when one could take the other aspects such as the content of the songs and the attitude of the participants. These songs produce and represent the group's self-images of their femininity. We will see that the Tīj songs have been an important site for the critical commentary about the place of women in Nepal, and are a significant genre of women's critical analysis.

However, in my opinion, one important factor has been ignored in the studies until now. My numerous interviews and recordings helped me to gain valuable insight into the attitudes of the Tīj participants. Also, the songs seemed to be speaking a language of their own. This brought me to the realisation that one particular genre of these songs have been ignored or down-played throughout the research of the Tīj festival. What are these songs? What topics do these songs deal with? I will be presenting these songs and analysing them for their contents in the third chapter. Further, in chapter four, I will be raising questions and discussing the topics relevant to the same.

1.4.4 "The Shift in the Alignment During a Song Performance"

Laura M. Ahearn,⁷⁹ who explored the songfests involved in Tīj, asks the questions, how the lyrics of the Tīj songs are interpreted by the women who sing them and the men who hear them. She enquires how linguistic anthropologists can identify the constraints on the range of interpretations that might spring out from any discursive

⁷⁹ Ahearn 1998:63

event. The author states that there are multiple voices within the lyrics. She further on argues that linguistic anthropologists searching to limit interpretive indeterminacy should shift toward a practice theory of meaning constraint, one which labours to recognise the range of possible interpretations scientists might construct from a discursive event.

1.4.5 The Monsoon Festival of Tīj in Rajasthan

Manju Bhatnagar⁸⁰ in her short article ‘The Monsoon Festival of Tīj in Rajasthan,’ presents us with a parallel regional version of Tīj, and gives us some interesting elements of comparison. Devotion to the Goddess Pārvatī seems to be the central theme in this festival. The women in Rajasthan wear green, red or yellow dresses, whereas in Nepal, the red colour is more popular. Specific motifs which seem to be important in the local version of this festival in the desert region of Rajasthan are; *henna*⁸¹ on hands and feet, with the *lehariya*⁸² motif, and the *ghevar*⁸³ sweet dish.

1.5 The Methodology and Plan of Study

I, myself, a South Asian, coming from a semi-urban set-up, am however acutely aware of the multiple projections and presumptions I would be making in my effort to convey the picture and qualities of the women. Women, whose lives I partly shared for the brief period of this time, during the Tīj festival. As a migrant Indian living in Europe, I am constantly confronted with the cliché image in both western academic and journalistic accounts depicting South Asian women as submissive, passive participants, who are supposed to be playing a subordinate role in a patrilineally dominated society. Further, as an educated South Asian woman commenting upon relatively not-so-privileged women, I am aware that my attempt to interpret the lives of these women is quite limited.

⁸⁰ Bhatnagar 1988:64

⁸¹ *henna* Hin.”*mehandi*, an ayurvedic medicinal plant the leaves of which produces a dye used to decorate the palms and feet.”

⁸² *lehariya* Hin.”vertical lines of *henna* on palms”

⁸³ *ghevar* Hin. “a form of round sweet dish.”

I am also aware that my attempt to interpret the lives of South Asian women living in Nepal, is coloured through my own educational and experiential background. But then the whole of anthropological writing makes sense, when one could have as many perspectives as possible. Is there something like an ideal perspective, where one attempt at portrayal covers the range of the topic under discussion? If so, which one is the correct perspective, and who shall decide so? Is the view of the 'western academic,' whether male or female, who precisely due to the distance to the subject involved can claim an unbiased, non-subjective view of the matter, the right one? But then what about the other end of the scale, where the South Asian woman, educated and relatively aware of her own rights and that of her own less privileged sisters, makes a journalistic or academic venture into the ethnographic worlds. Her language and culture are lesser obstacles, both worlds sharing a similar vocabulary, where the unsaid is often understood between the spoken lines. The questions then are whether this person is objective enough, and if so, is her perspective wide enough.

A third aspect in this spectrum is a South Asian woman living in the diaspora, precisely someone like myself, who has experienced parts of both these worlds. Born and educated in India, I was not aware until I came to the west, that the South Asian Woman had this cliché image. Having grown up in the South Asian culture, my natural tendency was to accept the picture of the woman in the Indian society as the 'measuring reality'; using this 'reality' as the measuring tape to experience, categorise and denominate the further images and experiences with which one is confronted with. Being confronted with the new perspectives I have to ask myself the question, whether the South Asian woman is indeed not free to make independent decisions. Is she really suppressed and unhappy, say, in comparison to the women in the west?

But then, what about our subject herself, the South Asian woman who is less educated, in the academic sense, about whom all the above three categories are trying to analyse? Can she portray herself, and tell her own story? My study of the Tīj festival in Nepal gives us a positive answer to the above question. The dancing, laughter, drumming, song production, singing, and many other tiny details, speak a language of its own, a language which has an incredible authenticity of its own. The Tīj festival in Nepal

proves very well that the Subaltern can indeed SING and DANCE.⁸⁴ I will be discussing this issue in detail in the final chapter.

The method of Study has been participant observation. I describe and analyse the festival of Tīj principally through three different lenses. The foremost of these three, is of course, myself armed with a camera, a video camera, sound recording device and notice pad. I participated in a partial fast, in the festival of Tīj 2008, and accompanied the family Poudyal in the rituals and the subsequent festivities. The second perspective has been through the interesting lens of the women members of the Poudyal family themselves, whose celebration of Tīj, though certainly not the only way Tīj is celebrated in Nepal, is nevertheless a good example of the Tīj celebrations in the manner as is common among the urban *Bahun*, upper class Nepali women. My ready acceptance within their *didi-bahini*⁸⁵ group, and the subsequent freedom to ask questions, to film them, even in their private home-sphere, gave me very valuable information which helped me to understand certain aspects of the Tīj festival. My third lens has been the numerous valuable interviews I made during the Tīj and the days following with the participants of the festival. The individual perspectives, and the varied answers to my questions, all seemed to help me consistently to get one step closer to understanding and analysing my topic of research.

There are three strata involved here. The first of these is the Tīj *pūjā*,⁸⁶ the ritual which is part of the festival, and the Tīj *brata*, the ritual fasting undertaken by the women, both necessary and fixed elements practiced with slight local variations by the women of Nepal. The second is the Tīj Brata Kathā,⁸⁷ the *vidhi*⁸⁸ text⁸⁹ which forms the background legend upon which the Tīj festival is based. The third dimension is the Tīj

⁸⁴ I have used the words SING and DANCE in capital letters to indicate the parts, where these activities take on an active role- where the performers of the same actively reflect on their roles and lives.

⁸⁵ *didī-bahini* “elder sisters and younger sisters, sisters”

⁸⁶ *pūjā* “Worship, ceremonial rite”

⁸⁷ *kathā* “tale, story”

⁸⁸ *vidhi* < Skt.*vidhiḥ*. “doing, performance, practice, an act or action, method, manner, way, means, mode, A sacred precept or rule, ordinance injunction, law, a sacred command, religious commandment, any religious act or ceremony, a rite, a ceremony”

⁸⁹ These texts and their implication to the Tīj festival have been discussed in detail by Linda Iltis 1985.

Gīt,⁹⁰ songs of the Tīj festival, sung by the women in groups to the accompaniment of *mādal*⁹¹ during the three days of Tīj festival. It is the analysis of this last category; that of the oral tradition in the Tīj festival which will form the core of my argument in the final chapter. Back at my desk, I systematically transcribed the songs which I had recorded on D.V.D. as well as the ones on the cassettes. Valuable advice and assistance was rendered to me by Mrs. Alaka Chudal and Mrs. Sony Baral during this phase of my study. Following this, I then transliterated and translated these songs into English.

My study will take us through some of the most relevant moments of the women's lives depicted throughout the medium of festival songs. Similar to Raheja and Gold's study, these songs depict the most memorable experiences in women's lives; leaving one's paternal home and family and arriving in the household of a new husband, the domination and hierarchies on the husband's senior relations, pain caused at the hands of the in-laws, the joys of intimacy and sexuality, the longing for a lover, a husband's betrayal, longing for husband's love, the pleasures of adorning oneself with fine cloths and jewellery, longing for the paternal home and its freedom, longing for speaking from one's heart, and so on. These oral traditions are explicitly addressing the manifold sets of opposites within the hierarchical sets of contradictions within gender and kinship ideologies of South Asia.

Yet another interesting aspect which I will be attempting to analyse is the point of split-identities of women in Hindu South Asia (see above discussion): the beneficent, caring, procreative and motherly aspects of a woman on the one hand, and the dangerous, malign, destructive and threatening sexual potency of women as wives, on the other. The shift in the view of the women's status has brought about certain attitudes of codex in the social strictures of South Asia. Female sexuality, considered to be dangerous and threatening must be constantly repressed under structures, and women, as we shall see assume a stance of sexual reticence and *lāj*.⁹²

⁹⁰ *gīt* "song"

⁹¹ *mādal* or *mādhāl* "drum, hub of a wheel"

⁹² *lājā* "shame, modesty, honour"

Moreover, similar to the songs analysed by Raheja and Gold, the Tġ songs, as we shall see, speak of a lively sexuality, a positive evaluation of sexual pleasures, of eroticism and child birth which question the so-called split between sexuality and fertility presented in the official versions of women's ideology.

My work on the women's songs of Nepal will look into the above items of women's sub-culture in the backdrop of the Tġ festival, the ritual, the legend and its songs. My work raises similar questions concerning the force, the persuasiveness, and the salience of dominant cultural propositions concerning patriliney, hierarchy, and women's subordination in everyday experience. Are the women's lives to be seen as aspects of a fixed and defined cultural system, or as strategically invoked idioms in an ongoing negotiation of personhood and relationship? Are the sub-cultures of Tġ in South Asia a form of resistance to the dominant patriarchal ideologies? Do other parallel social structures exist, and if so what are these? Can one speak from strategies which are used to bypass the standard social norms concepts? What are the salient features of such alternative structures? What in short are the salient features of the women's sub-culture in South Asia? Is the South Asian woman a silent passive witness to the life around her? Is the object 'woman' of the male tradition a dumb being, a mere puppet, or is she a speaking, imagining, singing, acting person?

In the coming chapter, I will be presenting an ethnographic documentation of the festival of Tġ 2008. Here, I will be pointing out to the different scenes of enactments on the three days. The existence of a public sphere will engage our attention here. The following chapter deals with some of the Tġ songs which I was able to record, sung during the Poudyal household *pūjā*, at the Pashupatinath Temple complex and at the waiting queues in front of Tekudhoban on the Rṣi Pancami day. The analyses of these songs presents us with the everyday lives and themes of interest of the women in South Asia. In the light of the above songs and analyses, the fourth and final chapter discusses the relevance of the oral tradition in the understanding of the feminine culture of South Asia. It throws up the question how the Tġ songs can contribute to the aspect of 'folk

feminism'⁹³ within South Asia? I will be arguing why Tīj can be seen as an important platform for the exchange of women's perspectives within the South Asian context. Further, we will be discussing the contribution of the Tīj festival and its oral traditions to the understanding of women's self-identities within South Asia.

⁹³ "In its rooted aversion to essentialism, the study of folklore also has much to offer feminist theory across the disciplines. Folklorists trained to see groups from the inside, to honor their individual and particular worldviews, creative styles, and coping strategies..." Joan Radner 1993:ix

2. The Tīj Festival 2008 in Nepal: What Does the Festival of Tīj Offer the South Asian Woman?

This chapter takes a closer look into the Tīj festival 2008 as celebrated by the family Poudyal and their neighbours in the Kathmandu valley. It delves into the particular rituals which lend this woman's festival its particular cultural identity. The several interviews conducted help us to get a closer opinion from the participants, as to why they celebrate the festival and what are the important factors which they look forward to. Moreover, it helped me to come one step further in answering the question; "What does the festival of Tīj offer the South Asian women?"

The household *pūjā* place, the neighbourhood courtyard, the courtyard in front of the Pashupatinath Temple complex, the river Bagmati, and the streets which lead to Pashupatinath, are examples of the stage scenes of the Tīj festival which I documented. In the afternoon, the focus of the study shifts back to the Nepali household, on the third floor, where the *Tulsi pūjā*, *Ārati* and *Pati pūjā* take place; culminating with the breaking of the fast in the evening.

I was asked by a colleague before the documentation, if it was not better to do my research in a small village in Nepal. Normally, one tends to associate village ambience with the unchanged, undiluted, pristine 'culture' of a particular place. However, these doubts were cleared once I met the Poudyal family and their friends. The way the Poudyal family and their friends celebrated the Tīj confirms for me that Kathmandu, valley represents a typical and important version of the Nepali culture. Of course, Kathmandu being the biggest urban centre in Nepal, is the one liable to changes and improvisations. In this sense, the Tīj celebration in Kathmandu is unlikely to be one hundred percent representation of the way in which the Tīj festival is celebrated in the rest of the valley. As we have seen in the previous chapter, there have been earlier studies, such as the one from Bennett;⁹⁵ in the rural district of Nepal and from Holland

⁹⁵ Bennett 1983.

Skinner⁹⁶ in the Naudada valley, both of which focus their research on the rural locations of Nepal.

On the other hand, the urban centres of Kathmandu and Patan have their own unique culture of celebrating the festivals and are major scenes of Tīj celebration. Pratima, my young friend from the host family where I stayed in Bhaktapur, went every year to celebrate Tīj in Kathmandu.⁹⁷ Precisely the urbaneness of these centres has resulted in a dynamic of its own. It is this urban touch, which gave my documentation and analysis of the Tīj festival, a life of its own. It is this which helped me later on, to raise specific questions regarding the Tīj festival and its society, and to try to come up with answers to the same.

2.1 Tīj, an Annually Repeating Performance.

For me, sitting at my desk, and looking back at the Tīj festival of 2008, one of the aspects which catches my attention is its characteristic of an annually repeating performance. Levy in *Mesocosm*⁹⁸ attempts to construct in Bhaktapur the representations of the urban symbolic order from many sources. Some of those are from the studies of points of movement representing this order, or the surfaces of friction. For me, Tīj festival is comparable to a drama that demands a script, a stage, curtains, performers and the public. Similar to a performance, the festival of Tīj seems to capture the imagination of the Kathmandu valley women-inhabitants weeks before its advent.

⁹⁶ Holland and Skinner 1994.

⁹⁷ Bhaktapur is an exception. "Tīj is not celebrated by us in Bhaktapur with the same pomp as it is celebrated in Kathmandu. So I will go with my mother and aunts to Pashupatinath on this day." K. Pratima. Interview. Tīj festival 2008

⁹⁸ "This coherent symbolic order is a peculiar attempt to order a community. It is not in itself adequate to represent "the life of the community." That life itself has many aspects, lively, and kinds of order and disorder. To try to make one aspect the "real" one is to engage in ideological polemics or, worse, tendentious and convert use of the exotic...." Levy 1990: 10

Some three weeks before Tīj, during the time where Bhaktapur is busy with Gāī Jātrā⁹⁹ celebrations, the shopkeepers were busy putting up the Tīj *sārīs* for display. One by one the window-shops displayed the *sārīs*, and *dupattas*,¹⁰⁰ in carmen red, a colour typically associated with the Tīj festival.

2.2 The Poudyal Household and the Maternal Senior Female Member of the Family.

The first scene of my documentation takes place at the Poudyal household on the day of the Pashupatinath Temple *darśan*. The initial introductions were a bit dry and hesitant, where only the men of the house presented themselves. My hosts seemed to feel hesitant, perhaps pondering how to proceed further with a lady-guest, travelling alone, armed with a camera. Krishna Poudyal, the young man, called out; “*hajurāmā!*” He introduced Ms. Naramaya Poudyal as ‘*hajurāmā*,’ the maternal head of the household. In the beginning, I too felt a bit awkward in my double role as a South Asian woman, interviewing a South Asian family. I felt unsure of whether or not I shall I go to the room beyond, where the women were dressing up, as is customary for a female-guest, or should I remain in the drawing room, along with the male members of the family, and interview them first.

What followed was an interesting situation. I began to interview the eldest lady of the house. I asked Ms. Naramaya Poudyal:

“Since what age have you been celebrating Tīj?”

Her son Krishna Poudyal, answered for her:

“Ever since she was a little girl she has been celebrating Tīj.”

I further asked her:

“What are the special dishes that you love to eat on the Tīj day?”

⁹⁹ Gāī Jātrā “ or Sāpāru is the cow festival to commenmerate the dead persons of the previous year. The festival includes two aspects in a complex mixture, commemorations of death and the annual carnival.

¹⁰⁰ *dupatta* „shawl or cloth used as part of an attire by the South Asian womae to drape over the shoulders.”

Krishna Poudyal, once again, answered the question, listing out several vegetarian dishes his mother liked. I asked Ms. Naramaya Poudyal the interview questions one by one, and each of these were systematically answered by her son, Mr. Krishna Poudyal. His mother continued nodding her head. I was hardly satisfied with this indirect system of answering. However, I went through my list of questions, one by one, and noted down the answers given by Mr. Krishna Poudyal. I decided to ask the same questions at a later stage, where I could interview the ladies alone, without the company of men.

The Poudyal family residence is quite spacious. Located in a prosperous residential area of Kathmandu, the house is fenced in with a half-wall and a metal gate. A staircase from the ground floor leads up to the veranda on the first floor, from which one can enter some of the main living spaces of the household. The living room, and two of the bedrooms, which function simultaneously as women's living quarters are located on this floor. Mrs. Naramaya Poudyal has two sons and three daughters. All of the three daughters are long married, and live at their respective in-laws houses. Both her sons are also married, and as is the custom in the Kathmandu valley, they all live together with their family at their paternal house. Bhishma Poudyal¹⁰¹ along with his wife Santha Poudyal¹⁰² occupy one bedroom, and Krishna Poudyal,¹⁰³ along with his wife Asha Poudyal,¹⁰⁴ occupy the second bedroom. Since the men of the house are living mostly out of town, these inner rooms are usually occupied by the women of the household.¹⁰⁵ At a later stage, I had the opportunity to ask the same interview questions to the women of the household. The answers were in some instances similar, sometimes exactly the same, and in some cases totally different.

Some time elapsed before I received an invitation to the top storey of the house. Luckily, over the course of time, as the Poudyal ladies warmed up to me, I received an

¹⁰¹ Bhishma Poudyal; born 1968, was working at a catering company in Japan.

¹⁰² Santha Poudyal; born 1975; is a housewife and takes care of the joint family and her two children.

¹⁰³ Krishna Poudyal; born 1971, was working in the USA as an engineer.

¹⁰⁴ Asha Poudyal, is a housewife and takes care of the joint family and her two children.

¹⁰⁵ I was informed later of the sad news that the eldest son of Mrs. Naramaya Poudyal, Bhishma Poudyal died in Japan the following year, in 2009.

invitation to enjoy the evening meal at the top storey. However, my documentation of the Tīj festival presents several other scenarios before coming to this particular destination.

Once the dressing up of the ladies was over, the ladies joined me on the veranda. There, free from the direct presence of the men, I could interview the two *bahus*¹⁰⁶ of the house. Asha Poudyal, the younger daughter-in-law and the more talkative of the two showed me her *pūjā* plate. A decorated metal plate was laid out with the items listed below. Asha said:

“*cāmal*,¹⁰⁷ *haledo*,¹⁰⁸ *til*,¹⁰⁹ *jau*,¹¹⁰ *phal*,¹¹¹ *kankro*,¹¹² *ghiu*¹¹³ and *ghiu ko diyo*¹¹⁴ are very important for the Tīj *pūjā*.”¹¹⁵

Red hibiscus flowers and red and orange coloured *parijāt* flowers also decorated the borders of the plate. The *lighted lamp*, once lighted, is to be kept burning throughout the whole night, until the morning hours. Asha Poudyal said:

“If the *ghiu ko diyo* wick burns out before the morning *pūjā*, it is considered as a bad omen for the *suhāgan*.”

Here, in the privacy of the ladies group, I once again asked Ms. Naramaya Poudyal:

“Since what age have you been celebrating Tīj?”

She answered:

¹⁰⁶ *bahu* “bride, son’s wife, daughter-in-law”

¹⁰⁷ *cāmal* “husked, uncooked rice.”

¹⁰⁸ *haledo* “yellow, turmeric.”

¹⁰⁹ *til* “sesame seed.”

¹¹⁰ *jau* “barley.”

¹¹¹ *phal* “fruit, result, growth, gain.”

¹¹² *kankro* “cucumber, any disease in which there is an eruption of spots, chicken pox.”

¹¹³ *ghiu* “melted butter, ghee.”

¹¹⁴ *ghiu ko diyo* “a small earthenware lamp burnt with ghee.”

¹¹⁵ Asha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

“Ever since I reached the age of thirteen, I started participating in the Tīj festival.”

I was slightly amused to receive these two different answers for the same question within the same afternoon. The Poudyal ladies group then moved on to their neighbour’s house, these being the neighbours with whom they customarily celebrate the Tīj festival.

2.3 The Singing and Dancing at Home

The neighbourhood house is located on a parallel street, within the same residential district as the Poudyal house. An upper middle class house, with a seemingly large garden and a private veranda greeted us. In the large living room, around eight to nine women, almost all dressed in gay red crimson *sārīs*, had assembled and were chatting amongst one another. The exception to the red coloured *sārī* was Ms. Naramaya Poudyal, who being a *bidhavā*¹¹⁶ was dressed appropriately in a muted blue and white *sārī*. The unmarried, pre-puberty daughters of the family, were wearing orange, pink, or violet *salwar kurtas*, but not red *sārīs*, the red *sārī* being reserved for the *suhāgans*. Only two male members were allowed entrance to the singing and dancing and the subsequent *pūjā* at the house. One was the grandfather of the host family and the second was the two year old son of Asha Poudyal, Russon. The grandfather, more or less invisible during the singing and dancing, made his appearance during the *pūjā*, and could be seen observing the on-goings from the side of the *pūjā* place.

The women gathered in a semi-circle in the drawing room, taking their place on the sofas and chairs. In the first round, Asha Poudyal, the youngest bride in the family was given the *ḍholak*¹¹⁷ and urged to play it. Meanwhile, Santha Poudyal started singing a song, while the rest of the ladies started singing and dancing to the beats. Being accustomed to the lyrics, it was not difficult for the women to sing the songs from their memory. After one song, the roles were changed. The woman who was drumming now offered the *ḍholak* to a dancer and she herself started dancing. In this manner, all the ladies present took turns, singing out tunes from their memory, alternatively clapping

¹¹⁶ *bidhvā* < Skt. *vidhavā*. “widow”

¹¹⁷ *ḍholak* “a musical instrument like castanets. small drum, extension of *ḍhol*.”

their hands, or drumming out the tunes. Towards the end, even the two older ladies, who were initially reluctant to participate actively, also joined hesitantly the round of dancing ladies. Themes about the *maitīghar*,¹¹⁸ praising its superior qualities were the favourite songs here. However, no cassettes or CD players were employed here. The poignant memories of the maternal house were enhanced by the fact that these songs were sung at the *maitīghar*, and not at the *ghar*.¹¹⁹ These songs are presented and analysed in the following chapter. Now the ladies moved on to prepare themselves for the morning *pūjā* at the veranda.

2.4 The Morning *pūjā* in the Veranda

The 3 m. x 3 m. rectangular veranda, situated at the eastern side of the two storied house, had put on a festive atmosphere. The black-tiled floor had been swept clean and was laid up with cushions on the sides. The young family priest (*pūjārī*)¹²⁰, dressed in spotless white *pyjama* and *kurta*, sitting on the west side of the veranda was busy organising the items required for the *pūjā*. A *yantra*¹²¹ approximately 30 cm. x 40 cm. was laid out by the *pūjārī* by sprinkling *haledo*¹²² held tight between his index finger, middle finger and thumb. A leaf plate filled with rice, topped by a copper vessel carrying water, was placed to his right. A bunch of five leaves were inserted in the opening on top of the copper vessel. One by one, the women of the neighbourhood started taking their place at the *pūjā*. Mrs. Naramaya Poudyal and her daughter-in-laws sat together to the left of the *pūjārī* and the other family to the right of the *pūjārī*. The maid of the host house, dressed in less number of gold jewellery also took her seat to the right of the *pūjārī*, slightly apart from the others.

¹¹⁸ *maitīghar* “paternal home, home where the person grew up”

¹¹⁹ *ghar* “house, building, home, family.” In this case the *maitīghar* represents the woman’s own maternal home as in contrast to the *ghar*, the home of the husband.

¹²⁰ *pūjārī* “the priest, a Brahman in charge of the *pūjā koṭṭha*”

¹²¹ *yantra* “amulet, charm, geometrical designs attributed with symbolic meanings”

¹²² *haledo* “turmeric”

The lamps were lighted, and the *pūjārī* started the *pūjā* ceremony. Sitting in a cross-legged pose, the women held their hands in the prayer gesture¹²³, and joined in on the chanting. However, the *pūjā* was not taken too serious of an affair, as one would expect it to be. When the mobile of Asha Poudyal rang, she didn't to hesitate to answer, while the *pūjā* continued parallel. Her son, Russon, ran in and out asking for bananas, and was happy only after if he was offered one of the *pūjā* bananas. Then the *pūjārī* read out the text of Pārvaṭī's legendary fasting (referred to in chapter 1), first in Sanskrit followed by a brief translation in Nepali. In this manner, the *pūjārī* explained didactically the importance of fasting on the Tīj day, and the blessings¹²⁴ awaiting the women who did the correct fasting. The *pūjārī* now went around in a circle, where he received a *ṭika* and *dakṣiṇa* from each of the women present at the *pūjā*. Two hundred rupee notes and three fifty rupee notes were visible in the palm of the *pūjārī*. The elder maid servant also added her humble offering of fifteen rupees. The *pūjārī* carefully went around a second time, collecting money from the ladies who had not yet offered him money, with the request, "you cannot let me go with *khālī hāth*"¹²⁵,

In the following period, the women of the household now held each others right hand together, thus seeming to symbolically signify allegiance to their families¹²⁶, while the *pūjārī* chanted for the happy life of the *saubhāgya* and her family. All the articles in the *pūjā thālī*¹²⁷ were now offered symbolically to the fire one by one. One by one, *cāmal*, *haledo*, *pārijāt* flowers and the rest of the items on the *pūjā thālī* were offered to the flame.

The *pūjārī* now blew the conch, and everyone stood up, each family jointly holding the *diyo* together with their right hand. Now it was time for the *Ārati*.¹²⁸ The *pūjā* plate containing the *diyo* was waved in clock-wise direction to the chanting with the sound of the ringing bell. The smell of burning *ghiu* and incense sticks filled our nostrils.

¹²³ *namaskāra* "obeisance, salutation, greeting"

¹²⁴ "The foremost blessing you will receive through on the fasting is the happy life of a *suhāgan*." Srīrām; Interview at the home *pūjā* Tīj 2008 Nepal

¹²⁵ *khālī hāth* "with empty hands"

¹²⁶ In this case, we see that the symbolical significance is extended to the husband's family.

¹²⁷ *pūjā thālī* "the plate containing the *pūjā* items."

¹²⁸ *ārati* "A ceremony performed by moving a platter containing lamps in a circle round the image of a god. hymn of praise."

Bananas were distributed by the *pūjārī* and the *pūjā* came to an end. The whole ceremony took approximately forty minutes.

The women now assembled in front of the household and chatted for a few minutes, before departing with the lighted *diyas* to their respective homes. Once back at the Poudyal house, the children were sent upstairs with the maid servant, and the women got ready for the temple visit. All of the women now climbed into the two waiting family cars. I was also invited, and I too joined them on our trip to the Pashupatinath Temple complex.

2.5 The Pashupatinath Temple Complex

The whole of the Pashupatinath Temple complex wore a festive look. Colourful *maṇḍaps*¹²⁹ striped red, green, and yellow, had been put up at certain points. Under these colourful makeshift roofs, the women had gathered in groups of twenty to thirty, in small circles. Most of these circles followed the same pattern. A circle of approximately 2.5 m. diameter was formed by some six to seven women standing close together, and singing Tīj songs. One or two women of the group had the task of playing the *ḍholak*. Inside the circle, some four to five women, all dressed in their bright red *sārīs* were dancing to the songs. In some instances, a cassette player combined with a stereo system, was playing the Tīj songs. The women standing in the circle seemed to know most of these songs by heart. They sang the lyrics along with the voices in the cassettes. A second, and often a third and a fourth row of women, dressed in bright red *sārīs* encircled the first circle. These women were busy watching the dancers, cheering them on and clapping their hands to the songs. Here and there, the dancers in the middle would stop dancing, having been exhausted from the day's fasting and exchange places with a friend or neighbour from the outer circle. This friend then was coaxed by the other dancers to join them. The drum also changed hands from person to person in the course of the performance.

The Sources of Music

¹²⁹*maṇḍap* < Skt. *maṇḍapa* “an open hall, temporary building for festive occasions, pavilion”

The sources of music I came across at the Pashupatinath were mainly four.

a. Reciting of Songs from Memory.

The foremost of these sources was groups of women, reciting songs from their memory, they had prepared in the weeks preceding the Tīj festival. I asked one woman: “Where are you from?” She answered:

“My cousins and friends and I come here every year from Patan to celebrate Tīj at Pashupatinath. This year, we had very little time to prepare the Tīj songs, as everyone was too busy. But we met the last three days in the evenings at my aunt’s house. There, we prepared these songs.”¹³⁰

I further asked: “Did you know these songs previously?” Seema answered:

“I know most of these songs by-heart, as I have been listening to them from my childhood onwards. My *hajurāmā*¹³¹, my *āmā*, my *didīs* and my *āñṭīs*¹³² and my friends all sing these songs for Tīj ever since I can remember.”

b. Films, Television and You-tube

The second group of songs are those which have been popularised through the medium of films and television. The song no:06: *Maitīghar*, appearing in the analysis in the third chapter, is one such example. The song *Maitīghar* seemed to be one of the favourites of the Poudyal family, during the Tīj songs sung at the house. Upon being asked where they learnt this song, Santha Poudyal answered:

“*Maitīghar* is one of my favourite Tīj songs from the cinema. There is a new remix version. You must watch it.”

Later on, back at my desk, I had the opportunity to watch the two versions of the song in You-tube, an older film version and a newer You-Tube remix version. In the

¹³⁰ Seema Bista. Interview. Tīj festival 2008. Seema Bista was a Tīj song and dance performer at the Tīj festival 2008.

¹³¹ *hajurāmā* “grandmother”

¹³² *āñṭī* [English Loan word “aunty”]

latter remix version, the scenes have been modified. A young dancer in the typical attire of the Nepali village women plays it. New electronic beats have been added, but the lyrics and the nostalgia for the maternal home have been retained faithfully.

c. “Cassette Culture”¹³³

The third, and perhaps, the most popular mode of song presentation at the Tīj celebrations in front of Pashupatinath, were the cassettes. Already, days before the Tīj celebrations had begun, I came across shops selling cassettes and CDs with Tīj songs. The same shops, also often had a small television screen, where they were presenting one of the respective Tīj VCDs, one after the other, thus drawing a crowd of onlookers, both male and female grouped in a semi-circle around the shop entrance. The commuter busses, the overcrowded private mini-buses which operate over short distances, not to forget the auto-rickshaws; all were playing the Tīj songs either on their radios or cassettes. For a period of three to five days, the whole of Kathmandu valley seemed to be in the grip of Tīj song fever.

d. The NGO Songs

I would like to categorise the fourth category of songs that I came across under the NGO-songs category. These are the songs produced by specific groups with particular issues in mind. In one such group, for instance, a group of six women appeared on the scene of the dancing at the Pashupatinath Temple Complex, and set up an arena for their presentation. The song no:10 from the following chapter is an example of the song items produced in this manner. Four of these ladies then proceeded to sing the song reading from a paper. One of the women in the group provided the rhythm with the *ḍholak* and yet another woman started dancing to the melody. At first, a crowd of onlookers encircled the women, in order to observe the proceedings, seeming to take note of the

¹³³ Manual 2001. In *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India*, Peter Manul analyses how a new mass medium; the portable cassette player- lead to to some substantial changes in popular culture in India. Cassette culture is one of the formost sceintif studies of Indian popular music and the first case study of the cultural and social consequences of a technological revolution now visible thrououghout the world.

situation. However, it did not take long before the onlookers joined in on the dancing and clapping.

Initially, not knowing the text, the women joined in merely with the dancing and clapping. However, as time went by, they shouted the refrain:

“*nepālmā gaṇatantra āeko cha*”.

I interviewed one of the onlooker-women¹³⁴ after the song and asked her if she knew the song and liked it.

Question:¹³⁵ “Did you know this song previously?”

Sunita Mainali: “No. This is a new Tīj song for me.”

Question: “How did you find this song?”

Sunita Mainali: “It is a nice song. It has a nice melody.”

Question: “Do you know the group who wrote this song?”

Sunita Mainali: “No, they are not my friends. But I think this group of women made these songs because they want Nepali women to be aware of their rights.”¹³⁶

In several spots, all along the temple complex, *pūjārīs*, in their typical white *pyjama* and *kurtā* attire, had spread their bamboo mats, one after the other, and were sitting facing the roadside. Laid out in front of them, on the bamboo mat, were the *pūjā* objects similar to the list mentioned above. Copper pots filled with water, leaf plates, a platter filled turmeric, rice, and *til*, were placed on one side. Hibiscus flowers, *pārijāt* flowers were also among them. Opposite to them was a flux of women who took their turns to get their *pūjā* done. The procedure was similar to the home *pūjā* at the Poudyal neighbourhood. Only, most of the women’s groups were smaller comprising of three to four women per *pūjārī*. The *diyo* was lit, the mantras were recited, the *Ārati* was done,

¹³⁴ Interviewing the women during the celebrations was understandably not such an easy task, considering that everyone’s attention was turned towards the singing and dancing. One could hardly hear anything due to the din the neighbouring cassette player-sound boxes were making.

¹³⁵ The questions are from myself.

¹³⁶ Sunita Mainali. Interview. Tīj festival 2008. Sunita Mainali was a dancer at Pashupatinath at the Tīj festival 2008.

money was offered, and the next group took their place. Each group stayed by a particular *pūjārī* anything between ten and twenty five minutes, and then moved on to the dancing groups. The duration of the ceremony depended upon how elaborate the *pūjā* was, and how heavy the payment was.

Later, once nearing the Pashupatinath temple, the women adorned the Śiva Liṅgam with flowers,¹³⁷ vegetables and fruits,¹³⁸ sweets,¹³⁹ and coins. The women fetched water from the *ghats* of the Bagmati river and performed *abhiṣek*¹⁴⁰ on the Śiva Liṅgam at the *ghats*. Now and then I observed one woman swooning and fainting due to the bodily exhaustion of the strenuous fast. They were then carried away by their friends and relatives. After doing the *pradakṣiṇa* of the temple, the group of ladies whom I was accompanying then returned home for a short rest. The long wait without a drop of water or a morsel of food, in front of the temple gates seemed to make everyone exhausted and weak. I too, having observed partial fasting till afternoon now felt tired and decided to strengthen myself with some lunch, in order to be ready to photograph and film the evening *pūjā*.

2.6 The Evening Pūjā

The evening *pūjā* can be categorised typologically into four segments i.e.; the Tulsi pūjā, the evening Ārati, the Pati pūjā, and the breaking of the fast.

2.6.1 The Tulsi Pūjā

The *tulsi*¹⁴¹ plant, as is common among the *Bahun*s of Nepal, has been devoted a special place in the Poudyal households. The plant occupies an important place on a raised podest in the middle of the terrace on the third floor. The podest has been

¹³⁷ The flowers mostly observed were hibiscus, *pārijāt*, marigold and rose flowers.

¹³⁸ The most commonly observed fruits were bananas, apples, oranges and cucumber.

¹³⁹ There were toffees, candied sugar balls packed in plastic packets, and other fried rice balls.

¹⁴⁰ *abhiṣek* “sprinkling. Any religious ceremony where sprinkling is performed, anointing, investiture in an office, coronation.”

¹⁴¹ *Tulsi* “*Ocimum Sanctum*”

decorated and painted nicely. The evening rituals started at sunset with the Tulsi pūjā, where Santha Poudyal placed a lamp and offered water to the family *tulsi* plant, planted on the 80 cm. high pedestal in the terrace of the second storey. Hibiscus flowers were offered, the small bell was rung, the conch was blown, and the *tulsi* plant was circumbulated seven times. Following this, Asha Poudyal assisted by the young maid-servant girl also did the *Tulsi pūjā*.

2.6.3 The Evening Ārati.

The Tulsi pūjā was followed by the evening Ārati in the *pūjā* room. The small *pūjā* room, approximately 140 cm. x 120 cm., is located on the second floor of the house, and is accessible from the kitchen and the bedroom of the grandmother Naramaya Poudyal, and is obviously a private space. The back wall of the *pūjā* room has been divided into smaller compartments, by means of wooden beams. Each of these compartments housed glazed tiled images of different house deities. The deities and images appearing from top left corner to the bottom right corner are listed out below.¹⁴² In addition to these ten images, three golden statues, each approximately 10 cm. big of Sarasvatī, Lakṣmi and Durgā were placed in front of the altar.

Copper vessels filled with water were placed in front of the deities. Golden gilt paper decorated their images. A picture of Śrī. Sāi Bāba and a poster of Caturmukha liṅga Śiva¹⁴³ also adorned the side walls. The two Poudyal daughter-in-laws now sat down together and recited the *pūjā* mantras. I was told that because the room was rather small, Mrs. Naramaya Poudyal couldn't participate in the *pūjās* and would join us only at the end of the *pūjā*.

2.6.4 The Pati Pūjā

¹⁴² 1. *Aum* Symbol. 2. Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Gaṇeśa, all seated. 3. *Aum* and *Swastika* Symbol 4. Gaṇeśa 5. Śiva-Pārvatī 6. The trio of Rām, Sītā and Lakṣman 7. Durgā riding the tiger, flanked on the right hand side by an elephant. 8. Gaṇeśa, with Śiva-Pārvatī couple in the background. 9. Durgā riding the tiger, flanked on the right hand side by an elephant. 10. Radha Kṛṣṇa

¹⁴³ Caturmukha liṅga Śiva: Iconographic representation of Śiva with the four faces.

Now appears one of the most controversial parts of the Tīj celebrations in Nepal¹⁴⁴, the *pati pūjā*; i.e.; the worshipping of the husband. Back home, as I presented my documented material at a seminar in the University of Vienna, at our South Asian Institute, this particular scene aroused a lot of comments. Questions were asked as to why the woman washes the feet of the husband, and what implications this has for the status of the women in the society. My search for the answer to these questions will be dealt with in the final chapter. The sister in law of Asha said; “I won’t be performing this part of the ceremony this year, as my husband is away in Japan.” Asha Poudyal¹⁴⁵ ceremonially now washed the feet of her husband Krishna Poudyal, who was sitting with his feet stretched out on the carpet in front of the *pūjā* room. This water was collected in a small plate placed under his feet. Following this, Asha Poudyal symbolically drank a few sips of this water with her right hand. Both the children sat nearby observing the scene. She then made a *pūjā* with Hibiscus flowers, waving the *ārati* in front of him. Following this, she placed a *ṭika* on his forehead and offered him a banana. The Pati pūjā ceremony took approximately fifteen minutes.

2.6.5 The Breaking of the *Brata*.

The breaking of the fast is the last bit of the evening celebrations on the *Dar khane din*. Asha Poudyal, exhausted from the day’s fasting now sat in front of a sumptuous *thāli*.¹⁴⁶ Asha Poudyal said:

“Traditionally, the fasting has to be done for a period of twenty four hours and is broken at dawn the next day. However, as my constitution is not so strong, my mother-in-law has advised me to break the fast in the evening.”¹⁴⁷

Wearing a garland of yellow marigold flowers, Asha now sat down in front of the *thāli*. The *thāli* was filled with rice, *dāl*,¹⁴⁸ beans, *lauki*,¹⁴⁹ and *acār*.¹⁵⁰ There was also salty

¹⁴⁴ Bennett 1983

¹⁴⁵ Santha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

¹⁴⁶ *thāli* “plate, dish, small flat brass dish”

¹⁴⁷ Asha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj 2008.

¹⁴⁸ *dāl* “lentils”

¹⁴⁹ *lauki* “bottle gourd”

*lassi*¹⁵¹ to drink. The others in the household had eaten already. I too was offered the same, and we enjoyed our hearty meal in silence.

2.7 The R̥ṣi Pancami Celebrations

After the interval of a day, on the fifth day of the brightening moon (*śukla pakṣa*) the festival of ceremonial bathing is celebrated by the women of Nepal. The women of Nepal get up early in the morning to perform ritual abulations. I was told by the Poudyal family; “The water of the city being polluted, we prefer to do the abulations in the privacy of our bathroom at home.”¹⁵² So, I decided to accompany another group of women at the Pashupatinath. The ceremonial bathing started early morning from 6 a.m. at Pashupatinath. Having tied an underskirt around the chest, each woman stepped into the riverside water. She then rubbed *rato mato*¹⁵³, which she had brought along with her in a bag, on her private parts, feet, legs, arms, back, belly, breast and shoulders. Next, she washed her hair also with the same *rato mato*. Following this, she brushed her teeth 360 times by chewing on the twig of *daitun*¹⁵⁴ and spitting it out. After that she poured water over the head with a copper vessel. “Each stream of water indicates one bath. I have to take 360 baths today.”¹⁵⁵ In the end, the woman took a dip in the river water. She then wrung out her wet clothes, and changed into fresh clothes and red *sārī* for the *pūjā*. Now the first part of the bathing ritual was over.

2.7.1 The Ceremony at Tekudhoban

Many *pūjārīs* had taken their seats at several spots in front of the bathing *ghats* at Tekudhoban. Tekudhoban, being located at the confluence of the two rivers Vishnumati and Bagmati, is considered a very sacred place by the local population. Women sat circling the *pūjārī*, while he conducted the *pūjā*. Each group of women from the same

¹⁵⁰ *acār* “pickles, chutney, relish“

¹⁵¹ *lassi* “a drink made with curd and water“

¹⁵² Santha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

¹⁵³ *rato mato* “red mud“

¹⁵⁴ *daitun* “twig of a particular tree“

¹⁵⁵ Preeta Aryal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

household had organised their own *pūjā thālī* with *diyo*, *kalas*, fruits, and flowers which included hibiscus and marigold and some *kuśa* grass. After purifying themselves with the touch of the holy *kuśa* grass, the women performed the *pūjā* under the *pūjārīs* guidance. Prayers were offered by the women to their respective *gotras*¹⁵⁶. This was followed by the *pūjā* for the *ṛṣis*. Seven pieces of *kuśa* grass were stuck into a rice pile, and an eighth was placed in the middle. Bennett explains:

“The central *kuśa* grass represents Arundhati, who remained faithful to her husband even in the face of temptations from Śiva, the seven grass pieces surrounding the central one representing the seven *ṛṣis* .”¹⁵⁷

The women now offer a red piece of cloth, vermillion, water, ghee, flowers, incense, and sweets to the *Ṛṣis*. Following this, the women offer their *saubhagya sāmān* to Arundhati. I asked one of the women, Preeta, waiting for her turn to do the *pūjā*, details about her plate of *saubhagya samān*. Preeta answered:

“The married woman whose husband is alive is considered to be *saubhāgya*. The collection of items which represent this *saubhāgya* are; *sindūr*,¹⁵⁸ *pote*,¹⁵⁹ preferably red or green or yellow, *gājal*,¹⁶⁰ *churo*,¹⁶¹ *dhāgo*,¹⁶² *kaniyo*,¹⁶³ *ainā*,¹⁶⁴ *vastra*.¹⁶⁵ All the above items were then placed on a platter and offered to Arundhati, is the epitome of chastity.”¹⁶⁶

Following this, a bundle of 360 cotton wicks soaked in ghee were lighted and placed in a circle. The women then made eight circumbulations in small steps around the lighted lamps. At the end, the *pūjārī* once again instructed the women to offer a fruit (a

¹⁵⁶ *gotra* “clan, family”

¹⁵⁷ Bennett 1983: 200

¹⁵⁸ *sindūr* “red vermillion powder”

¹⁵⁹ *pote* “beaded necklace”

¹⁶⁰ *gājal* “lampblack, soot, the black pigment placed around the eyes”

¹⁶¹ *curo* “bracelet, bangle (of glass)”

¹⁶² *dhāgo* “thread,” to decorate the hair, mostly red with golden tinsels.

¹⁶³ *kaniyo* “comb”

¹⁶⁴ *ainā* “mirror, looking glass, pane of glass”

¹⁶⁵ *vastra* „clothes“

¹⁶⁶ Preeta Aryal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

banana, a cucumber, apples etc. were offered), which the women then packed onto their bags to offer later on to their husbands.

2.7.2 The *Darśan* at Tekudhoban

Following the *pūjā* at the riverside, the women, in their bright red *sārīs* lined up in front of Tekudhoban. Consisting of many parallel rows stretching from the entrance of the Tekudhoban temple till the riverside bridge, some half a kilometre away, the queue appeared endless. Young teenage girl's and boy's scout groups were responsible for maintaining the queues. I was impressed with the patience and discipline with which those youngsters were organising and directing the groups of women, waiting in the mid-day sun, to get a glimpse of the Śiva Liṅgam at Tekudhoban.

The women, while waiting in the long queue made use of the opportunity by singing and dancing to their favourite songs. This scene presented me with a good opportunity to film and interview the waiting devotees. Upon being asked why she celebrates Tīj, one woman answered:

“I enjoy Tīj very much. I love to sing and dance. And the songs of Tīj are very nice. They flow from my *man*. During the Tīj festival, I can sing and dance to my heart's content. We are from Kirtipur. I come here every year with my friends and relatives to sing and dance.”¹⁶⁷

Another woman replied:

“ I can't wait till the Tīj festival is arriving. Then, I love to dress up in my favourite red *sārī* and my new jewellery. I also love to sing the songs. The best part of Tīj is that I get to meet my sisters and cousins from my *āñṭī*. ”¹⁶⁸

Some women waited more than an hour before reaching the entrance to the temple. A television crew from the NTV¹⁶⁹ was present, filming the Tīj celebrations and the dancing ladies.

¹⁶⁷ Madhuri P. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

¹⁶⁸ Seeta M. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

The long hour of waiting seemed to increase the curiosity of the thronging devotees, all the more. Luckily, for me, the sight of my camera seemed to lend me a special status. The scout guides, once they came to know of my interest to document the dancing throngs, gave me special permission to go through the lines to whichever group I wanted to document. Initially, fearing that I may be disturbing their dances, I tried to remain as unobtrusive as possible. But my worries were unfounded. Most of the women's groups seemed to take special pleasure in dancing in front of the camera.

So, armed with my camera and video recorder, I reached the sanctum¹⁷⁰ of the Tekudhoban temple in a relatively short time. Here, the final *darśan* of the black granite stone *liṅga* was taking place. In comparison to the elaborate waiting and singing earlier, the *darśan* was a relatively short affair. Scout guides escorted the waiting women in a queue towards the *Śiva Liṅgam*. The *Śiva Liṅgam* was relatively small, embedded in a hole in the ground. A huge *papal* tree with a podest and a temporary roof shaded the *liṅgam*. Above at the *liṅgam*, the women were prompted to move on further by the scout guides.

A huge fire *kuṇḍo*¹⁷¹ approximately 100 cm. x 100 cm. formed the next spot of visit for the devotees. Some women offered their *ghī*-wicks into the fire, while some prayed at the Pīpal tree. The path now went further around to a veranda and an open courtyard. Here, the women gathered around in groups of small circles, and sang and danced to the Tīj songs. Some women also gathered outside the temple, and on the streets for a few last rounds of singing and clapping. Street vendors were selling coloured beaded jewellery, *sindūr* powder, henna designs, etc. Busses were waiting to take the Tīj ladies back to their homes.

2.8 Tīj Offers the Women a Means to Produce, Experience, Enjoy and Exchange Cultural Values.

¹⁶⁹ NTV: Nepal Television

¹⁷⁰ *garbhagṛha* “inner sanctum of a Hindu temple, womb”

¹⁷¹ *kuṇḍo* “pit, pot, cooking pot, earthen pot”

The crux of the festival seems to be the opportunity to come together in a ritual celebration once an year. It provides the women with the opportunity to be amongst themselves to share their feelings, their thoughts and experiences. In this context we are tempted to ask, “what are the issues under discussion and what themes are relevant in the women’s everyday lives”? The song narrative will provide us with some clues to these issues which form a part of women’s culture in South Asia.

Culture is transported within a society through diverse means. We see here that the medium of festival provides the society with an intense and regular opportunity to create and experience cultural norms and elements. Further, songs and dances are also means of cultural production. A closer observation of the Tīj festival helps us to understand some of the aspects of the Nepali urban women’s culture. All in all, the Tīj festival appears to be a festival for celebration and merrymaking.

The South Asian women’s culture has its own flair and its own identity. The diverse sources of production of music, are alone, a statement to the fact that cultural production is multifarious, lively and ever changing. These elements are shaped by the cultural milieu, the historic background, and its myths and legends. Moreover, the recent economic and consumer changes are observable in the shift in the medium of presentation of the songs. From paper pamphlets to the cassette culture, to the recent appearance of CDs and VCDs. One key falls into place. The festival of Tīj provides the women of Kathmandu with several enjoyable moments. By the very process of creating the songs, be it from memory or reading from the South Asian women are actively producing culture. The festival of Tīj offers the Nepali woman a platform to enjoy, experience and exchange culture. The South Asian woman is not only ‘oppressed’; nor is the South Asian woman only ‘celebrating life.’ The truth lies somewhere in-between. The analysis of the Tīj songs in the following chapter will give us further insight into these aspects of the Tīj festival.

3. The Tīj Songs and Their Analysis

In this chapter I have presented ten of the Tīj songs which I recorded during the Tīj festival 2008. Each line in Nepali is followed by its translation in English. At the end of the song translation, I have presented under a sub-capital the analysis of that particular song. We come across a wide variety of themes within the songs. There are the songs with a padagogical character such as the songs No:01 as well as song celebrating one's own beauty in song No:05. Then there is the song No:04 exhorting the women to sing out their heart's grief. In Song No:06, the singer sings with nostalgia about her *maītīghar*.

I have earlier listed out the four sources of music that I came across at the Pashupatinath Temple Complex during the Tīj festival. These are: a. Reciting of songs from memory b. Films, Television and You-tube c. 'Cassette Culture'¹⁷³ d. The NGO Songs. Going through my recordings, it was quite difficult to select the songs to be presented here. Further on, many small issues cropped during the task of transliterating and analysing the songs. Often, the singer's lyrics were not audible enough and I had to replay the recordings several times to discern the word. The mode of recording being live, also meant that all the surrounding sounds such as clapping, children crying, women laughing all were included into the background of the songs, making my analysis all the more challenging.

I have tried to present a collection of ten songs here, which reflect different aspects and themes, very central for my argument in the final chapter. Finally, as is the quality of live songs, some songs are quite long, such as song No:1 and Song No: 5; while some songs are quite small, such as Song No:09 and Song No: 10. From the earlier focus on *dukha* songs and the *rājñīti* songs in the earlier scholarly discussion, I have tried to shift the focus of my study to the so-called *sukha* songs, which will be analysed in detail in this chapter.

¹⁷³ Manual 2001.

3.1 “Āyo nayā lahar” (Song No:01)

3.1.a Song Advising the Sister to Learn the New Customs of the New age (to be Progressive / Modern). (Text: Song No:01)

Part I

In Part I (line no:1 to line no:93), we come across the character ‘B’, who addresses the character ‘A’ as ‘*did.i.*’ ‘A’ however remains silent during the Part I and enters into dialogue only in the part II.

1. *he uhī purānai kurā garchau āyo nayā lahar* (x2 ¹⁷⁴)

Oh! you talk about the same old things, a new wave has come¹⁷⁵ (x2)

2. *ke cha didi¹⁷⁶ bhināju¹⁷⁷ ko hāl khabar* (x2)

o *didi*, what is the condition, news, of brother in law?¹⁷⁸ (x2)

3. *he ...kati malai hernu raicha jorīpārī hāseko*

oh! how long I had to see neighbours laughing at me

4. *naulo khabar ke huncha ra bāhra māseko* (x2)

what can be the news of the permanent (twelve month) gambler? (x2)

5. *na bhanam ta sakīna ma bhare parlā raḍāko* (x2)

I couldn’t help saying, but if I say, there might be fight. (x2)

6. *bhinājuko saṅgat cha hai thūlā baḍāko*

¹⁷⁴ This number indicates that this particular line is repeated twice.

¹⁷⁵ The singer is advising the sister to learn about the new wave, i.e., the changes which are happening around her.

¹⁷⁶ *didi* “elder sister” (term of respectful address)

¹⁷⁷ *bhināju* “elder sister’s husband”

¹⁷⁸ Free translation “How is brother-in-law doing?”

brother-in-law has contact with big-people¹⁷⁹

7. *e bābai, kāṭa kapāl didi bhandā*

oh! *didi*, I told you to cut your hair,¹⁸⁰ and you said

8. *ū belāmā bhanyo nāi* (x2)

at that time, “no” (x2)

9. *thāi kaṭ¹⁸¹ kāl kāṭane sitai*

together with those who cut their hair in the style of Thai cut

10. *palke bhenā bāi* x3

brother-in-law has started to go out

11. *tara āīthi nī sālī¹⁸² lāīthi nī kurā* (x2)

but, that sister-in-law has come to complain (x2)

12. *khai mero lālumaī na bhannu ni hai* (x2)

don’t tell him this *didi* (x2)

13. *he ... bhakāriko dhān corera*

oh!... after stealing the rice from the grain store

14. *kapāl rāto pāreko*

he is making the hair red (dying the hair)

15. *thāha cha ki chaina didi jūgā phāleko*

did you know *didi*, that he shaves his moustache?

¹⁷⁹ *ṭhūlā baḍā* “important people”

¹⁸⁰ “Cutting the hair, or styling the hair is a fashion, which is becoming popular in Nepal in the last few years, and is considered as a sign of being modern.” Interview. Sony 2009

¹⁸¹ *thāi kaṭ* [loan from English ‘Thai cut’]

¹⁸² *sālī* “wife’s younger sister”

16. *he didi, dhotī nalāū kurtā silāu*

oh! sister, (I told you) not to wear *dhotī*¹⁸³

17. *bhandākheri bhanyau nāi* (x2)

to stitch *kurta*¹⁸⁴, but you said “no” (x2)

18. *jinko pāinṭ*¹⁸⁵ *lāune sitai*¹⁸⁶

with those who wear pants

19. *makhkhai bhenā bāi*

brother-in-law is thrilled to go out

20. *tara āithi nī sālī lāithi nī kurā* (x2)

but, that sister- in- law has come to complain (x2)

21. *khai mero lālumaī na bhannu ni hai* (x2)

don’t tell him this *didi*” (x2)

22. *he moṭer sāikal kindai chan re tārī khetai becera* (x2)

oh! going to buy motor–cycle by selling the (paddy) land (x2)

23. *kānmā mundrā*¹⁸⁷ *lāūdai chan re phūli kicera*

wearing rings in the ears, by exchanging his wife’s *phuli*¹⁸⁸

24. *he didi, lekhna paḍhana sika bhandā*

¹⁸³ *dhotī* “a length of cloth worn wrapped around the waist with the end passing between the legs and tucked in behind. *dhotī* is quite popular in the Terai region and the bordering Indian states.”

¹⁸⁴ *kurta* “a loose, long- sleeved shirt without cuffs or collar, falling just above or below the knees of the wearer. They are traditionally worn with loose fitting Pyjamas.”

¹⁸⁵ *pāinṭ* [loan from English ‘pant’]

¹⁸⁶ “*Dhotis* are considered old fashioned, and *kurtas* are considered modern“ Interview Sony 2009

¹⁸⁷ *mundrā* “earrings”

¹⁸⁸ *phuli* “a traditional jewellery to wear in the ears or nose, normally in the form of a flower.”

oh! *didi*, I told you to learn to write and read(read and write)

25. *ū belāmā garyau hāi* (x2)

at that moment you said, you groaned (x2)

26. *tūte inglis¹⁸⁹ chāṭne sitai sākhkhai bhenā bāi* (x3)

“brother-in-law is together (attached) with a lady who can speak broken English” (3)

26. *tara āithi nī sālī lāithi nī kurā* (x2)

but, that sister-in-law has come to complain (x2)

27. *khai mero lālumaī na bhannu ni hai* (x2)

don’t tell him this *didi* (x2)

28. *he ākhī bhāū ni khurkekā chan boke dārI pālera* (x2)

oh! he has shaved his eyebrows, and has (maintains) a beard at the chin (x2)

29. *biūtī¹⁹⁰ bhanchan sunkailī lāi ākhai mārera*

he says “beauty” to lady with full (blinking) eyes

30 *he morī mekap gara didi bhandā*

oh *didi*, I told you to do make up¹⁹¹

31. *lāj¹⁹² mānera bhayau nāi*

you got shy¹⁹³ and said “no”

32. *biūtī pārlar¹⁹⁴ dhāune sitai palke bhenā bāi* (x3)

¹⁸⁹ *inglis* [loan from English ‘English’]

¹⁹⁰ *būtī* [loan from English ‘beauty’]

¹⁹¹ “The concept of doing make up, i.e., applying lipstick, rouge etc is relative new in Nepal, and is not considered traditional.” Interview Sony

¹⁹² *lāj* “shame disgrace. shyness, modesty.”

¹⁹³ “*Lāj* is a sign of good character.” Asha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

brother-in-law is getting attracted to a lady (ladies) who goes to the Beauty Parlour (x3)

33. *tara āīthi nī sālī lāīthi nī kurā* (x2)

but, that sister-in-law has come to complain (x2)

34. *khai mero lālumaī na bhannu ni hai* (x2)

don't tell him this *didī* (x2)

35. *he dinai bhari lakhar-lakhar sājha pare bhaṭṭīmā* (x2)

oh! The whole day walking around without job, and in the evening in the bar (x2)

36. *nakhāī nalāī sāceko dhan jālā maṭṭīmā*

the money that you saved without eating, and without wearing (good) clothes may go to the soil (may go wasted)

37. *e bābai nācna gāuna sikha*

o sister, I said; “learn to dance and sing”

38. *bhanda ū belāmā nāī* (x2)

at that moment you said; “no” (x2)

39. *ḍisco dhāune dākinīlōe bhaḍkāī bhenālāī* (x3)

brother-in-law is being pulled away from you by the *dāmkinī* ladies going to the disco, is getting attracted to ladies going to disco (x3)

40. *tara āīthi nī sālī lāīthi nī kurā* (x2)

“but, that sister-in-law has come to complain (x2)

41. *khai mero lālumaī na bhannu ni hai* (x2)

don't tell him this *didī* (x2)

¹⁹⁴ *būūṭī pārlar* [loan from English ‘beauty parlour’]

42. *he kammar bāṭa khuskelā jhāi lāchan pāiṇṭ anauṭho* (x2)

oh! brother-in-law wears extraordinary pants which are about to slip down from the waist. (x2)

43. *nācancha holā sinemāko hīro¹⁹⁵ bhanāūdo*

(and also) dances like the hero of the cinema(s)

44. *he bābā, naṇ pāla na didi bhandā*

oh sister!, I told you to maintain / keep nails¹⁹⁶ (long beautiful nails)

45. *ū belāmā bhanyo nāi* (x2)

at that moment, you said; “no” (x2)

46. *naṇma pālis lāune tirai ḍalke bhenā bāi* (x3)

brother-in-law is attracted to (ladies) with painted nails (x3)

47. *tara āithi nī sālī lāithi nī kurā* (x2)

but, that sister-in-law has come to complain (x2)

48. *khai mero lālumaī na bhannu ni hai* (x2)

don’t tell him this *didi* (x2)

49. *he sākāl¹⁹⁷ caḍhne hutī chaina*

oh! he doesn’t even have the ability to climb / ride a bicycle

50. *ṭaāksī caḍhnu paryāchan*

(but) he climbs (travels) into a taxi

51. *dinakai keṭī pherī pherī sahar jharyāchan*

¹⁹⁵ *hīro* [loan from English ‘hero’]

¹⁹⁶ “To maintain long painted nails is considered to be the new fashion” Asha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008

¹⁹⁷ *sākāl* [loan from English ‘cycle’]

changing girls (girl-friends) daily, changing girls (girl-friends) daily, he visits the city/
town

52. *he didi, nākmā phuli na lāu bhandā*
oh *didi*, I told you not to wear *phuli* in the nose

53. *ū belāmā bhanyau nāi (x2)*
at that moment you said; ‘no’ (x2)

54. *naththī lāune nakkalīle palkāi bhenālāi (x3)*
brother-in-law is attracted to (ladies) with fashionable jewellery / earrings (x3)

55. *tara āīthi nī sālī lāīthi nī kurā (x2)*
but, that sister-in-law has come to complain (x2)

56. *khai mero lālumaī na bhannu ni hai (x2)*
don’t tell him this *didi* (x2)

57. *he gairi khet bandak rākhī hātmā lāuna panyau sun*
oh!, selling Gahiri field, he is wearing Gold on his *rākhī*¹⁹⁸ hand

58. *rāto bhāle corne pani bhinājunaī hun*
brother-in-law also stole the red male chicken

59. *he didi jhumkā*¹⁹⁹ *lagāu mārīvārī bho*
oh! *didi*. I told you to wear *jhumkā(s)*

¹⁹⁸ *rākhī* or *raksha bandhan* (the bond for protection) is a Hindu festival celebrated in Nepal and India, which celebrates the relationship between brothers and sisters. It is celebrated on the full moon of the month of Shravan Pōrnima. The festival is marked by the tying of a *rākhī*, or holy thread by the sister on the wrist of her brother.

¹⁹⁹ *jhumkā* “fringe, tassel(s), pendant(s) worn on earrings or attached to a chain around the forehead, it has tiny gold balls or jewels suspended by thin chains.”

60. *bhandā maile bhanyau nāi* (x2)

at that moment you said “no” (x2)

61. *kānmā yārliṇ lāune tirai ḍhalke bhenā bāi* (x3)

brother-in-law is attracted towards (ladies) wearing earring in the ears (x3)

62. *tara āīthi nī sālī lāithi nī kurā* (x2)

but, that sister-in-law has come to complain (x2)

63. *khai mero lālumaī na bhannu ni hai* (x2)

don’t tell him this *didi* (x2)

64. *he paḍhne umer ḍhalke pani iṅglis sīkna jāne re*

if the age goes by, one also needs to learn English

65. *ādhunik bhaina bhanchan yasta bānīle*

(you) will not be called ‘modern’ with these (type of) habits

66. *he didi svāmī²⁰⁰ hoina dārliṇ²⁰¹ bhana*

oh! *didi*, say; “darling”, to your lord, and not “*svāmī*”

67. *bhandā kherī bhanyo nyāi*

but, you said ; “no”

68. “*O maī dīar*”²⁰² *bhanne sīta palke bhenā bāi* (x3)

brother-in-law is attracted to (ladies) who say “Oh my dear!” (x3)

69. *tara āīthi nī sālī lāithi nī kurā* (x2)

but, that sister-in-law has come to complain (x2)

²⁰⁰ *svāmī* “an honorific title, for either males or females, meaning “Lord, owner.” It is also used to indicate ‘husband’

²⁰¹ *dārliṇ* [loan from English ‘darling’]

²⁰² *O maī dīar* [loan from English ‘Oh My dear’]

70. *khai mero lālumaī na bhannu ni hai* (x2)

don't tell him this *didi* (x2)

71. *he hātmā curoṭ salkāera kālo caśmā ṭilikka* (x2)

oh! waving / smoking cigarette in the hand, and wearing black sunglasses (x2)

72. *jatā keṭi utaitira bhenā milikka*

where lady(ladies) are, one can meet brother-in-law there

73. *he didi, naulo yugako naulo calan sika*

oh *didi*!, I told you to learn the new customs of the new age

74. *bhandā bhanyo nāi* (x3)

but (you) said “no” (x3)

75. *jamānāle kolṭe pherdā bhaḍke bhenābāi* (x3)

brother-in-law changes himself according to the times (x3)

76. *tara āiṭhi nī sālī lāiṭhi nī kurā* (x2)

but, that sister-in-law has come to complain (x2)

77. *khai mero lālumaī na bhannu ni hai* (x2)

don't tell him this *didi* (x2)

78. *he thailī banda gare didi*

“oh *didi*!, close your bag {keep your bag closed}”

79. *acel bhenā bhindai chan* (x2)

nowadays brother-in-law is changed (x2)

80. *paisā pāi ākhāchalī mobāil kindai chan*

(when he) gets money, he is not showing you, he is buying mobile

81. *he bāi, phonmā bolna sika bhandā*
oh *bāi*, I told you to learn to speak on the phone

82. *ū belāmā bhanye nāi* (x2)
at that moment, you said “no” (x2)

83. *mobāil bokne mangalīle bhaḍkāi bhenālāi* (x3)
the one who carry mobile phone attacked brother-in-law (x3)

84. *tara āīthi nī sālī lāīthi nī kurā* (x2)
but, that sister-in-law has come to complain (x2)

85. *khai mero lālumaī na bhanda he* (x2)
don’t tell him this *didi* (x2)

86. *he gharmā būḍhī hūdā hūdai*
oh! in the home the old woman is exist

87. *bāhirī keṭī tākne* (x2)
brother-in-law used to go outside with (other ladies) (x2)

88. *lau he didi soca bhena ṭhā ūmai rākha ni*
oh *didi*!, I told you how to change brother-in-law

89. *he morī sāīkal sika didi*
oh *didi*, I told you to learn my cycle

90. *bhandā, ū belāmā bhayau nāi*
at that moment you said “no”

91. *motorcycle hoinkāunele suikāi bhenālāi*
brother-in-law is attracted to those (women) who drive motorcycle

92. *tara āithi nī sālī lāithi nī kurā* (x2)

but, that sister-in-law has come to complain (x2)

93. *khai mero lālumaī na bhannu ni hai* (x2)

don't tell him this *didī* (x2)

Part II

In Part II, beginning from line no:93 and continuing towards the end of this song, presents us with a dialogue between the female character 'A' and her husband 'C'. Character 'B' from the former part is absent in this half.

A 94. *he, mero nākho phuli chaina*

oh! (your/ the) *phuli* of the nose is not there

95. *na dhānsārmā dhān hunu* (x2)

neither is paddy in the paddy store (x2)

96. *rāto bhāle beci beci banchau taruno* (x2)

by selling red male chicken, he is being young (x2)

C 97. *he dāga bhaye lā na khā na*

oh!, if you know how to eat food and wear

98. *kalle tālāi chekyo ta* (x2)

who can stop you? (x2)

99. *āphnai svāsnī bhanna pani lāj lāgeko cha* (x3)

I feel ashamed to say you are my wife (x3)

A 100. *he ū belāmā bhanytyau*

oh! at the moment

101. *malāī timī nai ho lekheko adhamī le* (x2)

when you married me, you said “I am for everything you” (x2)

102. *āja malāī hepnu hepeko barai* (x3)

today (you) start to dominate over me (x3)

C 103. *he merā sāthī hīro jastā*

oh! my friend(s) are like heroes

104. *nuke dulai hīronī*²⁰³

and their wife(s) are like heroine(s)

105. *āphnī bhane unkā cheumā chaina jironī*²⁰⁴ (x3)

but what to do?, mine is zero (x3)

A 106. *he nakkal pāri hiḍū bhane*

oh! if I do fashion (make up), I am not any less

107. *chaina manī kamtī ta* (x2)

I am not any less (x2)

108. *mai hu bhanne ṭhiṭā*

those who say I am the most smart

109. *pani laṭṭhai masita* (x2)

also are attracted to me (x2)

C 110. *he her, her, ke boleḱī*

oh! look, look, what do you say?

²⁰³ *hīronī* [loan from English ‘heroin’]

²⁰⁴ *jīro* [loan from English ‘zero’]

111. *lāj pacekī cothāle*
you have to feel shy

112. *cār chimekle sunlān pherī*
the neighbours can listen

113. *cup lāj mukhāle e gāṭhe* (x2)
please keep your mouth shut, please keep your mouth shut (x2)

A 114. *he sune sunun,*
oh! if they listen, let them listen

115. *bholī dekhī, ma nī bajār hiḍne ho*
from tomorrow, I too will go to the market²⁰⁵”

116. *thāī kaṭ kāṭī, ṭī ṣṭṭ*
I will also cut Thai cut hair style and T-Shirt,

117. *pāinṭ, caśma kinne ho* (x2)
pant and glasses, I will buy (x2)

C 118. *he bhagavān yo āīmāile*
oh God! this woman

119. *bhātko ijat phālne bhai*
will throw away the remaining prestige

120. *hātmā curoṭ salkāera*
waving cigarette in the hand

²⁰⁵ “It is not looked upon as a sign for a woman of a good family to roam around alone in the market.”

121. *biuṭī pārlar gaī*
she wants to go to the beauty parlour

A 22. *he āj mero mīṭīn²⁰⁶ cha hai*
oh! oh! today is my meeting

123. *he gharko dhanda sakāunu (x2)*
hey!²⁰⁷ finish all the house hold work (x2)

124. *pharkina lai dhīla huncha*
I will be late to return

125. *bhāt pakāunu bhāt pakāunu*
cook rice, cook rice

C 126. *he talāī bhāt ghicāera*
hey! to prepare rice for you, do you believe I am your servant?²⁰⁸

127. *basne nokar mānekī, basne nokar mānekī*
do (you) think I am your servant, do (you) think I am your servant?

128. *ghurkya ūdaimā ghurkincha yo bhanne ṭhānekī (x2)*
whatever you say, I will do, you consider (think) (x2)

A 129. *he ghurkyaunu ni chaina*
hey, I am not ordering you

130. *malāī euṭā ṭhīto cāhinchā (x2)*
I want only one smart youth (young man) (x2)

²⁰⁶ *mīṭīn* [loan from English ‘meeting’]

²⁰⁷ *he* the translation “hey!” seems to be more fitting here.

²⁰⁸ “In a traditional Nepali household, only the women of the household do the cooking, except on very rare occasions” Interview Asha 2008

131. *timīlāi basnu chaina bhane jāna pāincha* (x3)
if you don't want to stay, you can go (x3)

C 132. *he āphno bhanne lognelāi*
oh! one's own husband

133. *nokar sarī dalāūches*
(you are) making into a servant²⁰⁹

134. *āja mero sampatīmā rajāi calāūches* (x2)
today you are enjoying my assets (x2)

A 135. *he timīle malāi satāeko*
oh! you are making troubles for me (troubling me)

136. *āja ho ra dherai bho āja ho ra dherai bho*
it is not only today, but since a long time it is not only today, but since a long time

137. *āphno jethā beci sakyau*
you sold your own part

138. *bākī merai ho bākī merai ho bākī merai ho*
the rest is mine, the rest is mine, the rest is mine

C 139. *terā bāuko pevā hora*
(is this) your fathers property?²¹⁰

140. *mero bārī merai khet* (x2)
it is my land, my field (x2)

²⁰⁹ “hey! you are making your own husband into a servant.”

²¹⁰ Note: here the women are encouraged to become aware of their property rights

141. *rām dhulāī pāūdā kherī*

while you receive beatings

142. *balla āulā cet (x2)*

finally you will open your eyes (x2)

A 143. *he lau ta malāī chou*

hey! if you even touch me,

144. *ta mātrai koṭrarīmā khadā ūchu (x2)*

that moment I will close you in the small room (x2)

145. *vai sī el²¹¹ lāī lagāera bārā bajā ūchu²¹² (x2)*

I will let Y.C.L. know how you are (x2)

C 146. *he dīn ganera kati pharak*

oh! with the days, how much change

147. *ānī- bānī ānko tān (x2)*

has come in your behaviour (x2)

148. *lau na parbu kasale phukyo*

oh Lord! who whispered

149. *yo būdhīko kān (x3)*

in this old woman's (wife's) ears (who filled this wife's ears against me?) (x3)

²¹¹ *vai sī el* [loan from English 'Y.C.L.']. THE Y.C.L., the Young Communist League, formed on January 2007 in Nepal is a youth organisation of CPN-M with paramilitary structures.

²¹² *bājā bajāunu* idiomatic: "to play the pipe, to let something be known in the public"

3.1.b The Conflict of ‘the Traditional’ and ‘the Modern’ in “*āyo nayā lahar*” (Analysis of Song No:01)

3.1.b.1 A ‘*sukha*’ Song About an Errant Husband

I heard the song “*āyo nayā lahar*,” played from a cassette in front of the Pashupatinath Temple complex during the Tīj festival. The song advises the *didi* to learn the customs of the new age, (to be progressive / modern). I would like to add this song to the *sukha* category. Not specifically sung only for Tīj festival, this song however was obviously a favourite among the singers during the Tīj festival 2008. Many would collapse in gales of laughter, while describing B, the errant husband who makes himself funny by running behind other women.

“This song is not an ideal one to be sung in the company of men. But we enjoy to sing it among ourselves during the Tīj festival” ²¹³

Not singing the song in front of men, doesn’t necessarily mean that the above-mentioned reflections don’t exist. The mere non-existence of a particular element in one sub-group of the society doesn’t imply that it doesn’t exist in reality at all. This song is ample proof of the fact that a parallel women’s world exists with another set of concepts and constructs.

3.1.b.2 The Location and Source:

The singing at home. The *didi-bahini* group, including the Poudyal Family and their neighbourhood friends meeting place at the friends house, in the morning of the second day, just before the *pūjā* at home.

Recorded DVD and cassette. Part I 8:26 am. , and 8:27am. 03.08.2008. Tīj festival.

3.1.b.3 Key Words

²¹³ Seema Mainali. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

*nayā lahar,*²¹⁴ *ṭhūlā baḍā,*²¹⁵ *īṅglis sīkna,*²¹⁶ *mero bārī merai khet*²¹⁷

3.1.b.4 The Portrayal of the Women-characters and Men-characters

This song has three characters who alternately sing out the verses; A, B and C. For the sake of clarity, I have divided the whole song into two parts, Part I and Part II, the second part being a subsequent thematic development of the former one.

In the Part I (line no: 1 to line no: 93), we come across two women characters, A and B. A is a woman, a particular one, to whom the whole of part I of the song is addressed. A, however remains silent during the former part and enters into a dialogue only in the Part II. B is the character who is actually singing in Part I. B addresses A as *didi*, and addresses herself as the *sālī*²¹⁸ of the husband of A. B and could be could be A's real sister (*didi*), or a friend of A.²¹⁹

In part II (line no: 94 to line no:149), we come across a dialogue between the characters A and C. A, the woman in Part I is singing to her husband, and C, who is depicted in colourful terms in Part I. In reality, of course, the women gathered in front of Pashupatinath, were singing all the roles, whether it was A, B or C; male or female. There were no men participating in these songs, and therefore, a woman took on the role of C, the husband in Part II.

A: A woman, who is married to C.

B: the sister of A: this could also be a friend, who addresses her as *didi*

C: the husband of A

Part I: B, the sister of A is singing the song

²¹⁴ *nayā lahar* “new wave”

²¹⁵ *ṭhūlā baḍā* “big, huge”

²¹⁶ *īṅglis sīkna* “learn English”

²¹⁷ *mero bārī merai khet* “my land my field”

²¹⁸ *sālī* “wife's younger sister”

²¹⁹ “In our place, it is common to call someone as *didi*, even when she is not my actual sister. She is like a sister to me.” Asha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

Part II: Dialog between A and C

It is interesting to observe in this particular song how the men and women have been portrayed. The first part of the song, mainly a monologue, by B, A's sister, gives us a pretty clear image of the character A. She is shown to be traditional and not open to making any changes. The sister says that A will not be called 'modern' if she sticks to her old traditional customs. When told to learn the customs and ways of the new age, she says; "no." In short, we see here a character who is seemingly rooted in her so-called old-fashioned system; and is not willing to undergo any changes according to the modern age.

The part II shows the character A doing a complete turn-over and presenting a totally new image of herself. The character A seems to have taken the advice of her sister seriously, and seems to have changed herself.

Let's now observe how the men have been depicted in this song. We come across *bhināju* who is a regular gambler and likes contact with important people. *Bhināju* is accused of stealing the rice from the grain store. After selling the family paddy land, he buys himself a motor cycle. The brother-in-law has further changed his old-fashioned *phulis*²²⁰ and wears earrings²²¹ of the modern fashion. Walking around the whole day without a job, he goes to the bar in the evening. He likes woman who go to the discos²²². He wears extraordinary pants, which are about to slip down from the waist. *Bhināju* is said to dance like the hero of the cinemas. *Bhināju* changes himself according to the times, and when he receives money, he doesn't show it to his wife, but buys himself a mobile phone instead.

In the Part II, when his wife starts to become modern, the husband is not happy with the change, and says to her:

²²⁰ *phuli* "a traditional jewellery to wear in the ears or nose, normally in the form of a flower"

²²¹ *bhundra* "earrings"

²²² "Going to the discos is something totally unthinkable for the women brought up in a traditional family." Santha Poudyal. Interview. Tj festival 2008.

“I am ashamed to say that you are my wife.” (line no: 99)

He protests that his wife is becoming modern and trying to dominate over him. He is amazed about the changes in the behaviour of his wife with the passage of time. When his wife asks him to help him with the house work, he feels irritated, and refuses to participate in the house work. He wonders irritatedly who is responsible for putting these modern ideas of change in his wife.

3.1.b.5 ‘Code-Switching’²²³ and Changes in the South Asian Society

This song, in particular has quite a few loan words from English; such as ‘*būūṭī*, *hīro*, *O māī dīar*,’ *dārliṇ*,’ etc. This shows the dynamics of song production, where the oral songs show the tendency not to remain static, but undergo changes according to the needs of the times. They include loan words from English, which have become a part of the local language idiom. It also is an indicator of the liveliness of the tradition of oral songs, which are created and re-produced regularly and freshly over the course of time.

This song is about the changes in the South Asian society and how the women are facing these changes. The song moves in playful, teasing way, from the figure of a woman who has tried to stay rigid with her traditional image of ‘how a woman is expected to behave’ in the traditional society. One who is not willing to change with the changes in technology and social structure. The former part of the song poses questions and queries which, is perhaps, familiar to many of the women singing these songs, while the latter part gives answers to these questions.

We see here the traditional image of the South Asian woman, who is not supposed to go to the market alone, to be in charge of her own finances, or to learn to ride a bicycle or a moped. The woman A is shown to be frustrated with her errant husband, who in turn, finds the ‘modern’ women, more interesting. The modern women are portrayed as independent, as being able to ride motorcycles, to speak on the phones, and open to changes with the times, and therefore making them more interesting.

²²³ ‘Code-switching:’ The alternate use of two or more languages within conversation, has become an increasingly topical and important field of research. Auer 1998

Part II seems to present the answer to character A's queries and frustrations. The same person who said "no" earlier to becoming 'modern', has now transformed herself into a fashionable person, inclusive hair cut and modern style clothing. She starts to speak English, and plans to go the market the next day, all by herself. She is also aware of her property rights, and seems to behave more self-confidently and independently.

3.1.b.6 The South Asian Women is Speaking

The idea that the South Asian woman is not able to speak for herself is refuted in this song. We see that the two women singers are very well reflecting about their life situations and thinking of solutions. The main theme of the song is the conflict of the traditional concepts against the modern ideas. Through the medium of this song, the women are able to convey the importance of adapting oneself to the modern changing times. We see here that the women are discussing their everyday life situations in their own language, with their own jokes and sense of humour.

The women are reflecting about their education, and their financial independence. They deliberate on the issues of social independence, or rather the lack of it, and their mobility within their own community. There are concrete suggestions on how to accept the changes which are happening in the immediate neighbourhood. So the image of the silently suffering, non-interest-bearing, submissive South Asian woman, who is a languishing puppet of her tradition, is illustrated to be a myth. I, therefore, argue that the South Asian woman is an active reflecting participant who does involve herself actively in a debate over her own life. We will discuss the above point in more detail in the final chapter.

3.2 *Tījko rahar āyo barīlai* (Song No:02)

3.2.a *Didi Bahini* Group Shall Fast and Sing and Dance During Tīj (Text: Song No:02)

1. *gāũ sor kholera*

let's sing in aloud voice

2. *didi ra bahini*

come older sister(s) and younger sister(s) / (sisters)

3. *nācau na milera ...*

lets dance together ...

4. *tījko rahar āyo barīlai*

the festival of Tīj has come, *barīlai*

5. *gāũ sor kholera*

village and town will play [Tīj]

6. *didi ra bahini*

lets dance, elder sister and younger sister (sisters)

7. *nācau na milera ...*

lets meet ...

8. *tījko rahar āyo barīlai*

the festival of Tīj has come, *barīlai*

9. *gāũ sor kholera*

let's sing in a loud voice

10. *tījko rahar āyo barīlai*

the festival of Tīj has come, *barīlai*

11. *Nauḍāṛā kāṭera gaekā celī*

those who are gone over Naudada (the nine mountains)

12. *bhāgyale bheṭ bhayechaũ pherī* (x2)

luckily (we) have met ...again (x2)

13. *ko kahāṁ pugane ho kehī thāhā chaina*

who will be in which place , and some are not here

(We don't know who will be in which place).

14. *āgum bheṭ pherī hune ho hoina*

whether we will meet again or not, next year.

15. *manko dhoko puryāi gāṁ*

lets sing, fulfilling our desire to sing

16 *sormā sor milāi gāṁ*

lets sing joining voice in voice.

17. *tījko rahar āyo barīlai*

the festival of Tīj has come, *barīlai*

18. *na ... na... na... na...*

(humming)

19. *bhadaure bhelle sakena chekna*

even the floods of Bhadau are not able to stop the daughter

20. *janmeko māṭōmā celīlai ṭekna*

from entering her birth place

21. *bisrera ājalai karkare sāsu*

forget the quarrelsome mother-in-law today

22. *āmāju nandale diekā āsu*

and the tears given by the elder sister-in-law and the younger sister-in-law”

23. (...) *mārera khelaū na aja*

lets play today

24. *jagat namānī bisrera lāj*

lets forget the world, do not feel shy today.

25. *tījko rahar āyo barīlai*

the festival of Tīj has come, *barīlai*

26. *ū ū ū....* (music)

27.(...) *tai basa ni hāmrā yi maiti*

my *maiti*, may you live happily

28. *bābā ra āmā ni dājai ra bhaiti*

with mother and father, elder brother and younger brother

29. *gardachaū binatī mahādev hāmī* (x2)

lets pray to Mahādev²²⁴ (x2)

30. *jug jug bācun śirkā svāmī*

may our husbands live from age to age.

31. *nirjala*²²⁵ *baser lieko brata*

we are fasting without (taking) water

32. *saphal pāri deūe dukhhartā*

please make a success of this, Oh! Destroyer of sadness!

²²⁴ Mahādev, another name for Lord Śiva.

²²⁵ *nirjala brata* “fasting without taking water” “*Nirjala brata* is considered one of the hardest fasting in the Hindu fasting. Women who are very strict will not even spit out their spit, to keep the fast as pure as possible” Asha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

33. *tījko rahar āyo barīlai* (x2)
the festival of Tīj has come, *barīlai* (x2)

34. *gāū sor kholera*
let's sing in aloud voice

35. *tījko rahar āyo barīlai* (x4)
the festival of Tīj has come, *barīlai* (x4)

3.2.b An Opportunity to Meet the Members of the *Didi-Bahinis* (Analysis of Song No:02)

The singers presented in the song are the *didi-bahini* groups. In my recorded version, this was sung by the Poudyal family and their neighbourhood *didis* and *bahinis*.

3.2.b.2 The Location and Source:

The *didi-bahini* group, including the Poudyal Family and their neighbourhood friends meeting place at the friends house, in the morning on the second day, just before the *pūjā* at home.

Recorded DVD Cassette,- Part I 8:26 am. , and 8:27am. 03.09.2008.

3.2.b.3 Key Words

sukha songs, *nācau na milera*,²²⁶ *nirjala brata*, *Naudada. lāj*,²²⁷ *sāsu*,²²⁸ *barīlai*²²⁹, *maitīghar*, *man*²³⁰.

²²⁶ *nācau na milera* “lets dance together”

²²⁷ *lāj* “shame, disgrace, shyness, modesty.” *lāj lāgnu* “to feel ashamed, to feel embarrassed, to feel humiliated, to be shy, diffident, hesitant, to be bashful, coy”

²²⁸ *sāsu* “mother-in-law”

²²⁹ *barīla*: this word is used as a filler in the local folk songs.

3.2.b.4 Some Imagery in the Song

The songs refers to Naudada²³¹, a place which has been orally translated for me as ‘a far away place across the nine mountains.’ Naudada is portrayed as an imaginary place, with symbolic connotations. The song says that some members of the *didī-bahini* group have moved across to Naudada; due to marriage or other reasons. This seems to imply that they are living in a very distant location. Among the *didī-bahini* group I interviewed, the place Naudada seems to be lodged in the imagination as ‘a far off place, which requires days of tedious travel’. I was told that if one gets married to a family so far away, the chances that the *didī-bahini* group will meet this person often become slim.

3.2.b.5 ‘The Self’ and ‘the Other’ in Women’s Songs

This is a light, *sukha* song, and shows two categories of women, ‘the self’ and ‘the other,’ and is sung by a group of women. The *didī-bahinis* wishing to celebrate Tīj declare that it is Tīj time, and they wish that the whole village and town would celebrate Tīj with them (line no:5). Even though they are feeling the hunger due to the strict fasting, they will continue on. They are sad about their friends who are gone over the Naudada mountains; and hope this Tīj festival will give them an opportunity to be reunited with them. So the *didī-bahini* group encourages each other to share whatever is in their *man* (heart, mind). Even the floods of Badhau are not able to stop them from going to celebrate Tīj at their *maitīghar* (line no: 19).

However, as we can see, the *didī-bahini* group here doesn’t include all women. ‘The other’ in this case are listed out as *sāsu*,²³² *āmāju*²³³ and *nanda*.²³⁴ They are represented as having given the members of the *didī-bahini* group tears and sorrow. The

²³⁰ *man* “mind, intellect, heart [fig.], emotion(s)”

²³¹ “When a *didī* is living in a very far off place, which is quite difficult to reach, we say that she is living in Naudada.” Sony Baral. 2009.

²³² *sāsu* “wife’s or husband’s mother”

²³³ *āmāju* “the elder sister-in-law”

²³⁴ *nanda* “husband’s younger sister”

group however encourages each other to forget this sadness and tears, and all other pressing duties on this Tīj festival day, and to dance happily. Even if the rest of the world doesn't agree, they are encouraged to leave aside their *lāj*, and to celebrate and play Tīj, roaming around. The women sing about the good qualities of their *maitīghar*, and sing loving adjectives about their *bābā*,²³⁵ *āmā*²³⁶ and *bhāi*.²³⁷

3.2.b.6 The 'Official' and the Private Reason for Celebrating Tīj

We can interpret here, between the lines, two reasons why the Tīj festival is being celebrated. The former one, the socially accepted reason among the men folk for the celebrating of this festival, is 'for the long life of the husband'. The second reason is to meet the *didis* and *bahinis*, whom they meet so rarely, in order to sing and dance with them. We see here a so-called paradox behind the celebration of Tīj festival.

Brata, or *vrata* [Skt.], a class of ritual in the Sanskrit religious Tradition, has become the field of activity of women, both married, unmarried, and widows. The possibility to perform the *bratas* at home, without priests or expensive ritual articles has allowed this ritual activity to be popular among women. The basics of the *brata*, consisting of an act of self-denial (for instance self-denial of particular food items), is believed to create good *karma*²³⁸. The merits accumulated during the *bratas* gives the person the power to bring back an errant husband, to give birth to a son, to cure an ailing child or husband and so forth. Alternatively, the deity in whose name the *brata* is performed would graciously bless her by fulfilling her wishes. An ideal *patibrata*²³⁹ is

²³⁵ *bābā* "father"

²³⁶ *āmā* "mother"

²³⁷ *bhāi* "younger brother"

²³⁸ *karma* "action, deed" "The nominative singular *karma* refers to the quality of deeds as determining the quality of subsequent experience: good and bad deeds cause subsequent enjoyment and suffering, respectively to their agent, possibly in a subsequent state of existence. The concept of *karma* combines ideas of natural causality, ethics and transmigration (O Flaherty 1980: xi) in an ethically committed retributive causality (Halbfass 1991:301)."

²³⁹ *patibrata* "wife devoted to her husband, virtuous wife." "In pre-modern Hinduism, *pativrata* denoted a woman who performed vows (*vratas*) for her husband (*pati*), a key concept of the good wife in elite

expected to perform these *bratas*, either to get rid of specific calamities, or for the general well-being of the family members, but seldom are these *bratas* used for personal desires. As Young observes:

“Texts classify the *bratas* as *kāmya karma*,²⁴⁰ but ethnographies show that the women often understood them as the higher status *nitya karmas*,²⁴¹ which they performed for their own confidence, well-being and spiritual welfare as well.....”²⁴²

Among my interviewees , Asha Poudyal said:

“*Brata* gives me ‘peace of mind,’ and it helps me to accumulate good *karma*. This helps to protect my family, brings merits to the family and wards off bad luck. I would feel uneasy if I did not participate in the *brata* this year. Further on, if I undertook the *brata* very properly, without even drinking a drop of water, and particularly taking care that the *batti*,²⁴³ doesn’t go out during the whole of the night; then my husband will be blessed with a long life.”²⁴⁴

The powers generated by the vow could even generate control over the husband. So we see here a tie-up of a woman’s social role as a wife (*strīdharmā*) along with her own spirituality in connection with the concepts of ritual, yoga, devotion, and service.

3.2.b.7 The Presence or Absence of Particular Members influences the Song Genre.

I would like to argue here that the standard image of the subordinate woman of the dominant patrilinear ideology, is only one side of the coin. Asked in an official interview, neither men nor women disputed that the *ghar* (husband’s house) was their home, where

circles (and those who imitate them). ... The ostensible purpose of the vow was to ensure his health, welfare and longevity (and by extension that of the family)..... A wife’s duties included the following: having children (especially sons), preparing food, providing sexual and other pleasures for her husband, managing the household, doing the housework, and childcare. A husband’s duties included being a progenitor and providing economic support, protection and marital security. ...” Young 2008

²⁴⁰ *kāmya karma* “action for the fulfilment of desires”

²⁴¹ *nitya karma* “constant and necessary acts”

²⁴² Young 2008:1020

²⁴³ *batti* “lamp, wick, electric light”

²⁴⁴ Asha Poudyal Interview. Tij festival 2008.

they felt loved and accepted. However, the song no:2 reveals the other side of the coin, where these concepts are open to ironic, shifting, and ambiguous equivalutions in the festive language of Tīj.

Thus, we observe that one should give close attention to the setting in which a particular answer is given, the persons present, whether it is an all women's group or an all men's group, or a mixed group. Further, the presence of the *sāsu*, for example also produces constraints in the answers produced by my interviewees²⁴⁵.

3.3 “Sohra singār²⁴⁶ garikan ho” (Song No:03)

3.3.a The Song About the Sixteen Ornamentations (Text: Song No:01)

Singer: Sindhu Malla

I

1. *sohrai singār garikana ho*
after doing the sixteen ornamentations

2. *mai po rāmrī bhākī chu*
I have become beautiful

3. *mai Rapti²⁴⁷ kī chorī hajūr*

3. I am the daughter of the people

4. *nācna gāuna bhani āki chu* (x2)
I have come to dance and sing (x2)

II

5. *sohrai singār garikana ho*
after doing the sixteen ornamentations

6. *mai po rāmrī bhākī chu*

²⁴⁵ Devika. Interview. Tīj festival 2008

²⁴⁶ *sohra singār* or *solah singār* “the sixteen ornamentations of the bride”

²⁴⁷ Rapti is a zone in Nepal. Sindhu Malla hails from Rapti.

I am becoming beautiful

7. *māyā miṭō daṅgālīko*

the love of Daṅgālī is popular

8. *koselī yo bāṭan bhanī lyāekī chu* (x2)

so I have brought it as a gift to distribute it (x2)

III

9. *sohrai singār garikan ho*

after doing the sixteen ornamentations

10. *mai po rāmrī bhākī chu*

“I have become beautiful”

11. *saṅgiṇīlāī bheṭna ani nācna gāuna bhani kana*

in order to meet (my) (girl) friends and to dance (and) sing with them

12. *ma ta ākī chu* (x2)

I have come (here) today (x2)

IV

13. *sohrai singār garikan ho*

after doing the sixteen ornamentations

14. *mai po rāmrī bhākī chu*

I am becoming beautiful

15. *maitīgharko āganīmā khuśiyālī charna*

in order to spread happiness in the paternal courtyard

16. *bhanī ma ta ākī chu*

I have come here

3.3.b The Question of Feminine Identity in “*sohrai singār*²⁴⁸ *garikan ho*” (Analysis of Song No:03)

3.3.b.1 The singers and the public

²⁴⁸ *singār* *Skt.śṛṅgāraḥ* “The sentiment of love or passion, the erotic sentiment (the first of the eight sentiments or nine sentiments in poetical composition.)”

The text is sung by a solo woman singer. One *didī-bahini* group told me that the song is addressed to their *saṅgiṇis*.²⁴⁹ In reality, of course, the women took turns singing out the lyrics.

3.3.b.2 The Location and Source: (taped DVD, cassette)

Pashupatinath and Theku *mandir* Tempel complexes.

Cassette played in front of Pashupatinath Temple complex.

3.3.b.3 Key Words

*sukha-singār, maitīghar, māya,*²⁵⁰ *saṅgiṇī*²⁵¹

3.3.b.4 The Singers and the Public

The text is sung by a solo woman singer. One *didī-bahini* group told me that the song is addressed to their *saṅgiṇis*.²⁵² In reality, of course, the women took turns singing out the lyrics.

3.3.b.5 The Ritual and Social Significance of the Ornamentations

The *singār bhāva* is predominant here. The short song about the ‘*sohra singār*’ falls into a typical genre of ‘*singār*’ songs to be found throughout the South Asian cultural backdrop. In the classical dance, as well in folk dance, the decoration of oneself with *anjana*, *sindūr*, and other ornaments listed above, is popular. These ornaments have many layers of significance. On the ritual level, at least a part of them are presented to the married woman on Tīj day. Parallely, on the social level, these ornamentations are the

²⁴⁹ Devika. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

²⁵⁰ *māyā* “infatuation, folly, magic, love”

²⁵¹ *saṅgiṇī* “girl friend”

²⁵² Devika. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

typical signs of a *suhāgan*.²⁵³ On the personal level, the interviewees delved in the simple joy of being able to receive new *sārīs* and other clothing, and dressing themselves up in their fineries. As my Interviewee Devika says;

“ For me, Tīj is a long awaited occasion, where I get a new *sārī* as a gift, and look forward to dress up with my friends, and to sing and dance with them. Dressed in my red *sārī*, I feel I am dressed like Goddess Pārvatī.”

3.3.b.6 Sources of Women’s Self-images

I would like to argue here that the songs and dances associated with the Tīj festival, as well as the *bratas* and *pūjās* surrounding it are both expressive sources for women’s self-images. ‘*Singār*,’ a concept with decidedly erotic connotations, hardly appropriate to be sung in front of a group of men, acquires other qualities when sung in the context of the Tīj festival, exclusively under the *didi-bahini* group. The word *singār* is derived from the Sanskrit word *śrngārah*. Apte²⁵⁴ defines *śrngāra* as the sentiment of love or sexual passion, the erotic sentiment (the first of the eight or nine sentiments in poetical compositions). He also translates *śrngāra* as love, passion, sexual love, and also as an elegant dress suited for amorous interviews.

We see here that ‘the objects of ornamentation,’ is a popular motif for South Asian Songs. It shows, as such, the predominant popularity as well as the acceptance of the sexual and feminine motifs as part of the feminine identity. The fact that some songs lament about the family problems or about the lack of rights in the constitution, doesn’t exclude that the *singār* motif shall be excluded from the song themes as being inferior to the other songs. We see here a positive representation of woman and the presentation of the so-called ‘feminine’ qualities such as dressing up. I would like to bring this in contrast to the concepts of Western Feminism, where a comparatively masculine image, including attire and clothing, is adopted as the ideal in favour of the feminine one.

²⁵³ *suhāg* “The happy state of a wife when her husband is alive, auspiciousness, good fortune, ornaments worn by a bride at the time of her marriage, a nuptial song.”

²⁵⁴ Apte 1988

3.4 “Bola bola bola didi bahini”(Song No:04)

3.4.a Didi Bahini, Speak About Your Heart’s Grief When We Meet for Tīj. (Text: Song No: 04)

1. *ḍhalkī nāca ḍhalkī nāca*

let’s dance, twisting and turning our body; let’s dance, twisting and turning our body

2. *didi bahinī sādhai kati rune ho*

didi, bahini, how long will (we) cry?

3. *āgum bheṭ huncha kī na kaso hune ho*

we don’t know if we can meet next year or not

5. *ḍhalkī nāca ḍhalkī nāca*

let’s dance, twisting and turning our body; lets dance, twisting and turning our body

6. *āgum bheṭ huncha kī na kaso hune ho* (x2)

we don’t know how (when) our coming (next) meeting will be (x2)

7. *bola bola bola bola didi bahini*

talk... talk..... talk.....

8. *bheṭ hūndā bolana*

speak (talk) when we are meeting

9. *bhārī pīrle thiceko tyo man khola na* (x3)

open your heart which is heavy with (full of) sorrow (x3)

10. *ḍhalkī nāca ḍhalkī nāca*

lets dance, twisting and turning our body; lets dance, twisting and turning our body

11. *ekai pāthī²⁵⁵ ekai pathi makai pani* (x2)

one measurement of corn, one measurement of corn only (x2)

12. *hāla sāsu jholāmā*

put in the bag, mother-in-law

13. *ḍikī jāto ukhelera phāla kholāmā* (x2)

and throw away (in the river) all the equipment to grind cereals

14. *ḍhalkī nāca ḍhalkī nāca*

let's dance, twisting and turning our body; lets dance, twisting and turning our body

15. *kati baschau āsu jhārī*

how long will you stay (crying) with heavy tears

16. *bolnu pani pardacha choḍnu hunna*

(so) we also need to speak

17. *āphno hak khosnu pardacha* (x2)

you also need to snatch our rights (x2)

18. *choḍnu hunna āphno hak khosnu pardacha* (x3)

it is not good to leave our rights, so we need to snatch our rights (x3)

19. *pokharelī ra mārś dhānko callī*

now the fashion has come to eat the rice of *pokharā* and *mārśī*

20. *jau makaiko piṭho aba gālāl thupāra* (x2)

come, father-in-law, give the barley and the corn to the cow(s) (x2)

²⁵⁵ *pāthī* “a unit of measure equal to four sera or approximately 8 pounds, used to measure grains, flours and liquids”

21. *jau makeko pīṭho gālāi thupāra* (x3)

and collect the barley and maize flour for the cow (x3)

22. *ḍhalkī nāca ḍhalkī nāca*

let's dance, twisting and turning our body; lets dance, twisting and turning our body

3.4.b A *Dukha* Motif in a *Sukha* Song in '*bola bola didi bahini*' (Analysis of Song No:04)

3.4.b.1 The Women are Encouraged to Speak Out Their Heart's Grief.

The song '*bola bola bola didi bahini*' is a song exhorting the *didi-bahini* group to speak out their hearts grief when they meet for Tīj. I would categorise this song as *sukha-dukha* song. This song was played on a cassette in front of Thekudhoban temple complex, by the women lined up for a *darśan* in the Theku *mandir*. Addressed to one another, this song mentions a few other characters such as the *sāsu*²⁵⁶ and the *sasurā*²⁵⁷.

3.4.b.2 The Source

Cassette played in front of Thekudhoban Temple complex

3.4.b.3 Key Words

sukha-dukha, bola bola, sāsu, sāsurā, āsu, man, āphno hak.

3.4.b.4 The Contrasting Motifs.

The song deals with everyday objects such as 'one measurement of corn', the barley, and the corn for the cows. However, the song cautions the listeners to be aware of

²⁵⁶ *sāsu* "wife's or husband's mother"

²⁵⁷ *sasurā* "father-in-law"

their own rights. Contrasting mood is provided by the heart filled with grief, and the encouragement to dance by twisting and turning their bodies.

The singer tells the *sāsu* to throw away all the equipment to grind the cereals in the river (line no.13). The river can be interpreted as a metaphor to show things which should be abandoned. The river stands for cleansing, and for getting rid of unwanted things.

“ A river has the special quality to purify us. The water of Theku is as purifying as the *gaṅgā-jala*^{258,259}

When we look specifically at the portrayal of women in this song, we find quite a few extremes of *bhāvas*. The *didī-bahini* group encourages each other to dance, twisting and turning their bodies. They wonder when they will meet again. They encourage each other to open their *man*,²⁶⁰ which is full of sorrow, as well as to speak and share their sorrows, when they have the opportunity to meet each other. The *sāsu* is requested to put one *pāthī* of corn into the bag. Therefore, they endorse each other to speak out and to exchange their problems. The song encourages them to grasp their *hak*²⁶¹ on their own, and not to sit passively.

This song comes up with strong messages in the social context. It encourages the women not to bottle up their problems for themselves, but, to share their sorrows. We have seen that the lack of proximity to each others *ghars*, and the relative lack of freedom to move around has been a problem. Therefore, the Tīj gives the women of the neighbourhood, a superb opportunity to exchange information and to share experiences. The women we see are endorsed not to ignore their rights, but to be active participants and demand for their share of rights.

²⁵⁸ *gaṅgā jala* “the water of Ganga“

²⁵⁹ Radha. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

²⁶⁰ *man* “mind, intellect heart [fig.] emotion(s) mood.”

²⁶¹ *hak* “rights“

I would like to interpret this song as contrasting between two *bhāvas*²⁶². The *sukha bhāva*, in this case, the joy to sing and dance, is placed opposite the *dukha bhāva*, where the heart is overflowing with grief. The South Asian cultural and literary context often plays with the *bhāva* and its nuances. *Bhāva* is interpreted as a state of being. It could also be defined as an inclination or disposition, nature, temperament, but in everyday terms *bhāva*, is also a feeling, an emotion, or a sentiment. The *sukha rasa*, presenting the joy to sing and dance placed opposite the *dukha rasa*, where the heart overflowing with grief, is encouraged to open up; can be seen as the contrastive poles of this songs poetic backdrop. A person merely listening to these songs, perhaps through a cassette, without being present at the spot of the actual enactment of the song, could interpret: “the *didi-bahini* group is grieving and in sorrow.” However, in my opinion, this is too simple an interpretation of the song quality. While watching the songs being played along with the singing and dancing in front of Pashupatinath and Theku temple complex, I am repeatedly struck by the fact that the women are smiling and dancing. They don’t appear to be sad; on the contrary they are positively enjoying the festivities and singing with relish.

Therefore, I would like to argue that a *dukha* song, could in reality, be a *sukha* song. No doubt it has a ‘*dukha*’ content, but the accompanying atmosphere also finally defines whether to categorise this song as category A or B, or as in this case, category A-B. We can label B here as being a sub-category of A. i.e., a *sukha* song. Even though singing about a sad theme, the *didi-bahini* group is basically in a happy mood. To conclude, a *dukha* motif in a Tīj song need not mean that the singer is principally sad, or oppressed and not happy. Rather, I would like my readers to become aware of the several layers of implications and the play with words and meanings, which give this particular song its originality, depth and liveliness; the aforementioned *didi-bahini* group being happy even while performing a sad theme.

We see here how women exercise agency in religious performances, as ritual authors, and as performers and consumers. Thus, we see that the words and

²⁶² *bhāva* “being, existence, inclination or disposition of mind, thought, opinion, supposition feeling, emotion. In the dramatic science or in poetic compositions generally, *bhāvas* are either eight or nine, according as the *rasa* are taken to be 8 or 9, each *rasa* having its own *svāyibhāva*.” Apte 1988.

concepts involved in these songs explore and expand notions of what constitutes women's self-images in the South Asian women's ritual and festive traditions. They also help to break down conceptual boundaries, which divide the accepted version, from the private version and the public spaces from the domestic spaces and performances. As Tracy Pintchmann²⁶³ says, we also see that the women who are involved in these productions are jumping across their own shadows, breaking down boundaries, re-interpreting the cultural imageries, and acknowledged social norms. They are in the continuous process of creating a backdrop for the formation of alternative cultural norms, norms which go farther than the borders allowed by the official version of patriarchal society. There is no doubt here that the women's festivities and religious activities permeate diverse realms and breach the so-called orthodox borders. This point will be discussed in detail in the coming chapter.

3.5 “*Herana lālumai ma kati rāmrī chu*” (Song No:05)

3.5.a Tīj Song Describing One's Own Beauty. (Text: Song No:05)

Singer: Shakuntala Thapa

1. *yaspālī tījmā nanācī choḍḍīna* (x2)

I won't leave without dancing in this times Tīj (x2)

2. *herana lālumai ma kati rāmrī chu*

look at me, how beautiful I am

3. *bārulī kammar na bhāchi choḍḍīna*

I will not leave without twisting my thin waist

4. *herana ...*

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

²⁶³ Pintchmann 2007: 3-7

5. *bāba ra āmākī ma kāchī chorī* (x2)

I am the youngest daughter of my father and mother (x2)

6 *herana* ...

look at me...

7. *kasaikī kālī kasaikī gorī* (x2)

(I am) the dark one for somebody and the fair one for somebody.²⁶⁴ (x2)

8. *herana* ...

look at me...

9. *yo larke bāisa yo lālī joban*

this young age and this colourful life

10. *culbule bānī cancale yo man*²⁶⁵

(my) changing habits and wavering heart

11. *herana* ...

look at me...

12. *hīrchu re ma ta hāsako cālmā*

O I walk with the gait of a goose²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ “*Gorī*, a fair woman in Nepal is considered more attractive, in general than a dark one, *kālī*.” Preeta Aryal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

²⁶⁵ *man* “mind, intellect. heart [fig] emotion(s)”

²⁶⁶ *hāsako cālmā* “the gait of a goose” “The gait of a goose is very elegant.” Interview. Asha Poudyal. Tīj festival 2008.

13. *herana ...*

look at me...

14. *javāni phulyo bāṣeko cālmā*

(my) youth blossoms as the years march by

15. *herana ...*

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

16. *aināmā herī lajāune bānī*

my habit of becoming shy by observing (myself) in the mirror

17. *herana ...*

look at me...

18. *rāmro phul siramā sajāune bānī*

(my) habit of decorating my hair with beautiful flowers

19. *herana ...*

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

20. *ciṭṭikka jyān chineko kammar*

(my) beautiful body and thin waist

21. *herana ...*

look at me...

22. *he raicha bhanchan jhanai ek nambar (x2)*

if someone looks (at me), they say; “she is number one” ²⁶⁷ (x2)

23. *herana ...*

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

music...

24. *jiskana thālchan gharbāṭa niske*

as (I) emerge out of the (house), (they)²⁶⁸ tease(flirt) with me

25. *herana ...*

look at me...

26. *bhutukkai huncha ekaichina jiske*

(they) go crazy, if they can talk / flirt with (me) even for a single moment

27. *herana ...*

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

28. *kohī sita ekaichin jiskanai nahune*

if I talk / flirt with anyone, they become crazy

29. *herana ...*

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

²⁶⁷ number one: “Number one here means ‘the best, the topmost.’” Asha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

²⁶⁸ “The implication here is on the young men from the neighbourhood” Sony Baral. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

30. *gharbāṭa bāhira niskanai nahune*

(I) don't have a chance to come out of (my house)

31. *herana ...*

look at me... x2 slow, x4 fast

32. *kasaiile ke bhanchan kasaile ke bhanchan (x2)*

some say something (and) some say something (x2)

33. *herana ...*

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

34. *kohīlo ta ajha jobanai le bhanchan*

some even ask me to give my youth to them

35. *herana ...*

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

36. *sangī ra sāthīle khūb māyā garchan x2*

all friends and mates love me

37. *herana ...*

look at me... x2 slow, x4 fast

38. *gatilā keṭā mai bhanī marchan (x2)*

The good boy said, "I will die for you"(x2)

39. *herana ...*

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

40. *kasiale kehī bhane hāsaire țārchu*

If someone said something, I used to go (along) with it, laughing.

41. *herana ...*

look at me...

42. *bainguñlāī gunaile mārchu (x2)*

[even]those who are without virtue, I also make them virtuous²⁶⁹ (x2)

43. *herana ...*

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

44. *bacan ko golī kasailāī hāndinā*

I do not shoot someone with the bullet of my words

(I don't speak words which hurt anybody)

45. *herana ...*

look at me...

46. *bala khāis bhanna kasailāī jāndinā*

I don't make myself happy, when someone is in sorrow

47. *herana ...*

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

²⁶⁹ “This is a saying in Nepali.” Sony Baral. Interpretation. Tīj festival.2008.

48. *jasko ni ta sāthī bhai hunchu* (x2)

I am like a friend for whomever who wants (for everybody) (x2)

49. *herana* ...

look at me...

50. *aruko pīramā ma pani runchu* (x2)

In others sorrow, I also cry (x2)

51. *herana* ...

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

52. *risako khetī panī garekī chaina*

I am also not doing the farming of anger²⁷⁰

53. *herana* ...

look at me...

54. *bisako khetī panī garekī chaina*

I am also not doing the farming of poison

55. *herana* ...

look at me... (x2) slow, (x4) fast

3.5.b The Celebrations of One's Own Beauty in "Herana lālumai ma kati rāmrī chu" (Analysis of Song No:05)

²⁷⁰ "I don't nurse bad feelings towards anybody." Sony Baral. Interpretation. Tīj festival 2008.

Singer: Shakuntala Thapa

3.5.b.1 The Trance-like Quality of the Repeating Versus.

The repetition of the verses lend the song an almost trance-like quality. Clapping their hands in rhythm, and turning around in fast circles, the women dance in a faster and faster tempo, reaching a final crescendo towards the end. This song, which I would categorise under the *sukha-singār* slot, is a celebration of the singer's own beauty and attractiveness. I first heard this song played from a cassette, inside a tent at the Pashupatinath on the *brata* day, I purchased it for myself. Later on, I also came across singers playing this song live in front of the Thekudhoban temple complex.

3.5.b.1 The Location and Source

The singing at home. The *didī-bahini* group including the Poudyal Family and their neighbourhood friends meeting place at the friend's house, on the morning of the second day, just before the *pūjā* at home. Cassette played in front of Pashupatinath Temple complex. Song played live in front of the Thekudhoban Temple complex.

3.5.b.2 Key Words

sukha-singār, rāmri²⁷¹ javāni.²⁷²

3.5.b.3 Some Metaphors

This song celebrates the singer's own beauty. In a proud manner, the singer presents to the listeners her own beauty. She mentions her own thin waist, and says she is someone's *gorī²⁷³* and someone's *kālī.²⁷⁴* The singer decorates herself with flowers in her hair, and lists out the list of young men who wait to flirt with her. Some young men, she

²⁷¹ *rāmri* "beautiful"

²⁷² *javāni* "youth"

²⁷³ *gorī* "a fair woman"

²⁷⁴ *kālī* "a dark woman"

says: say: “I will die for you” (line no: 38). As to her own moral qualities, the singer claims herself to be able to sympathise with the others in times of their sorrow. She also tries to cultivate the seeds of happiness.

In the song, the singer equates her own gait to that of a goose (*hāṃsako*²⁷⁵ *cālmā*).

“The *hāṃsa* can separate milk from water and is a very special bird, with special powers. It is one of the most elegant birds and is the *vāhana*²⁷⁶ of Sarasvati. The *hāṃsa* is representing, also, the supreme Brahman.”²⁷⁷

My other interviewee Sarita also added:

“The *hāṃsa* is also a very special bird, while it can separate good from bad. This, therefore, is a metaphor for the higher virtues that the singer possesses. The *hāṃsa* is a pure bird, and it has divine knowledge, and is a symbol for the sacred knowledge. It can walk on the earth, fly in the sky, and swim in the water.”²⁷⁸

The *javāni* is compared to a flower.

“Just as a non-descript bud blossoms out into a beautiful flower; so the listener can use his fantasy to imagine the youth of the singer blooming out, in its full beauty and fragrance.”²⁷⁹

The celebration of one’s own beauty is often a recurring theme in South Asian women’s oral traditions. We observe that the singer seems to take special pleasure in describing her own beauty, how she dances, how she observes herself in the mirror, how she has ornamented herself with *ṭika* on the forehead, and also the *lālī* on the lips.

3.5.b.4 The Transport of Certain Concepts of Womanhood

The main theme in the song is the celebration and acceptance of one’s own beauty and qualities. The singer speaks only sweet words, and the song presents some particular

²⁷⁵ *hamsa* “swan, goose, duck, flamingo”

²⁷⁶ *vāhana* “vehicle, carriage, beast for riding”

²⁷⁷ Sindhu Baral. Interview 2009.

²⁷⁸ Sarita Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

²⁷⁹ Radha. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

qualities of the singer as praiseworthy. Possessing a virtuous character, not speaking harsh words, not making merry while someone is in sorrow, or expressing sympathy when someone is crying are some, are some other examples (line no: 46-50). The singer is proud of the fact that instead of sowing the seeds of anger and poison, she is like a friend to anyone in need (line no: 52-54). *Lāj* is another interesting aspect which appears in the song (line no: 16). *Lāj* is a typical aspect of the South Asian culture. Here, being shy is considered an attribute to a woman from a noble household.

3.6 “Maitīghar...maitīghar...maitīghar...” (Song No:06)

3.6.a Song Describing the Maternal Home of the Singer. (Song No:06)

1 . *hā... hā...*

2. *basanta nai basna khojcha yahā lolāera*²⁸⁰
even Spring stays here in a relaxed manner

3. *yo ho mero prāṇa bhandā pyāro*²⁸¹
this is more lovely than my life

4. *maitīghar... maitīghar ... maitīghar*²⁸² (x2)
maternal home , my maternal home, my maternal home) (x2)

5. *euṭā phūl phule yahā dhartī magamāūncha*
if one flower blossoms here, the (whole) earth smells (wonderful)

6. *euṭā battī bale yahā jagat jagmagāūncha*²⁸³ (x2)

²⁸⁰Basanta “Spring (season); one of the six seasons of the year.”

²⁸¹ *prāṇa* “life, breath”

²⁸² *māṭa* “The paternal home of a married woman, a women’s brother’s home, women’s paternal uncle’s home (refers not merely to the house, but the place (village, town) where her home is located)”
ghar, (or *ghara*) “house, building, home, family”

even the light of a single lamp makes the whole world shine (x2)

7. *sukha śānti muskāūncha yahā sadhai bhari*

here (in this place) happiness and peace always stays.

8. *lukamāri khelcha jun yahā rātai bhari*

the moon plays hide and seek the whole night.

9. *maitīghar... maitīghar ... maitīghar (x2)*

maternal home , maternal home, maternal home (x2)

10. *basanta nai basna khojcha yahā lolāera*

even Spring stays here, needed to stay here longer

11. *yo ho mero prāṇa bhandā pyāro*

this is more lovely than my life

12. *hā...hā...hā...*

13. *ākāślāi choeko cha mero himālale (x2)*

with my Himalayas, it seems to be touching the sky (x2)

14. *svargalāi lobhyāūcha merai nepālale*

(even) The heaven is greedy (crazy) for my Nepal.

15. *mero prīt palāūcha sadhai paharāmā*

my love grows among the mountains

16. *mero gīta susāūcha sadhai chaharāma*

my love / liking start to make noises like a waterfall

17. *yo ho merā prāṇa bhandā pyāro*

²⁸³ *battī* “ lamp, wick, electric light”

this is more lovely than my life

18. *maitīghar... maitīghar maitīghar* (x2)

maternal home ... maternal home,... maternal home (x2)

19. *basanta nai basna khojcha yahā lolāera*

even Spring stays here, needed to stay here longer

20. *hā... hā...*

3.6.b On the Usage of Metaphor in “*Maitīghar...maitīghar...maitīghar...*” (Analysis of Song No:06)

3.6.b.1 Song Describing the Maternal Home of the Singer

I recorded this song during the neighbourhood celebrations of the Poudyal family and their neighbours, at the gathering before the *pūjā*. This song, titled “*Maitīghar...maitīghar... maitīghar*”, is a song describing the natal home of the singer. I would like to categorise this song in the *sukha* slot. This song is part of a famous popular cinematic film, ‘*Maitīghar*,’ and therefore enjoys a wide popularity. In real life, it was sung by almost all the younger members who were gathered for the morning *pūjā*, such as Asha Poudyal, her sister-in-law, and the *bahus* of the neighbourhood family.

3.6.b.2 Key words

*maitīghar, sukha śānti,*²⁸⁴ *prāṇabhando pyāro,*²⁸⁵ *prīt*

3.6.b.3 The Location and Source:

Live song sung at the Poudyal neighbourhood.

²⁸⁴ *sukha-śānti* “happiness and peace”

²⁸⁵ *prāṇabhando pyāro* “more lovely than my life”

3.6.b.4 Some Metaphors

As a characteristic of speech writing and oral songs, metaphors can serve the poetic imagination. Here, the usage of an image that by implication suggests the likeness of one entity, to one another entity lends these lines a certain dramatic touch. This metaphor also serves to facilitate the understanding of the singer's conceptual domain, typically an abstract one such as ideas, through expressions that relate to one another, more familiar expressions or concepts.

This song is teeming with many different *upamās* / metaphors²⁸⁶. *Upamās*,²⁸⁷ or metaphors, are a standard aspect of South Asian poetry and can be observed in the *lok gīt* of the region, as well as the poetry of the classical Sanskrit (*kāvya*²⁸⁸). The object, or concept to which it is compared is called '*upamānaṃ*'²⁸⁹ (*vehicle*), meaning the standard of comparison, or that with which anything is compared. The '*upameya*'²⁹⁰ (*tenor*) is the subject of comparison, or that which is resembled. If A is compared to B, A is *upameya* and B is *upamānaṃ*.

²⁸⁶ metaphor: (from the Greek: *metapherein*) is language that directly compares seemingly unrelated subjects. In the simplest case, this takes the form: "the [first subject] is [a second subject].", i.e; A is B. Or in general, a metaphor is a rhetorical trope that describes a first subject as being equal to a second subject, in some way. Thus, the first subject can be optimally described because implicit and explicit attributes from the second subject are used to enhance the description of the first. This device is known for usage in literature and especially in poetry, where , with few words, emotions, and associations from one context is associated with objects and entities in a different context. Moreover, metaphor also denotes rhetorical figures of speech that achieve their effects via association, comparison, and resemblance. A metaphor is more forceful (active) than an analogy, because metaphor asserts two things are the same, whereas analogy implies a difference.

²⁸⁷ *upamā* "resemblance, similarity, equality" Comparison of two objects different from each other, simile, comparison, a likeness (as picture, portrait)."

²⁸⁸ *kāvya* „prophetic, inspired, poetical“

²⁸⁹ *upamānaṃ* "comparison, resemblance, a particle of comparison"

²⁹⁰ *upameya* " fit to be likened or compared, comparable with"

The singer of the song, '*maitīghar*', loves her paternal home dearly. I leave it open to interpretation whether the singer loves her *maitīghar* more than her *ghar*. This song has a certain dream-like quality. Noticeably, it mentions no real life characters, not even the members of the *maitīghar*. The singer seems to be content in the blissful contemplation of the place where she grew up, and seems oblivious of any other person. It is, however, interesting to note that many fictive characters appear one after the other almost as if the *maitīghar* would be a stage.

We see here that the *Basanta*,²⁹¹ is sketched out as a personification (even spring stays here in a relaxed manner (line no: 02). The *Basanta* season being the *upameya* here, is placed opposite the personification as *upamānaṃ*. This person 'Basanta' gets lulled and relaxed upon entering the *maitīghar*. Interestingly, Apte also defines *Basanta* (*vasanta*) as "spring personified as a deity and regarded as a companion of Kāmdeva."²⁹² Thus, *Basanta* gets so lulled by the outstanding atmosphere and charm of the *maitīghar*, that he doesn't like to leave the place anymore.

The second *upamā* in the '*maitīghar* song' is that of a single *phul* (flower), which has the effect of filling the whole earth with its fragrance (line no:05). The flower here has the power to bring out some cultural signifiers.

"A flower is associated with beauty, fragility and fineness. Its fragrance may allude to the good name, the fame, and the sweetness which the singer associates with her natal home."²⁹³

Further, an only lamp has the strength to lighten up the whole universe (line no: 6). The whole world shines in its glory. A lamp is an important element in the *pūjā* paraphernalia of the South Asian rituals.

"I like to light a *batti* after taking my bath, as the first action in the morning. Also in the evening, with the setting of the sun, I like to light a *batti*, and to make the evening *ārati*."²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ *Basanta* "spring (season); one of the six seasons of the year"

²⁹² Apte 1988: 837.

²⁹³ Santha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

²⁹⁴ Asha Poudyal Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

The moon, (*juna*) plays a significant role in the South Asian cultural imagery.²⁹⁵ The moon or the *upameya* moreover is represented as a person (perhaps a child), the *upmāna* who plays hide and seek (line no:08). This playful *upama* of the scene of the *maitīghar* paints out the nostalgic scene vividly depicting the *maitīghar* in front of our eyes. The listener can identify easily with the emotions of the playful moon-personification who is playing, hiding here and there in the courtyard of the *maitīghar*.

3.6.b.5 *Aphno* vs. *Parāyī*

The ironic fact that the *maitīghar* is named as the place dear to the singer, dearer than her own life, but that it is in her ‘*ghar*,’ husband’s house where she now lives, gives this song its emotional power and resonance. This genre of *maitīghar* songs brings out the poignancy of women’s separation from their natal kin, through *vivāha* (marriage) and the subsequent *bidāī* (departure), when the bride leaves her natal home to live in the house of the *pati* (husband) and his kin. In the wake of the song, I asked Asha, married and at that time living in the house of her *sāsu* more than eight years already; and the mother of two children, which place is ‘*ghar*’ for her; and she answered hesitatingly:

“This (pointing to her husbands house), is my ‘*ghar*,’ but my ‘*āphno ghar*’ is my *maitīghar*, because I was born there.”²⁹⁶

Asha, we find here, is torn between these social concepts, which divide herself and her natal kin from each other, and is expressing the sentiment that there is no place she can call ‘her own’. The longing for the maternal home, so poignantly pointed out in these songs, gives these songs their emotional potency, as well as wide-spread popularity.

²⁹⁶ Asha Poudyal Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

3.7 Sāno māyālāi bāṭōmā bheṭ bhayo (leṭ²⁹⁷ bhayo)” (Song No: 07)

3.7.a Song About Meeting the Sāno Māyālāi (Young / Small Lover) (Text: Song No:07)

1. *ghūmtī tira bheṭ bhayo (leṭ bhayo)*

(I) met at the corner of the road

2. *sāno māyālāi bāṭōmā bheṭ bhayo*

(I) met the young lover at the corner of the road.

3. *nāc nāc nāco ṭolīharū ho*

dance, dance, dancing group.

4. *ma bheṭulā āja kī bholi ho*

today or tomorrow, when I/ we meet

5. *ghūmtī tira bheṭ bhayo*

meet at the corner of the road

6. *sāno māyālāi bāṭōmā bheṭ bhayo*

meet the young lover at the corner of the road.

7. *ākhaimā gājal oṭhomā lālī*

for the eyes eyeliner , for the lips red colour (lipstick)

8. *kasale po ni diyo ni thāni māyālāi*

who is then giving these items to the lovely one/ lover

9. *yo gājal ra lālī*

²⁹⁷ *leṭ* [Loan from English „late“]

this kājā and lipstick

10. *dilaiko rājāle diyo barīlai*

[my] heart's king / prince gave [me]

11. *kānaimā jhumkā nākaimā phuli*

in the ears are ear- rings, on the nose is an ornament [nose-ring]

12. *kasalāi diyo ni yāni thāni māyālāi*

to whom[for me] is this given by my lover?

13. *yo...*

14. *yo curā ra pote kasale po*

from whom are these bangles and this necklace?

15. *diyo thāni māyālāi*

is given from my love/lover

16. *dilaiko rājāle diyo barīlai*

[my] hearts king / prince gave [me]

17. *anmol sārī kasale po*

from whom is this special *sārī*?

18. *diyo yāni māyālāi*

is given from my love/lover

19. *dilaiko rājāle diyo barīlai*

[my] hearts king / prince gave [me]

20. *anmol sārī kasale po*

from whom is this special *sārī*?

21. *dilaiko rājāle diyo barīlai*

[my] hearts king / prince gave [me]

3.7.b The Alternative Image of the Women in “*Sāno māyālāi*” (young / small lover) (Analysis of song No: 07)

3.7.b.1 Meeting the young / small lover at the corner of the road.

The song is about meeting the young / small lover (*sāno māyālāi*) at the corner of the road. *Māyā* could also be the name of a girl. I would like to categorise this song in the *sukha-singār* category. I recorded this song almost at the end of the last day of Tīj, at Thekudoban, outside the temple complex, in front of a small *ciya* shop.²⁹⁸ The women, having undergone the bathing rituals and long wait in front of the temple complex, had finally the *darśan* of Theku. Further, having done a further *pūjā*, were now gathered outside, waiting for their busses to take them home. Taking their places in front of the *ciya* shop, some of the women took out their *dholaks* and started drumming.

3.7.b.2 The Source:

Song sung live at the exit of Thekudhoban Temple Complex

Recorded: Part VI: 8.28 a.m. 03.09.2008. and 05.09.2008.

3.7.b.3 Key Words

sāno māyālāi, dilaiko rājā, bheṭ bhayo, leṭ bhayo.

3.7.b.4 The Broadening of Our Perspective of Women

²⁹⁸ *cia* “tea, the tea plant, camellia thea”

The song speaks about the singer's young lover and then lists out what all the younger has presented her. The *sāno*²⁹⁹ lover gives the singer *gājal*³⁰⁰ for the eyes and *lālī*³⁰¹ for the lips. Later on, he presents her with *jhumkā*³⁰² and *phuli*,³⁰³ as well as bangles and a necklace (line no: 7-14). Her heart's prince also presents her with a very special (*anmol*) *sāri*, which the singer likes to flaunt in front of her friends (line no:17).

Upon listening to this song, one is struck by the fact that the women not only enjoy meeting the *sāno* lover, but seek consciously the admiration of her friends and listeners. She likes to show off the gifts she has received from him. From the encounter at the corner of the road, one can deduce that it deals with a lover and not the husband, an opinion which was endorsed by Rukmini Mainali.

“The ‘*sāno māyālāi*’ in this song refers to a lover, who doesn’t exist in reality.”³⁰⁴

Contrary to whatever our expectations are, this song was sung not only by unmarried women, but also by the married women, each teasing the other.

Here, the woman's image is shown to be not in congruence with the standard sanskritistic patriarchal ideology. Just like Raheja, I would like to propose that the Nepali women's poetic use of words is in disagreement with the split-image accorded to them; whether by the dominant patrilineal ideology, or by the overbearing western feminine ideology. These women are not living in a fractured setting; on the contrary, it is our perspective of the motifs and meanings of these portraits which need to be broadened.

Another small point of interest which caught my attention is the alternate version of the first line, ‘*ghumti tira leṭ bhayo*’ instead of the line, ‘*ghumti tira bheṭ bhayo*’, which seems to be a more modern version. We can note how the dynamics of a song production

²⁹⁹ *sāno* [alt of *sānu*] “small, little, young, unimportant”

³⁰⁰ *gājal* “lampblack soot, the black pigment placed round the eyes”

³⁰¹ *lālī* “lipstick, red colour”

³⁰² *jhumkā* “earrings”

³⁰³ *phuli* “nose ornament”

³⁰⁴ Rukmini Mainali Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

lead to the new more humorous version with the addition of the English word, ‘late’, instead of the Nepali word, ‘*bhe.ṭ*’. The lines undoubtedly play with irony.

3.8 “*Kāṭḍina gorulāi ghāsa barīlai*” (Song No:08)

3.8.a I Won’t Cut Grass for the Bullock, *Barīlai* (Text: Song No:08)

Singer: Saraswati Pariyar

1. *he ... āganī cheumā suntalāko rukh* (x2)

Oh! there is an orange tree at the edge of the courtyard

2. *jurelī carīko bāsa barīlai*

Jureli bird’s shelter *barīlai*

3. *tījko belāmā māita jāna napāe* (x2)

if I don’t have the opportunity to go to my *maiti* during the Tīj festival

4. *kāṭḍinā gorulāi ghās barīlai* (x4)

I wont cut grass for the bullock, *barīlai*(x4)

5. *sabaika celīlāi maiti lina āūchan* (x2)

everyone comes to take their daughters to the *maiti* (x2)

6. *ramāūdai māita jānchan barīlai* (x2)

rejoicing, they go to their *maiti* (x2)

7. *āmāle dieko tījko khājā*

the Tīj-food given by (my) mother

8. *sallai ra ballai khānchan barīlai* (x4)

they eat eagerly (x4)

9. *he... he... tījko dinamā deurālīko cautārī*
oh!... oh!... at the Tīj festival in Deurali's³⁰⁵ courtyard

10. *rātai ra pahe lai huncha barīlai* (x2)
we can see (women) wearing red and yellow (coloured clothes) all over (x2)

11. *arukā didi bahini nācdā ra gāūdā*
(while) other *didi- bahnis* are dancing and singing

12. *dukhiko man jhan runcha barīlai* (x4)
the sad one's heart cries more *barīlai* (x4)

13. *he gāī ra bhaisīlāī sirukī ra kharukī*³⁰⁶ (x2)
oh! For the cow and bullocks, there is grass (x2)

14. *he bheḍī ra bakharīlāī syāulī barīlai* (x2)
oh! for the sheep and goats, fodder is needed, *barīlai* (x2)

15. *māitako samjhanale mania bairāg bhāko cha*
with the memory of *maita*, my heart is feeling sad"³⁰⁷

16. *na rouna kulera nyali barīlai* (x4)
please do not cry loudly, oh! Mongoose, *barīlai* (x4)

music...

17. *he sabaika celīlai māiti lina ai sake* (x2)
oh! everyone's *maiti* have already come to take their daughters (x2)

³⁰⁵ Deurālī is a temple.

³⁰⁶ Varieties of grass.

³⁰⁷ *bairag* "sadness" Here, we have a song where the text is sad, but the context in which they are singing this songs is termed as happy, by the women. "I sing these sad songs, but I am happy on Tīj." Asha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

18. *āphnā ta ā chainan kina barīlai*

but why is my family not coming, *barīlai*³⁰⁸

19. *bābā ra āmā ta būdhā-buḍhī bhaisake*

father and mother are quite old

20. *kāncho bhāi āuncha kī lina barīlai* (x3)

maybe my youngest brother will come to fetch (me), *barīlai* (x3)

21. *he... he... asārmāi*³⁰⁹ *bhai sakyo mahāmārī barṣā nī* (x2)

oh! In the month of Asār it is raining heavily (x2)

22. (...) *sāunmā*³¹⁰ *mūla barīlai*

there is no source of water in the *Savan* (month)

23. *kholo ra pahiro urliera āūda* (x2)

with lots of water in the river and landslides” (x2)

24. *bagāyokī khahareko pula barīlai* x4

maybe the bridge is also washed (taken away) by the water

music...

25. *he tījmā chorīlai khāūlā bhanera* (x2)

oh! In the Tīj festival, the daughters are fed (special food) (x2)

³⁰⁸ “Traditionally, a representative from the family is sent to pick up the daughter from the *ghar* to the *maiti*, and it is not usual for the daughter- in-law to go on her own to her *maiti*, even if it is nearby.” Asha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008

³⁰⁹ Asār [var.: *āṣāḍha*], “The month of Asār in the Nepali calendar, approximately mid-June to mid-July. Asar is the month of rice plantation in Nepal.”

³¹⁰ Sāun *srāwam* [alt.: *śrāvaṇ*], “The month of Saun in the Nepali calendar, approximately mid- July to mid-August.”

26. *rākhī holin āmāle ghiu barīlai* (x2)

my mother may have collected / kept apart Ghee³¹¹ (to feed her daughter) (x2)

27. *bihānai āganīmā kauā āi karāūdā* (x2)

in the morning, when the crow crows in the courtyard (x2)

28. *tharara kāmyo ni jiū barīlai* (x4)

my body is shivering without control (x4)

music...

29. *he chānā māthi pharsī cha jhikarīma boḍī* (x2)

oh! In top of the roof, there is pumpkin and in the wooden support, there is a bean –
plant (x2)

30. *thākarīmā phalyo ni kākro barīlai* (x2)

the cucumber is grown in the wooden support (near the house) *barīlai*(x2)

31. *ahile ni tījmā māita jāna napāe*

if I am not able to go to my *maiti* this Tīj festival

32. *herdina bheḍā ra bākhrā barīlai* (x4)

I will not look after the sheep and goat (take out to graze), *barīlai* (x4)

3.8.b The *Pāhuni*³¹² in One's Own House in “*Kāḍdina gorulāi ghāsa barīlai*” (Analysis of Song No:08)

Singer: Saraswati Pariyar

³¹¹ *ghiu* < [Skt. *ghṛta*: refined butter], “Clarified butter, ghee, vegetable ghee.” Ghee is widely used in the South Asian cuisine. Ghee is also an important ingredient used in the preparation of certain South Asian sweets. The ghee here symbolic for the good food which the mother normally prepares.

³¹² *pāhuni* “guest”

3.8.b.1 A *Sukha-Dukha* Song

The song says that the singer won't cut grass for the bullock if she is not allowed to participate in the Tīj celebrations at her *maiti*. This song suggests a resistance. Played by women in front of the Theku temple complex, this song has a singular *sukha-dukha* aspect. I would call this song a very down-to-earth song, with a melancholic twist in the text. The irony of it is that, this song is nevertheless, a joyous song. It describes the singers, the courtyard and her work, her everyday life, and the tidings with which she is involved, i.e, exactly the scenes which, as stated before hopefully help us to depict the intrinsic motifs and images typical to the cultural worlds of South Asia.

3.8.b.2 The Source:

Song sung live in front of the Thekudhoban Temple complex

Recorded DVD.05.09.2008.

3.8.b.3 Key Words

*kāṭḍinā gorulāi ghās,*³¹³ *maiti, dukhiko man, kāncho bhāi, tharara kāmyo ni jū*³¹⁴, *herdina bheḍā ra bākhṛā,*³¹⁵ *barīlai*³¹⁶

3.8.b.4 The Junalai Bird Reminds the Singer Poignantly of Her Own *Maitīghar*

The daughters await with great longing to be picked up by their family members to go to *maiti* for the festival (line no:25). They look forward with great relish to eat the *bhāt*³¹⁷(rice) served by their *āmā*. Our singer, however, is waiting anxiously with the

³¹³ “I won't cut grass for the bullock.” (line no: 04)

³¹⁴ “My body is shivering without control.” (line no: 28)

³¹⁵ “I will not look after the sheep and the goat” (line no:32)

³¹⁶ “*barīlai* is a word used as a filler. It often occurs in the Tīj songs and has no particular meaning.” Alaka Chudal. Interview. 2009.

³¹⁷ *bhāt* “cooked rice”

question; “why her family members are not there to take her to her *maitīghar*”. This forms the background setting of the song.

The singer then recalls that her *bābā* and *āmā* ³¹⁸are perhaps too old, and hopes that her *bhāi* (younger brother) could fetch her. The song is coloured by a particular irony, where the singer is treated as a ‘*pāhuni*’ in her own home (*āphno ghar*). We see here how the singer expresses the pain she experiences about feeling like a ‘*parāyi*’ in her own household (line no: 17-26).

The women are dependent on their *maitīghar* members to pick them up for the festival of Tīj. Even if the parents are too old, or if the brothers or cousins are unable to pick them up, it is not common for the women to go to their *maitīghar* by themselves. This opportunity is further complicated if the *maitīghar* is far away, requiring days of travel across the mountains. However, my interviewees stated that even if their *maitīghar* was in the same *thāū* (place) as that of their *ghar*, it would be considered proper to wait until someone comes to fetch them home.³¹⁹

Let’s now observe the metaphors in the song. The *junalai* bird’s shelter in the courtyard reminds the singer poignantly of her own *maitīghar* (line no:02).

“The crying mongoose, which she hushes, represents symbolically the singer herself, who is pining for her family members. It is either this hope or the anxiety, which makes our singer shiver without control in the early morning hours. This crow reminds her of her family, who has not yet arrived to fetch her for Tīj, and fills her with longing and sadness.”³²⁰

3.9 “Ahile ko Tīj pani hāmro lāgi āeko cha” (Song No:09)

3.9.a This Time, the Tīj has Come For us (Text: Song No:09)

³¹⁸ *bābā ra āmā* “father and mother”

³¹⁹ Sarita and Rukmini Mainali. Interview. Tīj festival 2008

³²⁰ Sindhu Baral Interview 2009.

1. *bābule gālī³²¹ garni āmāle ākhā tarnī*

Even if my father scolds, and my mother stares at me,

2. *nācne ājai ho*

today is the day to dance

3. *bārulī kammar bhāncane ājai ho (x2)*

today is the day to twist (my/our) thin waist (x2)

4. *uphrī uphrī saṅgiṇi nācne ājai ho (x2)*

today is the day to dance, girl friends , by jumping (here and there) (x2)

5. *gāule kurā kāṭenī jasko cittā phāṭenī (x2)*

even if the village is back-biting and jealous

6. *ramailo saṅgiṇi nācī gāerā (x2)*

it will be nice girl friends, to dance and sing (x2)

7. *ahile ko Tīj pani hāmro lāgi āko ho (x2)*

today's Tīj has come for us (x2)

8. *ramauna yahā saṅgiṇi, nayā lugā lāer*

let's enjoy, girl friends, wearing new clothes³²²

9. *āuna āuna sanginī hāsne ājai ho (x2)*

come, come, friends, today is (the day) to laugh / smile (x2)

10. *āuna āuna sanginī nācne ājai ho (x2)*

come, come, girl friends, today is the day to dance (x2)

³²¹ *gālī* “scolding, abuse, rebuke, reprimand, admonition.”

³²² “It is customary to receive new clothes, especially *sarīs* as gifts from the *maiti* and from our *ghar* on the Tīj festival.” Asha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

11. *bārulī kammar nācne ājai ho* (x2)

today is the day to twist the thin waist (x2)

12. *uphrī uphrī saṅgiṇi nācne ājai ho* (x4)

today is the day to dance, girl friends , by jumping and twisting (here and there) (x4)

3.9.b Aspects of ‘Folk Feminism’ in “*Ahile ko Tīj pani hāmro lāgi āeko cha*” (Analysis of Song No:09)

3.9.b.1 A Song Encouraging the Women to Sing and Dance

The song ‘*ahile ko Tīj pani hāmro lāgi āeko cha*’ is a *sukha-dukha* song, which encourages the *saṅgiṇis* to sing and dance by twisting their thin waists (*bāḍulī kammar*). I came across this song in front of the Theku temple complex, where the women were waiting in the tedious, long que, in the burning sun for the *darśān* of Theku, and reciting it to the rhythmic clapping of hands.

3.9.b.2 The Source:

Song sung live by a women’s group in front of Pashupatinath Temple Complex.

Recorded DVD: Part II 11:52 a.m. 05.09.2008.

3.9.b.3 Key Words

saṅgiṇi,³²³ *hāmro lāgi*,³²⁴ *nācne*,³²⁵ *bābule gālī*³²⁶

3.9.b.4 The exchange of everyday problems helps the women to cope better with these themes.

³²³ *saṅgiṇi* “girl-friends”

³²⁴ *hāmro lāgi* “for us”

³²⁵ *nācne* “to dance”

³²⁶ *gālī* “scolding, abuse, rebuke, reprimand, admonition”

In the song, the women encourage each other to forget the scoldings of the *bāba* and the tears given by the *āmā* and to dance by jumping and twisting their bodies (line no: 1-4). They inspire each other to sing, in order to stop arguments and to clear up their thoughts. Tīj being the day to laugh and smile, they encourage one another to pick up their new clothing and to enjoy the day.

In spite of the sadness in her *man*, the singer encourages the others to come and gather together to sing and dance. In spite of the fact that the singer faces arguments and has troublesome thoughts in her everyday life, she hopes to rid of them, by singing and dancing at Tīj. We see here that through the very process of exchange of the everyday themes and problems, the women are better able to cope with them. I would like to argue here that the Tīj presents us with a particular aspect of folk feminism, a platform which offers the opportunity to voice the issues and challenges which they face in their everyday situation and get emotional, moral and social support for the same.

3.10 “Nepālmā gaṇatantra āeko cha” (Song No:01)

3.10.a The Republic has Come to Nepal (Text: Song No:10)

1. *Nepālmā gaṇatantra āeko cha*
the republic has come to Nepal

2. *he didi bahini ho bolne maukā*
Oh! *didi, bahini*, the opportunity to speak has come

3. *hāmro āko cha hāmro āko cha* (x2)
has come for us, has come for us (x2)

4. *Nepālmā gaṇatantra āeko cha*
the republic has come to Nepal

5. *kahile āulā bhāī lina bhanera*

when my brother comes to take me

6. *he didi bahini ho baseko chu dina gina*

Oh! *didi, bahini*, I am living counting the days

7. *Nepālmā gaṇatantra āeko cha*

the republic has come to Nepal

8. *nepālmā janmieko nāri ho*

I am a woman born in Nepal

9. *he didi bahini, ho bhana*

Oh! *didi, bahini*, lets say

10. *āja lokatantra āko cha*

“the people’s republic has come (arrived) today “

11. *saṃvidhānmā mahilā hak rākhnalāi*

in order to keep (include) women’s rights in the constitution

12. *Nepālmā gaṇatantra āeko cha*

the republic has come to Nepal

13. *hāmī sabai pahal garau hai*

let us all make efforts

14. *Nepālmā gaṇatantra āeko cha*

the republic has come to Nepal

3.10.b Stretching the Imagination Beyond the Social Sphere in “*Nepālmā gaṇatantra āeko cha*” (Analysis of Song No: 10)

3.10.b.1 A Politically Motivated Song

This song, named ‘*nepālmā gaṇātantra āeko cha*’, sung in front of the Pashupatinath Temple complex, was first sung live by one main singer; followed by a group of *didi-bahinis* accompanying her. There were also some other *didi-bahinis* who were drumming on the *ḍholak*. A fourth group of women were dancing in a circle. The rest of the women were standing encircling the circle, sometimes clapping and encouraging the dancers, and sometimes merely watching.

3.10.b.2 The Source:

Song sung live in front of the Pashupatinath Temple Complex

Recorded DVD. DVD.11:44 a.m. 03.09.2008.

3.10.b.3 Key Words

gaṇatantra,³²⁷ *maukā*,³²⁸ *lokatantra*, *saṃvidhānmā mahilā hak*³²⁹

3.10.b.4 The Social and Political Worlds Merge in Each Other

This song can be categorised as a *rājñīti*³³⁰ song. One could also ponder about the agency in this song. The song opens up with a harmless suggestion to dance and play. However, then the request to open up one’s own *man* and let the grief flow out, could of course be a topic, which could be interpreted as passing on better to a more serious atmosphere. To carry the point further, the line about the need to be aware of one’s rights, and not to ignore them, seems to take on a political dimension. The legal and

³²⁷ *gaṇatantra* ”republic“

³²⁸ *maukā* ”chance, accident, occassion“

³²⁹ *saṃvidhānmā mahilā hak* “the women’s rights in the constitution”

³³⁰ *rājñīti* “political, pertaining to the state”

constitutional rights of women, so much under discussion in the wake of the restructuring of the political scenario, seems to be the matter of discussion here. It was interesting to note how the NGO women's groups were accepted by the various *didi-bahini* groups, irrespective of whether they were educated, uneducated, hailing from a rich, poor, rural or urban set-up. The singers motivate all of the listeners to become aware of the political changes in Nepal and encourage them to make efforts to secure their own legal rights in the new political atmosphere.

This song, as we see, relies on less of the symbolism, in comparison to the earlier songs. Equally absent are the metaphorical images so widely present in the earlier songs. This here is a down to earth, straight forward song, with a clear message.

These songs reveal to us that the women do stretch their imagination beyond their domestic sphere to get themselves involved in the wider, social, and political worlds that transcend them. The conceptual boundaries which divide religion from the political and social realm, are here shown to be merging in each other.

3.11 An Overview of the Songs

The above ten songs give us a small taste of the private and public worlds of the women during the festival of Tīj in Kathmandu. They speak volumes about these women's everyday thoughts and issues. One important point which comes forth is the obvious ambivalence underlying the song themes. The *sukha-dukha* songs such as the Song No:04, the song No:08 and the Song No:09 are typical examples of this. The same song which starts with an exhortation to the *didi-bahini* group to sing and dance, comes up with lyrics listing out the unfair treatment meted out by the father-in-law, the mother-in-law or the sister-in-laws. The lyrics of the song might suggest a particular state of mind such as '*dukha*,' whereas the singer in reality could be in the '*sukha*' state of mind.

Moreover, as we see, the songs deal with various moods, ranging from the comic (*hāsyā*) in Song No:01 to *sringāra* in Song No:03, Song No:05 and Song No:07; then the mood of pure *sukha* character in the Song No:01, Song No:02 and Song No:06; and finally the note of resistance in the *rājñīti* song in the Song No:10. These differing themes

are a mirror of the actual topics of interest which occupy the imaginations of the singers. We listen to social issues of stagnation where the traditional costumes face a challenge from the modern issues, and see how these themes subsequently may play a role in influencing the changes in the modern South Asian society. To what particular extent do these songs really contribute to changes is yet another issue; to be discussed in some detail in the next chapter. At this point, it needs only to be noted here that songs with such themes are popular among the women of Nepal, during the Tīj festival.

We also come across a multiple list of reasons listed out by the participants as well as the singers behind the celebration of Tīj. This shows the complex layers involved in the celebration of this women's festival. Further, we see how the songs and dances associated with the Tīj festival, as well as the *bratas* and *pūjās* surrounding it are expressive sources for women's self-images. The creative use of *upamās* (metaphors), lends the Song No:06 its dream-like quality. A flower, an oil lamp all appear as important elements used in this metaphorical language. The *basanta* (spring), portrayed as a person, who likes the *maitīghar*, and the moon who likes to play hide and seek, all point us to the special use of metaphorical imagery in these Tīj songs.

In this analysis, we came across alternative images of women in the lyrics of these songs. And last, but not least, we see how the songs reveal the dynamics at work behind a given society. We come across loan words from English, which at times seem to lend a new character to the song, at times twist new meanings into the songs and at times lend a complete new flavour to the song.

4. Conclusion: The Missing Link of *Sukha* Songs

4.1 An Overview of the Issues in the Tīj Songs

The above study has helped us to trace the missing link to the women's image; the *sukha* songs, the very obvious factor which has been underplayed from the earliest articles on Tīj.³³⁷ The happy songs have been written off earlier with a dismissive gesture that they are 'just erotic love songs,' implying an underlying unimportance to them. But my analysis in the previous chapters presents us with data which indicates that these songs offer us many interesting perspectives. Some of the songs listed out under the genre *sukha* songs are indeed falling into the theme category of 'erotic, love themes'. In my study, I have attempted to demonstrate that these songs have their valid position in the social set-up of Tīj festival. They give us very valuable information about the women who celebrate them, and their lives. Why shall these songs not be given their proper place and be accepted in the list of Tīj songs?

In the *sukha* songs, we see how the Nepali women re-imagine their lives and their worlds through the medium of the festival songs. The *sukha* songs category, as we have seen, deals with various themes. Some present the singer's *maitīghar*, while other songs describe the singer's own bodily attributes. We see how the dancing songs, songs of *maitīghar*, festivity, rituals, and sharing function as tools of narration and communication. Indeed, one can say that they are frames of expression used by the women consciously or unconsciously; to share their own life experiences. As we have seen, these poetic, oral genres, have a very long historical tradition both in Nepal and in India. Here, I agree with Lakshmi Holmstrom³³⁸ that protest and tradition go hand in hand, rather than opposing each other. My interpretations of these songs in the previous chapters lead us to the conclusion that that the so called split-image of the South Asian woman is out of place. The standard split-image theory offers two poles. In such portrayals, the women are accorded the dual identities, one silent, passive, and traditional, and the other, lively, critical, and provocative.

³³⁷ These articles have been discussed in chapter 1.

³³⁸ Holmstrom 1991:xiii

The Songs and the associated issues.

Song No:	Title	Source & Location	Bhāva	Issues
1	<i>Āyo nayā lahar</i> : Song advising the Sister to learn the new customs of the new age (to be progressiv / modern).	. cassette played in front of P. T. C. ³³⁹	<i>sukha-hāsyā</i>	. changes in the S. Asian socety . the Englilsh loan words (code switching) . the conflict of the traditional and the modern
2	<i>Tījko rahar āyo barīlāi</i> : “ <i>Didi bahini</i> group shall fast and singand dance during Tīj”	. song sung by the ladies of the Poudyal N.	<i>sukha</i>	. ‘the self’ and ‘the other’ in women’s songs . ‘ <i>brata</i> ’ as a field of activity for women to achieve religious merits . concepts such as ‘ <i>ghar</i> ’ are open to ironic shifting in the language of Tīj
3	<i>Sohra singār garikan ho</i> ” : The song about the sixteen ornamentations	. cassette played in front of the T. T. C. ³⁴⁰	<i>sukha-singār</i>	. the ritual and the social significance of the sixteen ornamentations . the songs as sources of women’s self-images
4	<i>Bola bola bola didi bahini</i> : “ <i>didi-bahini</i> , speak about your heart’s grief when we meet for Tīj”.	. cassette played in front of the T. T. C.	<i>sukha-dukha</i>	. a <i>dukha</i> motif in a <i>sukha</i> song . women are the ritual authors, performers and consumers of the Tīj festival
5	<i>Herana lālumai ma kati rāmī chu</i> : Tīj song describing one’s own beauty.	. cassette played in front of P. T. C.	<i>sukha-singār</i>	. the transport of certain concepts of womanhood . the celebration of one’s own beauty and accomplishments
6	<i>Maīṭighar...maīṭighar</i> <i>maīṭighar</i> ... Song describing the maternal home of the singer.	. song sung by the ladies of the Poudyal family	<i>sukha</i>	. the usage of upamās (metaphors) in the women’s songs . <i>aphno</i> vs. <i>parāyi</i>
7	<i>Sāno māyālāi bāṭōmā bheṭ bhayo</i> (<i>let bhayo</i>): Song about meeting the <i>sāno māyālāi</i> (young / small lover)	. song sung live at the exit of the T.T.C.	<i>sukha-singār</i>	. the perspective of the women’s image needs to be questioned . the dynamics of song production
8	<i>Kāḍina gorulāi ghāsa barīlāi</i> : “I won’t cut grass for the bullock, <i>barīlāi</i> ”	. song sung live at the entrance of the T.T.C.	<i>sukha-dukha</i>	. the ‘ <i>pāhuni</i> ’ in one’s own maitighar
9	<i>Ahile ko Tīj pani hāmro lāgi āeko cha</i> : “This time, the Tīj has come for us”	. song sung live in front of the P. T. C.	<i>sukha-dukha</i>	. the exchange of everyday issues and problems during the Tīj . Tīj presents us with an aspect of ‘Folk-feminism’
10	<i>Nepālmā gaṇatantra āeko cha</i> : “The republic has come to Nepal”	. song sung live by a women’s group in front of the P. T. C.	<i>rājñī</i>	. the merging of the religious, the social, and the political worlds in the songs of women

³³⁹ P. T. C.: Pashupatinath Temple Complex

³⁴⁰ T. C. C.: Thekudhoban Temple Complex

We have seen that this picture has been observed with the lens of the standard patriarchal ideology. My point is that the South Asian women do not deserve this divided image that earlier research has stipulated upon them, whether by the dominant patrilineal ideology or the prevalent international feminist movement. It is not the women who are living in a fractured set-up; rather it is we who have to change our perspective and interpretations of their lives.

4.2 The Dynamics of Song Tradition

We see that the medium of this oral song tradition helps us to gain certain insights into the everyday life, issues and preoccupations of the object women in Nepal. As we have seen, the first song presents us with a clear picture of several of the changes which the Nepali society is currently undergoing. We can see how the women try to cope with issues such as educational expectations, financial independence, social dependency etc. In the second song, we come across the shifting concepts of '*ghar*' and '*aphno ghar*' and how the analysing of these subtleties helps us to appreciate the subtleties of women's expressive traditions. The third and fifth song, which dealt with the women's self-images give us a perspective into the issue of the representation of the feminine characters. In the fourth song, we have seen how the women are encouraged to communicate with each other about emotional themes which might be bothering them, to open their *man*, and to share their lives with each other. Here, the women are made aware of their own rights too. The following song, '*maitighar*,' helps us to get a vivid picture of some of the metaphoric '*upama*' image employed in the oral-tradition of women's songs in Nepal.

The seventh song shows us how the sanskritistic patriarchal concepts and ideologies undergo a shift in perspective, once one analyses the living oral song tradition. Here, the standard prevailing clichés of South Asian womanhood are shown to be incoherent. The eighth song describes the singer's everyday life; her longing for her *bābā* and *āmā*, her work place, and her house courtyard. It also lets the listener feel the poignancy of the singer's sadness, and her voice of protest, in case she is not allowed to celebrate the festival of Tīj. Issues of social dependency and mobility are very well discussed here. We see that the women here do voice their frustrations, their emotions and hopes through the medium of songs. In the ninth song, we see how the women

encourage each other to employ Tīj as a platform to voice out the issues with which they are challenged in everyday lives. Lastly, the tenth song, a highly politically loaded song, discusses the political situation in Nepal. We see all in all, that these song traditions have not remained unchanged over the course of time. Rather, we see how it is possible to gradually discern a women's world, which provides us with yet another clue to the object 'woman' in South Asia.

We see how Tīj is a dynamic medium for the women to exchange their issues and attitudes. It can be interpreted as a screen where the women exchange different issues, whether economical, social, political or familial, and try to get emotional, moral or political support for the same. These poetical creations show us that women are actively involved in the cultural production of the songs. Hailing from separate backgrounds, whether educated, uneducated, rich, poor, rural, or urban, these songs were available for all the women, irrespective of their backgrounds. The singers endorse all of the listeners to become aware of the political changes in Nepal and encourage them to secure their own legal rights. We noticed here how the Tīj songs are giving the women an opportunity to inform themselves about the political situation in Nepal, and about their own rights.

4.3 The South Asian Woman is Not a Voiceless Puppet.

To sum up, under no circumstance can we say that these women are voiceless. On the contrary, these songs present us with vivid pictures of the everyday life and activities of these women. Moreover these songs are abundant proof that these women can SING and dance, if not speak. We see that these women are not silent, but are actively creating their own tales, tales which reflect their important life-cycle events, reflect their everyday lives, which help us to get important perspectives about their workday activities, and which present us in vivid colours their emotional states. Tales, which help us to listen to their voices of protest, dissent and exhortations of social change. The myriad images of sadness, disappointment, expectations, anger, pride, laughter, tenderness, celebratory mood, and joyousness expressed in the songs are indeed some of the richest materials one could collect about women in South Asia.

These songs, as much criticised, are certainly not only an outlet to let out steam for the three days of Tīj, only to go back to the normal everyday configurations. On the contrary, the Tīj festival and the songs I have interpreted show us that there is a certain dynamics in the festival of Tīj.

The oral tradition presents the scientist with a dynamic, nevertheless tradition-rooted tool to comprehend the dynamics of the society. The interesting twist in the study of the oral traditions is that one could never say that the particular tradition has been researched to the last detail. The very dynamics of the oral tradition challenges this possibility. The very moment when the scientist, puts down the recorder, and pen at the conclusion of the documentation, a new song is being produced, a song which reflects, so to say, the scale of social and ideological changes. This, in turn, contributes a new element to the study of social attitudes of a community. Anthropologists have just taken the first bite into the cake of folk arts, be it songs sung, stories recited, or diagrams drawn on the walls. The rest of the cake is still waiting to be eaten, and let's hope that future studies in this direction will help us to understand and appreciate the existing traditions in South Asia in their holistic dimensions.

4.4 A Positive Representation of the Feminine.

In the *sṃgāra* song category, we see that one of the common themes occurring repeatedly has to do with the objects of ornamentations and the erotic aspects associated with it. I have pointed out here that we observe a positive representation of the 'feminine' and the so-called womanly characteristics, a sharp contrast to the accepted so-called 'masculine image' adopted by the western feminist movement. Further the songs offer the reader with potent messages in the social set-up; encouraging the participants not to block up their troubles inside themselves, but to avail oneself of the opportunity to open up, and share their worries with each other. My argument here is that Tīj offers a superb opportunity for the exchange of women's everyday life themes, a lively platform where the women are the voice, the agency and the listeners, all three at the same time.

A few of these songs are a celebration of the singer's own loveliness and attractiveness. We see that these songs present us with concrete concepts of

‘womanhood,’ in the Nepali culture. The reader is presented with the ideal woman, who is beautiful, self-assured of her beauty, but who has *lāj*³⁴¹, and who celebrates being beautiful. She is, at the same time, the possessor of particular qualities, such as sympathy for people in difficult times, friendliness to people in need, and spreading the seeds of joy and love among her society. The listener is able to get a vivid portrait of the woman in question.

The *sukha*-songs present us with the ambiguous fissure that the South Asian seems to be experiencing in the traditional family, where the bride becomes ‘*aphno*’ for the husband’s family after the wedding, but feels herself permanently an outsider ‘*parāi*’ in her husband’s home, as well as her *maiti*. The fact that the bride becomes an outsider both for her own family and for her husband’s family is not especially new, for the scientific research. What is new here is that the woman is indeed voicing her situation, that she is in no way a passive, non-reacting feminine, but on the contrary, is voicing her opinion in the situation.

4.5 The Interweaving of the Different Dimensions.

Bennett’s³⁴² research, one of the comprehensive studies about the dualistic worlds of the South Asian woman’s patrifocal–filiafocal opposition has definitely presented certain relevant truths. However, the statement that the women are purifying their own sexuality, and channelling it in the only direction acceptable to the Hindu patrilineal ideology,³⁴³ i.e., their own husbands, is, in my opinion observing only one side of the coin. The focus on the *pūjā* and *brata* aspects only gives us a limited perspective, a perspective which only confirms the standard accepted view of what the ideal South Asian woman shall be. We also saw that Holland and Skinner,³⁴⁴ who have done a very thorough research on several songs and their meanings, have shifted the centre of interest to that of the songs. They point the attention to the songs and their production, rather than

³⁴¹ *lāj* “shame, disgrace, shyness, modesty.” *lāj lāgnu* “to feel ashamed, to feel embarrassed, to feel humiliated, to be shy, diffident, hesitant, to be bashful, coy”

³⁴² Bennett. 1976:185-207

³⁴³ *ibid.*:185-207

³⁴⁴ Holland and Skinner 1998.

the rituals, to illustrate how the songs present us with data that show the women are offering resistance against the dominant patrilineal ideology.

However, in my opinion, all three factors need to be viewed in a holistic manner in order to get a complete picture of the Tīj festival. The three category of song, the *dukha* songs, *rājñīti* songs and *ghaṭana* songs, do help us to get a new perspective, that of the lived tradition, a scene of dynamics. The study of the Tīj festival and its songs and dance culture reveals for us some important factors. The foremost of them is the interweaving of the different dimensions involved in the festival. These three dimensions are the *pūjā* and the *brata*-ritual layer, the *kathā*³⁴⁵ layer and finally, the Tīj songs layer, each level blending in with the other, so that it becomes seemingly difficult to separate the impact of one on the other.

4.5.1 Pārvatī: the Image of a Strong-willed Woman as a Role Model for the South Asian Woman.

The Tīj *brata kathā* is one of dimensions which helps us to understand the Tīj festival in its whole, and gives structure to the whole corpus. It narrates a legend, a myth which lends the festival its traditional link, and also provides us with the *vidhi*, the text corpus, which stipulates how and when the ritual shall be undertaken. The legend of the Pārvatī's fast forms a sub-story of the popular *Svasthāni Brata Kathā*. We saw why this legend plays such a central role in the lives of women who celebrate the Tīj festival and sing its songs. We also came across the elements which are parallel to the Tīj festival in the living tradition and as narrated in the *Svasthāni Brata Kathā*. Also, the images transported through the medium of this *Kathā* become evident. We also observed how far do the women of Nepal nowadays identify with the images in the *Kathā*.

The first aspect which the reader is confronted with is that Pārvatī, and not Lord Śiva is the focus of the whole narration. Even Vaiṣṇava Nārāyaṇa has a small role, the role in which he advises Gaurī to perform the *Svasthāni Brata Kathā*. The whole sub-text revolves around Pārvatī. The girl-child Gaurī, who says that being a woman, she feels

³⁴⁵ This involves the legends associated with Tīj, discussed in the first chapter.

unsure where their family may send out to get married, echoes the words of the majority of South Asian woman to this date. So, Pārvatī's own strategy, as she states to her friends is to commence a *pūjā* to Mahādeva Śiva shows how she decides to take the reins of her future in her own hands and decides to do the necessary to be able to choose her own life partner. The question is, how realistic is this strategy in the everyday lives of the women of South Asia?

In a majority of the Nepali women, this insecurity about the future marriage and the family in which one will end up finds an echo. So what are the possibilities available to the South Asian woman to overcome this insecurity? The vow in the case of Pārvatī, takes on huge dimensions. The vow we see here is a tool, a tool which can be implemented where necessary. In this case, the power of the *brata* is such that anyone who practices it will be blessed with the powers.

The reasons why this legend enjoys such an immense popularity among the women of Nepal is now obvious. Pārvatī is shown as a very strong character, one who even from her childhood has a strong sense of purpose. Once she is determined that she wants Śiva and only Śiva as her husband, we see that nothing can stop her. Her mother who tries to encourage to eat a morsel of food, her father who asks various questions regarding her determination, all just seem to make the child Gaurī all the more determined to carry on with her fasting and vows. Even Śiva appearing disguised as a *yogi* ascetic in front of her, who paints the picture of a wild and untamed Śiva, begging for food, collecting the bones of dead people to make necklaces, and wearing snakes, is unable to shake Gaurī from her determination to dedicate her time to the worship of Śiva.

This strong, unwavering, single-minded image of the Goddess gives the Nepali women a clear role-model, a role-model which they can follow. The exponents of South Asian aspects of Feminism have argued that one of the main aspects of South Asian women's identity is the presence of strong women role- models. Even strong men such as the Maharṣi Kuśika Rṣi, the celibate Śiva, the wise Rṣi she visits, and even Lord Śrī Nārāyaṇa himself are impressed by Pārvatī's steadfastness. All these sub-stories give ample material for the women who read and listen to these texts, to cultivate the same

attitude as Pārvatī, to be as determined and steadfast in their resolutions, and to develop their own role models (song No:02).

4.5.2 The Existence of a Parallel Women's World.

The ritual and the *pūjā* form the basic core around which the whole of the Tīj festival complex has been constructed. I would like to point out that the whole of the Tīj cannot have any existence, isolated from the ritual. We take out the *pūjā* and the *brata* from the whole corpus and we have an empty shell, a festival conducted without a base. The South Asian women's religious practice does not stand in isolation from social, cultural, domestic or larger religious roles or frames of meaning. It tends, on the contrary to include the realms that transcend the individual ritual contexts.

We find it interesting to investigate the relationship between women's ritual practices and the everyday lives and activities of these women beyond the ritual sphere. Rituals that take place in the Sanskritic, Brahmanical Hindu environments are typically instituted by and dominated by the Brahmin males. But we see here a parallel stratum, a sphere that occurs in the private context. Beyond the male world, there exists a parallel world under the domain of women, where many household, calendrical, festive and devotional practices are implemented solely by the women. It is this sphere which is of particular interest to our study, and is here that the study of Tīj helps us to categorise and bring to focus these factors in full spectrum. Moreover, we can observe here that these two worlds are not divided from each other; rather they exist parallelly, the men's worlds and the women's worlds existing in multiple dimensions, their orbits sometimes crossing, and sometimes moving parallelly.

I would like to point out that the women's rituals are an important factor for the creating of identities, be it social identity, gender identity, identity within the family, or religious identity. Just as we cannot take out the ritual performance from the *pūjāri*, so we cannot isolate the South Asian woman from her *bratas* and other rituals. It is part and parcel of her own identity, and plays a rather key role in her everyday relations. We have observed that the South Asian woman identifies herself in her society, through her

various roles. Just as one cannot take away any of these everyday roles, one also cannot take away these rituals from the group of women in question.

Another point which deserves special mention is the aspect of ‘performance’ within a Tīj festival. One could ask the question of whether the women are aware of performing and presenting a song and dance or are they just dancing for oneself? Here, the agency also comes into question. Each of the women who performs this *pūjā* is aware, whether consciously or unconsciously, of their own role in the group and of their own part in the festival. The *pūjā*, where the Brahmin priests perform the ritual, no doubt has an important role, in the festival. But upon closer observation, the ritual is in reality in the hands of the women who perform the strict fast and the rituals coupled with it. When we calculate that the majority of the women’s *Bahun* and *Chettri* population in Nepal who participate in this ritual fast, and the celebrations associated with it, the dynamics of this festival starts to become more and more visible.

Next to the *pūjā*, the *brata* is one of the most popular religious activities of the women in South Asia. As we have seen, the practice of a *brata*, primarily undertaken in South Asia by women can be practiced easily at home, without the presence of a priest, and has mostly a social aspect, where the *Brata Kathā* is listened to and recited in a social gathering. The mother retells the *brata* legends to her daughter, and she to her daughter, and so the story moves on. However, when a married women enters her Patrifocal household, she is faced with new legends and myths and observances and adopts herself accordingly.

Although we come across urban Brahmin women, who had hired a Brahmin priest for the short period of the *pūjā*, we see that the rest of the ritual was conducted rather independently. The availability of cheap *brata* pamphlets and increasing literacy also seems to be contributing to the maintenance of *bratas* as women’s own domains. These rituals have been a primary method open to women for the recognised pursuit of religious duties and aims within both orthodox Hinduism as well as the *bhakti* tradition, and have merited detailed treatment in the *purāṇas*³⁴⁶ and in the *dharmanibandha*³⁴⁷ texts. By

³⁴⁶ *purāṇas* “mythological literature”

comparing the textual sources with my fieldwork and the recordings and interviews in Nepal, we can try to get a better understanding of the importance of these vows in the lives of the South Asian women in the contemporary times.

We noticed a discrepancy between the comments of the *pūjārī* and the wishes of the women regarding the Tīj festival. As we saw, the *pūjārī* of the Poudyal neighbourhood commented that the festival of Tīj and the fasting rituals will ensure that the women will achieve success, stay happy *suhāgans*,³⁴⁸ and achieve the heavens and *mokṣa*. The women on the other hand had a slightly different focus. They mentioned that they perform the *pūjā* and the fasting for the well being of their family and for a happy married life. As is clearly observable, the first statement from the Brahmin priest is in sharp contrast to the explanation given by Sarita, a woman in her mid thirties and the mother of two. The *vidhi* texts promise these *bratas* as an easy means to *mokṣa*. These texts also promise lesser more easily visible fruits, both *dr̥ṣṭa*³⁴⁹ and *adr̥ṣṭa*.³⁵⁰ These additional possibilities make the *bratas* as *kāmya*³⁵¹ by the compilers of these *nibandhakras*.³⁵² We see here the two poles of focus as to why the *brata* is performed. For the *pūjārī*, the *brata* is a step further to *mokṣa*, while for the Hindu women; the spiritual liberation fades into the background, with the family, health, children, spouse and well-being taking up the foreground.

This striking difference between the textual stipulations and the verbal answers given by the women I interviewed is interesting. We saw that two sources, from the same time period, from the same cultural background, both oral come up with two answers to the same question. The answer is exactly the point I have been trying to make. The orthodox Brahmin *pūjārī*'s answer, moulded to some extent from the *vidhi* text he has

³⁴⁷ *dharmanibandha* are texts of Hindu law and custom. These are encyclopaedic digests of Hindu law and custom, compiled between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries.

³⁴⁸ *suhāg* “the auspicious state of wifehood (as opposed to widowhood), married happiness”

³⁴⁹ *dr̥ṣṭa* “seen, that what is observable”

³⁵⁰ *adr̥ṣṭa* “unseen, that what is not accessible”

³⁵¹ *kāmya* Skt. “optional”

³⁵² *nibandhakāra* Skt. “*vidhi* texts”

been quoting, does help to supply a particular perspective into the practice of these rituals.

It is the living tradition which helps us take a serious account of the actual circumstance of the women. Liberation and the attainment of the heavens is of course included in the list of rewards promised upon the successful completion of the *brata*. But, it is the everyday familial wishes, the conjugal blessings, and the wishes for the personal mental well-being, which seem to be the chief focus among the women. As Leslie³⁵³ mentions, the observance of the practices of this world occupies the women, it is her focus, her territory her main interest, her *dharma*, and therefore her opportunity for liberation.

4.5.3 Tġ Gġt: The Oral Texts are Active Agents of Social Reflection.

The third dimension which adds a further perspective to the picture, are the Tġ Gġt. The singing, dancing and festivities are the lively elements, and the variables which lend the colour to the show. As Asha Poudyal³⁵⁴ put it, they would be meaningless, if there were no underlying ritual significance behind the whole scenery. Each layer, as we see, is interwoven meaningfully in each other. The songs, performed in different contexts, speak volumes about the singers and their lives. The folklore, we see is an active agent of social reflection, it is an active screen which reflects the changes taking place in the society. It in short reflects the dynamic force of a culture, an element under constant change, depending upon numerous factors, be it social, political, economic, educational, religious, or one from the medias.

We see here that these songs preserve the concepts, ideas and traditions over the centuries on the one hand, but have adapted themselves to the tiny elements of change, which the particular society has undergone. This in turn renders it a contemporary art form, a form which presents the society in its current status. Having been passed down through the ages, often from mother to daughter to grand daughter, these songs present us

³⁵³ Leslie 1989: 72-88

³⁵⁴ Asha Poudyal. Interview. Tġ festival 2008.

with an immense continuity of concepts and ideas, concepts which are invaluable in their historical representation of the society and its inhabitants.

Moreover, I would like to argue that the folk songs are dynamic, in contrast to the textual versions, which tend to be more static. The more humorous version '*ghumti tira late bhayo*,'³⁵⁵ instead of the older version '*ghumti tira bheṭ bhayo*' is a good example of the same. The oral songs here have undergone changes which reflect the linguistic trends in the society. In this particular instance, the songs reflect the increasing trend to add English loan words into the local idiom.

4.6 Āyo Nayā Lahar³⁵⁶ Some Aspects of 'Folk Feminism'

Now we should ask ourselves the question of whether these song traditions sung by the women in Nepal do flow into the lived society. Have these songs contributed in any way to shifts in the screen of everyday realities and contributed to changes in any way? Or does the power of these songs remain within the imagination of the singers, only in the singing? One could also ask the question; if these songs do indeed have such a long tradition, why haven't they contributed to any changes within the Nepali society?

It is a commonly expressed statement that these songs haven't helped in any way to help change the Nepali society. The accusation is that; in spite of the presence of these songs, the Nepali women's community hasn't undergone any changes. But, our songs prove that this is a mis-conception. One only needs to look at the song No:01 for a list of changes that the Nepali society has undergone in the last few decades. Did the Tīj song tradition contribute to the changes or did the changes lead to the developments in these songs? This question itself proves that these songs interweave with the living reality. They are, in short a mirror of the ongoing processes in the respective society (song No:01, song No:07, song No:10). We come to the conclusion that cultures are not frozen entities. Neither do they have a single homogenous voice.

³⁵⁵ *ghūmti tira bheṭ bhayo* Song No:07. Chapter 3.

³⁵⁶ *Āyo nayā lahar* "a new wave has come" Song No:01. Chapter 3.

The main concern of the present study has been to look into the relationship between the Tīj folk songs and the life of women in Nepal at both the individual and the community level. I have strived for a holistic approach, where all the parts be it the ritual, the textual or the social belong together in a totality. I hope that it provides some significant answers towards the understanding of South Asian women and her everyday life. We see that these Tīj songs present a multi-coloured fabric of the South Asian society. The reader has been presented with various aspects, be it scenes, natural landscape elements, vivid emotions, scenes from the every day life and so on. The main feature that stands out for us is the portrayal of the women who are creating and performing these songs. The women, do not merely give voice to these folk songs, they live and experience it, and is the main agency behind the production of these songs.

In these songs, we see that the women are reflecting about their financial independence and educational status. Topics such as social independence and their individual freedom of movement within the community are under discussion. The songs presents new ideas to the listener in an instructive manner. It introduces ideas such as how to deal with the new movements in the society, how not to get stuck by ones own traditional biases, and how to adapt to the modern changes which are occurring around them. We observe the women as active reflecting participant who do involve actively in a debate over her own life.

Moreover, we see that the one could interpret actually a dualistic (perhaps pluralistic) purpose behind why the festival of Tīj is celebrated. One the one hand, one celebrates it for the long life of one's husband, and on the other, the reason is to meet the *didi-bahini* group, to exchange each others life stories, and to sign and dance with them. We also see that the regular image of the feminine, who is subjected to the patrilinear ideology provides only one perspective. We see concepts such as '*ghar*' are open to ironic, shifting and ambiguous equivalents in the festive language of Tīj, presented through the verbal and vital world of oral song tradition.

One could say that the folk arts, in particular are one of the best mirror of the changes in a society, and offer us the perfect bridge to the textual formal traditions. The South Asian culture, as is known, is a multi-dimensioned, many-layered set-up, which

demands the parallel application of different stratas, be it literary texts, archaeological finds, architecture, the study of classical art forms, historical data or the folk arts. These songs are in flux, dependant on the social, economic, political, emotional situation of the composer, singer and the listeners. They adapt themselves to the local situations, to modern influences, to new concepts, to new dialects and languages, and to new attitudes prevailing in the society. In short they are not never-changing; static elements which weather the change of time and attitude. They are rather variable points in the panorama of cultural production. Thus, the study of the festival helps us to see how the oral tradition of Tīj is instrumental in the creation and re-creation of identities and social worlds.

4.7 The Open Questions in the Genre of Women's Song Tradition.

The women's oral tradition is also undergoing a changing panorama. One of the most obvious catalysts seems to be the technological advances appearing in Nepal. Video recordings and cassettes have begun their assaults on the Tīj song and dance culture scenario.

“Previously, we knew mostly the songs which our mother, aunts and neighbours sang during the Tīj celebrations. But this scene has changed a lot in the past ten years or so. Nowadays, Tīj songs are available on cassettes and television.” ³⁵⁷

The melodies, and sometimes even the lyrics of certain songs are borrowed from film music. ‘*Maitīghar*’ (Song No:06) is one such example.

“Songs reproduced to the tunes of film music are easy to compose and to sing.” ³⁵⁸

The You-tube is flooded with several sequences of Tīj festival celebrations. On one side, one comes across the postings inserted by the video, DVD and cassette companies, with obvious commercial advertisement motives. On the other hand, I was amazed to find the vast number of individual You-tube postings for different Tīj songs compositions. Some of these are posted by the non-resident Nepalese living across the

³⁵⁷ Alaka Chudal. Interview. 2010.

³⁵⁸ Santha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

whole world, who can afford the expensive video gadgets and are familiar with the modern technological innovations.

Most of the You-tube versions have one factor in common. The women who are singing and dancing; i.e., the agency is aware of the fact that their songs are available and visible for the whole of the public, be it male or female. Only the click of a mouse separates the private parallel world of women from that of men. Songs previously reserved to the private and insular worlds of women are now available not only to the men of the same community, but also to the women and men of the global scenario. This awareness in turn, must be influencing the conception, production, execution, reproduction, and representation of these cultural productions.

Commercial influences seem to be one of the biggest dangers to the genres of women's songs. Overt commercialisation may further lead to the marginalisation of women's voices and expressive traditions.

“These days, the trend seems to be to produce the *ṣṛṅgāra* variety of songs, where the singers and dancers can equate themselves to the beautiful charismatic heroines from the Hindi and Nepali films.”³⁵⁹

A further threat seems to be the blatant exploitation of women's songs for the voyeuristic appetite of the male audience. Is this a new mood, propelled by the catalyst of Bollywood and Nepali film songs invading the local cultural scene, or did it always exist parallelly? This, in turn points to the opening of new spheres of interaction, the extent and reach of which, time alone can tell.

What do these typed cassettes and videos do to the women's singing voices in the future? Would these blaring tape recorders discourage the women to create their own versions, or hinder them to sing themselves? In some instances, especially in the urban Kathmandu scenario, I had the impression that the loud cassettes tend to drown the women's own individual voice. On the contrary, some of these media might encourage

³⁵⁹ Asha Poudyal. Interview. Tīj festival 2008.

certain kinds of creative production. But, some others may contribute to the dilution of women's distinctive perspectives.

The future leaves us with certain open and interesting questions about the women's voiced and sung expressive traditions, as well as women's expressive cultural genres. What we have witnessed, is the latent potency and interwoven complexity of these traditions in the cultural worlds of the women in Nepal. This study points in the direction that women's genres will continue to voice the women's own contemporary worlds in a creative and reflective manner. The latent voices will be created, re-created, digested, adopted and assimilated, in their complex and myriad forms offered by the organic, pulsating, and dynamic tradition of oral folk culture.

Photos: Tīj festival 2008.¹



The *Didi-Bahini* Group near the Poudyal Neighbourhood



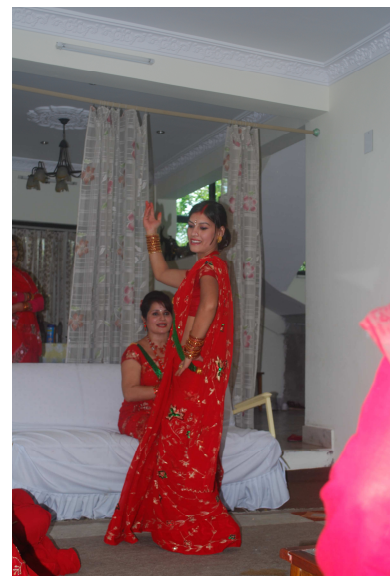
The *pūjā thāli*



The Poudyal family at the *pūjā*



The *pūjāri* blowing the conch during the *pūjā*



Singing and dancing in the Poudyal Neighbourhood

¹ All Photos: Pratibha Chelaparampath.



The evening *pūjā* in the family shrine²



Breaking the *brata*



Didi- Bahini groups singing and dancing at the Pashupatinath Temple Complex



Waiting for *darśan* at Thekudhoban



A singing group near the Thekudhoban Complex

² All Photos: Pratibha Chelaparampath

References

- Ahearn Laura M. 1998. "A Twisted Rope Binds My Waist": Locating Constraints on Meaning in a Tij Songfest. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol. 8. Issue 1. pp. 60-86. June 1998.
- Apte Vaman. Shivaram. 1970. The Students Sanskrit- English Dictionary. Motilal Banarsidas. Delhi.
- Auer, Peter (ed.). 1998. Code-Switching in Conversation. Language, Interaction and Identity. London. Routledge. March 1998.
- Bennet, Lynn. 1976. The Wives of the Rishis- An Analysis of the Tij- Rishi Pancami Women's Festival.
- 1983. Dangerous wives and Sacred Sisters: Social and Symbolic Roles of High- Caste Women in Nepal. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bhatnagar, Manju. 1988. The Monsoon Festival of Teej in Rajasthan. *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 47. 1988. pp:63-72.
- Burke, Kenneth. 1973. The Philosophy of Literary Form. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chakravarti, Uma. 1991. Review of the Perfect Wife, by I. Julia Leslie. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 25(1): 184-85.
- Chatterjee, Partha. 1989. Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India. *American Ethnologist* 16:622-33.
- Das, Veena. 1988. Femininity and the Orientation of the Body. In *Socialisation, Education, and Women: Explorations in Gender Identity*, ed. K. Chanana, 193-207. New Delhi: Orient Longman.
- Doniger, Wendy, trans. (See also O' Flaherty, Wendy Doniger). 1991. *The Laws of Manu*. London and New York: Penguin.
- Flueckiger, Joyce Burkhalter. 1996. Gender and genre in the folklore tradition of Middle India. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.
- Holland, Dorothy C., Skinner Debra G. 1994. "The Songs of the Tij: A genre of Critical Commentary for Women in Nepal. *Asian Folklore Studies*. 53n2 (October 1994).
- 1995. Contested Ritual, Contested Femininities: (Re)Forming Self and Society in a Nepali Women's Festival, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (May, 1995), pp. 279-305.
- Holland, Dorothy C., Skinner Debra G. and Alfred Pach III. 1998. Selves in Time and Place. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC.
- Holmstrom, Lakshmi, ed. 1991. The Inner Courtyard: Stories by Indian Women. London. Virago Press.
- Iltis, Linda Louise. 1985. The Swasthani Vrata: Newar Women and Ritual in Nepal. University of Wisconsin, Madison.
- Leslie, I. Julia. 1989. The Perfect Wife: *The Orthodox Hindu Woman According to the Stridharmapaddhati of Trayambakayajvan*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- Levi - Strauss, Claude. 1969. *The elementary Structures of Kinship*. Boston: Beacon Press
- Levy, Robert I. *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City in Nepal*. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1990 1990.
- Manual, Peter. 2001. *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India*. Oxford University Press.
- Mc Gee, 1987. *Feasting and Fastin: The Vrata Tradition and Its Significance for Hindi Women*. Th.D. diss., Harvard University Divinity School.
- McGregor, R.S. (ed.) 1993. *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press. Oxford.
- Mills, Margaret Ann [Ed.] : *South Asian folklore : an Encyclopaedia ; Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka / Margaret A. Mills ... eds. .* – New York, NY [u.a.] : Routledge, 2003.
- Mohanty, Chandra. 1984. *Under western Eyes: Feminist scholarship and Colonial Discourses*. *Boundary 2* 12(3):333-58.
- Pintchman, Tracy. ed. 2007. *Women's Lives, Women's Rituals n the Hindu Tradition*. Oxford Universtiy Presss, Inc.
- Radner, Joan Newlan. ed. 1993. *Feminist Messages: Cpdomg m Women's Folk Culture*. Urbana. University of Illinois Press.
- Raheja, Gloria Goodwin, Gold, Ann Grodzins. *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*. University of California Press, 1994
- Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- _____ 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven. Yale University Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1985a. *Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice*. *Wedge* 7/8:120-30.
- Turner, R. L. 1961. *A comparative and etymological dictionary of the Nepali Language*. London, Routledge.
- Wadley, Susan S. 1979a. *The Anthropology of Sāng- A North Indian Folk Opera*. *Studies in Indian Folk Traditions*, ed. Ved. P. Vatuk.15-37. New Delhi: Manohar.
- _____1979b. *The Lustful Stepmother in the Folklore of Northwestern India*. *Studies in Indian Folk Traditions*. Ed. Ved. P. Vatuk, 190-221. New Delhi: Manohar.

Songs of happiness and change.
Aspects of the Oral Tradition of Tīj: The Major Women's Festival in
Nepal.
Pratibha Chelaparampath, University of Vienna

This work studies and analyses the Tīj festival (as observed in Kathmandu 2008) and some of the songs I documented in the course of the three day women's festival. The major methodology of the study has been participant observation and the documentation of oral performances. I describe and analyse the festival of Tīj and its songs principally through three different lenses, that of myself, the Poudyal family whom I accompanied during the festival, and thirdly the numerous interviews I conducted in the course of the festival.

I was able to record a series of songs, some sung from memory, some replayed from cassettes and some performed out of paper pamphlets by performing groups. Recorded cassettes to TV broadcastings, to You-tube postings; the spectrum of the mode of performances is relative broad. What information do they give us about the women of South Asia? Are these just ritually performed songs, or are they in any real sense expressing problems and contributing to a change of perspectives in the community?

The *sukha* songs, the happy songs of Tīj have been ignored till now. But my study presents new and interesting data. We come across songs calling for social change, where the everyday problems faced by the women are presented in vivid colours. I have tried to demonstrate that these songs have their valid position in the social set-up of the Tīj festival.

Is the South Asian woman a languishing puppet of her traditions, or is she an independently thinking and speaking participant? The South Asian woman is often accused of being passive, lacking agency, and not being able to reflect on her own situation in the patriarchal set-up and the issues attached to the same. We often come across the question whether the South Asian woman has at all a possibility, a platform to voice her thoughts, to raise her questions, and to present her problems.

My attempt has been to appraise the magnitude and dimension of a women's festival, in particular their folk songs, in order to understand the distinct attributes and potentials of folk feminism in South Asia. My interest has been to analyse the festival, and the songs for a better perception of certain aspects in the South Asian context, such as gender issues, kinship relationships, social attitudes, work and other activities, aesthetic concepts, educational notions etc. The study thus tries to throw light on the question how the women of South Asia represent themselves and in which ways a women's festival and its oral texts are instrumental in the creation of a public sphere.

Key words: South Asian women - Tīj festival - Nepal - Folk feminism - Folk songs - Oral traditions

**Lieder des Glücks und der Veränderung.
Aspekte der Oralen Tradition des Tīj, dem wichtigsten Frauenfest
Nepals.**

Pratibha Chelaparampath, Universität Wien.

Diese Arbeit untersucht und analysiert das Festival Tīj, (wie es 2008 in Kathmandu zelebriert wurde), sowie einige Lieder, welche ich während diesem dreitägigen Frauenfest vor Ort dokumentiert habe. Die wichtigste Forschungsmethode der Untersuchung ist die, 'Teilnehmende Beobachtung' und die Dokumentation mündlicher Performances. Ich beschreibe und analysiere das Festival Tīj hauptsächlich durch drei verschiedene Lupen; erstens durch meine eigene Beobachtung; zweitens aus der Sicht der Poudyal Familie, welche ich während des Festivals begleitet habe; und drittens durch die zahlreichen Interviews, die ich während des Festes durchgeführt habe.

Ich konnte mehrere Tīj Lieder dokumentieren: einige aus dem Gedächtnis der Teilnehmerinnen, einige, die von Kassetten abgespielt wurden, und einige, die von verteilten Flugblättern durch verschiedene Gruppen gesungen wurden. Kassetten, Fernsehsendungen, You-tube Postings; das Spektrum der Darbietungen ist relativ breit. Welche Information bekommen wir hier über die Frauen Südasiens? Haben diese Lieder nur rituelle Bedeutung oder weisen sie auf existierende Themen in der Gesellschaft hin? Leisten diese Lieder einen Beitrag zu Perspektiven, Veränderungen in der Gesellschaft?

Die ‚*sukha* Lieder,‘ die ‚Glücklichen Lieder‘ von Tīj wurden bisher in der Forschung eher ignoriert. Diese Untersuchung präsentiert neue und interessante Perspektiven. Ich bin auf Lieder gestoßen, die nach sozialen Veränderungen rufen, Lieder, welche die Alltagsprobleme der Frauen in lebhaften Bildern schildern. Ich habe versucht zu zeigen, dass die Lieder ihre berechnete Position im sozialen Aufbau des Tīj Festivals haben.

Ist die südasiatische Frau eine passive Marionette ihrer Tradition oder ist sie eine selbständig denkende und sprechende Teilnehmerin? Die südasiatische Frau wird oft angeklagt, passiv zu sein und wenig Initiative zu zeigen. Es wurde ihr vorgeworfen, dass Sie ihre eigene Situation nicht reflektiert. Wir sind oft konfrontiert mit der Frage, ob die südasiatische Frau überhaupt eine Möglichkeit hat, ihre Gedanken, ihre Fragen und Probleme darzustellen.

Ich habe versucht, das Ausmaß und die Dimension des Frauen Volkfestival Tīj darzustellen, insbesondere dessen Volkslieder um dadurch die vernehmlichen Merkmale und Potentiale des ‚Volksfeminismus‘ in Süd Asien nachvollzuziehen. Mein Interesse war es, das Tīj Festival und die Lieder zu analysieren um einzelne Aspekte und Potentiale dieses Frauenfestivals zu verstehen, wie Gender Themen, soziale Haltungen, ästhetische Konzepte usw. Diese Arbeit versucht ein Licht auf die Frage zu werfen, wie die Frauen Südasiens sich selbst repräsentieren; und in welcher Art und Weise dieses Frauenfest und dessen Liedtexte ein Instrument sind, um eine öffentliche Sphäre für Frauen zu schaffen.

Stichwörter: Süd Asiatische Frauen - Tīj Festival - Nepal – ‚Volksfeminismus‘ – Volkslieder - Orale Tradition

BIODATA / LEBENSLAUF

Ausbildungsweg

Seit 03/2006	Diplomstudium Indologie, Univ. Wien
1991-97	Bachelor in Architektur, Kerala, Indien.
1991	Matura, Kerala, Indien.

Studienaufenthalte

7/2008-9/2008	Studienreise, Kathmandu und New Delhi.
7/2007-9/2007	Private Sanskritstudien, Kerala, Indien.

Studienrelevante Tätigkeiten

Seit 09/2010	Hindi-Unterricht, Sprachenzentrum. Univ. Wien.
09/2010- 02/2011	Hindi-Unterricht, Institut für Südasien-, Tibet-, und Buddhismuskunde, Univ. Wien.
09/2008-02/2010	Tutorium zur ‚Einführung in Südasienkunde,‘ Institut für Südasien-, Tibet-, und Buddhismuskunde, Univ. Wien.
Seit 03/2007	Hindi Unterrichtstätigkeit, Privat.
Seit 03/ 2008	Werkverträge, Institut für Südasien-, Tibet-, und Buddhismuskunde, Univ. Wien.

Sprachen

Muttersprache	Hindi
Weitere Sprachen	English, Malayalam, Deutsch, Sanskrit, Nepali.