

## Conceptualizing Bhojpuri for a National Hindi Elite: Reading the Folklorist Krishna Deva Upadhyaya

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**Abstract:** *The present moment in the life of Bhojpuri language is significantly marked by political contestations on its 'status' within India. Its attempts to be enlisted in the eighth schedule of the constitution are being passionately debated. Such debates operate within the limits of the nation-state. The relationship of the language with the nation is continuously evaluated to understand, dismiss or justify the aspirations of its speech-community. In such a scenario, this paper tries to take a deeper look at the underlying assumptions which inform the conceptualization of Bhojpuri language and people. It would make certain inviting and brief comments on the sociology of Bhojpuri scholarship which is being produced majorly in Hindi language. In doing so, the presentation would be critically aware of the power- relations which operate between Hindi and Bhojpuri. Oral cultural productions remain the single largest repertoire on Bhojpuri people, language and region. Therefore, this presentation would take a detailed look at the works of 'eminent' folklorist Krishna Deva Upadhyaya who conceptualized the language, its caste-gender relations and region primarily through oral cultural productions for over five decades, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such an exercise would unravel the methodological fault-lines and power relations in constructing 'Bhojpuri'. I argue that 'methodological nationalism' decisively marks the conceptualization of Bhojpuri language and people. The presentation would investigate the reasons for methodological nationalism in some detail, especially in relation to Upadhyaya's work. The historical trajectory of Bhojpuri as the demographic muscle of the 'Hindi' speaking majority hinders its claims to autonomy. This history partially explains the methodological nationalism in Bhojpuri scholarship.*

Key words: Bhojpuri language, Hindi, Folk songs, Methodological Nationalism, Women

### Introduction

This paper has grown out of my PhD thesis which tried to sociologically analyze Bhojpuri women's oral cultural productions (Folksongs) in the context of male out migration

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from Bhojpuri region (Singh, 2015, 2017a, 2018).<sup>1</sup> Such an exercise demanded that I refer and study the works of folklorists, socio-linguists and others who collected Bhojpuri folksongs. As I analyzed their work I developed a sociological interest in the process of documenting folksongs and the use of folksongs as an epistemic resource in conceptualizing Bhojpuri language, people and region.

Bhojpuri is spoken in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Nepal. This language has also travelled to various other parts of India with migration, especially Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi and Punjab. 19th century indentured labour migration from Colonial India to Caribbean countries and other plantation colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, Mauritius etc has permanently established Bhojpuri in these destinations, often with official status. However, the Indian State considers Bhojpuri (like 47 other languages) a dialect of Hindi which is primarily oral and rural. It is estimated that Bhojpuri speakers across the globe number more than twenty crores, though the exact numbers are not known. In India, as per 2001 Census Report, more than three crore people marked Bhojpuri as their ‘mother-tongue,’ a number comparable to that of Malayalee speakers in India. The first decade of the 21st century also witnessed a resurgence of Bhojpuri film and cassette industry operating primarily from Mumbai.

The significance of folksongs and orality in building an identity and consciousness for Bhojpuri region has been underlined by several scholars especially in the absence of a widely –used, written script. Manager Pandey a socio-linguist from Bhojpuri region argues that folksongs are central to the reconstruction of the history and culture of Bhojpuri people (Pandey & Upadhyay, 2000). Folksongs are used as the ‘raw material’ to give details about the society, its social composition, festivals, stereotypes, underlying gender and caste relations, agrarian practices etc.

Thus, quite naturally, anthologies of folksongs, play an important role in constructing the conceptual history of Bhojpuri language. This makes them extremely relevant in the present political moment when a Bhojpuri Civil society located in non-metropolitan urban centers (especially Banaras, Patna and Allahabad) and metropolitan (Delhi) is trying to mobilize a movement to get Bhojpuri enlisted in 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of Indian constitution.<sup>2</sup> The ‘pedagogy’ of inclusion of Bhojpuri in the 8<sup>th</sup> schedule cannot be fully grasped without understanding the ways in which Bhojpuri language and society were conceptualized in time and place.

Anthologists provide descriptions and interpretation of Bhojpuri language, people and region as they document folksongs. Such interpretations and descriptions have played the role of ‘conceptualization,’ which has a life beyond the anthology (in political claims as well). Hertzler in his pioneering essay on sociology of language describes conceptualization as a process through which fragmented and scattered experiences of language within the ‘language community’ are

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<sup>1</sup> Bhojpuri region is a socio-linguistic entity which spreads across Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Nepal. It is also spoken in Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad and other Caribbean countries where Bhojpuri speaking indentured laborers were taken in large numbers during 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>2</sup> For example: See <https://www.facebook.com/santosh.ibparishad/videos/1752654731421547/>  
[https://www.facebook.com/bhojpurijanjaganabhiyan/?hc\\_ref=ARQ3A9sm15Plbq8A30e5juOXKRqOfPxxPgRvWMRi\\_yIb\\_w\\_m0-B\\_qdkUtRZLn3zV8dA](https://www.facebook.com/bhojpurijanjaganabhiyan/?hc_ref=ARQ3A9sm15Plbq8A30e5juOXKRqOfPxxPgRvWMRi_yIb_w_m0-B_qdkUtRZLn3zV8dA)

integrated through a set of rules or plan (Hertzler, 1953). Such a process tries to generalize and standardize language and its diverse experiences. This process is not devoid of the speakers (in this case the anthropologist's) language ideology. In other words, the anthropologist through folksongs conceptualizes Bhojpuri language, people and region within the ambit of his ideological convictions. Woolard and Schieffeln (1994) explain,

Ideologies of language are significant for social as well as linguistic analysis, as they are not only about language... rather such ideologies envision and enact links of language to group and personal identity, to aesthetics, to morality and to epistemology. (p. 55-56)

This ideology shapes one's approach to the socio-historical contexts which produce the language and its culture.

Drawing lessons from the political economy of language, one can argue that ideologies of language are derived from social contexts shaped by power-relations. Every linguistic interaction, even the most intimate variety, reflects, constitutes and reproduces social structures of power (gender, caste, class etc.). For example, Bourdieu (1991) argues,

Everyday linguistic exchanges are situated encounters between agents endowed with socially structured resources and competencies, in such a way that every linguistic interaction, however personal and insignificant it may seem, bears the traces of the social structure that it both expresses and helps to reproduce. (p. 2)

Linguistic interactions are situated in histories. In the words of bell hooks (1992), 'language is a place of struggle' marked by the politics of uneven distribution of communicative resources.

The project of codifying and standardizing experiences of language is a modern project. And the 'power' to produce, codify the official identity of a language, its people and region, quite likely lies with those who have maximum access to cultural and material resources. The position of the analyst in relation to the object of analysis (in this case Bhojpuri) is one of the least investigated questions. Drawing from Bourdieu, such a probe would expose the intellectual division of labour in conceptualizing Bhojpuri language and society. It would also prove symptomatic in explaining the social-historical conditions which produced Bhojpuri public sphere. The project of conceptualizing Bhojpuri within a nationalist paradigm was disproportionately shouldered by upper-caste men from the region with well-defined stake in the emerging 'national discourse' of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Codifying Bhojpuri consciousness, its history and struggle was historically executed through conversations between upper-caste (Brahmin-Savarna) men. How have their social and political locations affected Bhojpuri's conceptualizations? What has been its impact on understanding caste and gender relations in the region?

One can surely take many routes to answer this question. A thorough reading of 'authoritative' writings on Bhojpuri sensitive to their contexts is necessary. I am in the initial stages of such an exhaustive exercise (Singh, 2017b and 2017c). For this presentation I would focus on the work of Krishna Deva Upadhyaya, an eminent Bhojpuri folklorist, and the first scholar to attempt thematic

classification of Bhojpuri folksongs<sup>3</sup>, to try and discern answers to these questions. It is noteworthy that Upadhyaya had an academic life which spanned over five decades (1940s-1990s).

### **Bhojpuri through Hindi**

Such a focus, should begin with placing Krishna Deva Upadhyaya within the literary tradition on Bhojpuri, *written primarily in Hindi*. The use of Hindi and its Devangari script to theorize Bhojpuri is not simply a technical or pragmatic choice. It is a result of how Hindi was (and continues to be) perceived as the most suitable language of knowledge production with the emergence of nationalism in this region, under the leadership of an educated Savarna class. Bhojpuri along with Maithali, Magahi, Braj, Avadhi etc. were imagined as sister concerns of Hindi during the Hindi renaissance which corresponded with the rise of nationalism in India.

Thus, Hindi was not simply a detached medium to understand an unscripted 'Bhojpuri' but its literary instruments provided the standard to evaluate/analyse Bhojpuri language, people and region. For example, Bhojpuri folksongs are often compared to Hindi poetry to conclude that the former are broken, incomplete expressions of a non-literate, simple, rural society, which needs to be conserved in its 'purest form.' The taken-for-granted primacy of Hindi as a 'national' standard is a common feature in Hindi elite scholarship. It is symptomatic of what Andreas Wimmer and Nina Schiller (2002) would call methodological nationalism. Hindi is seen as the most natural language to theorize Bhojpuri, without problematizing its relation with Bhojpuri. In fact, Hindi was seen as a language best suited to make a case for Bhojpuri without any suspicion of national disloyalty.

As we go through the biographical details of 'mainstream' Bhojpuri socio-linguists, folklorists and historians one realizes that most of them were Hindi scholars placed within universities and colleges teaching Hindi and Sanskrit. Banaras Hindu University, along with Allahabad and Calcutta University emerge as centers of their deliberations and brain-storming. Krishna Deva Upadhyaya was a doctorate in Hindi literature with deep knowledge of Sanskrit.<sup>4</sup> His brother, Padmabhushan Acharya Baladev Upadhyaya was a renowned Sanskrit and Hindi scholar (See Tripathi 1983). His father, Pandit Ram Suchit Upadhyaya was a Bhagwat Puran scholar. They were all beneficiaries of modern higher education, which initially insisted the knowledge of Sanskrit as essential for 'Hindu' students to enter and prosper in newly founded universities. Krishna Deva Upadhyaya was born in Ballia District of Eastern Uttar Pradesh, a product of Banaras Hindu University. He established *Bharatiya Lok Sanskriti Shodh Sansthan*, Varanasi and organized Bharatiya Lok Sanskriti Conventions in the early decades of post-colonial India. He has been part of several folk culture societies and conferences across the globe.

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<sup>3</sup> Pt. Ram Naresh Tripathi collected over 1000 songs under the title *Gram Geet*. However, it was not an exclusive Bhojpuri enterprise.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.rajkamalprakashan.com/lok/jmproducts/filter/index/?author=1530> (retrieved on 10 Feb. 18)

Thus, Bhojpuri was studied always in allegiance to or in reference to the 'national' (and their national was authored in Hindi!). Take a look at how Krishna Deva Upadhyaya (1991) describes Bhojpuri people in his introductory chapters:

भोजपुरी जनता शत-प्रतिशत राष्ट्रीय है. वह समस्त भारत को अपना देश समझती है. इसीलिए यहाँ के निवासी प्रांतीयता, क्षेत्रीयता या स्थानीयता के क्षुद्र बंधनों से बंधना नहीं चाहते. इसी राष्ट्रीय भावना के कारण लगभग छह-सात करोड़ संख्या में विद्यमान होने पर भी भोजपुरियों ने कभी प्रांतीयता के प्रश्न को नहीं उठाया. भोजपुरी लोगों का मूल मंत्र है, यह भारत देश हमारा है, मेरा देश महान, हम भारत की हैं संतान. इस प्रकार जब समस्त देश ही अपना है तब प्रांतीयता अथवा जातीयता की भावना ही कहाँ पैदा हो सकती है. (p. 25)

Bhojpuri people are cent percent national. They consider all of Bharat as their country. Thus, they are not ready to be tied down by the 'Kshudra' bonds of regionalism or nativism. This national emotion has stopped Bhojpurians, six to seven crores in population, from ever raising any question of regionalism. The central mantra of bhojpurians is - Bharat is our country, my country is great, and we are the children of this country. In this way, if the whole of Bharat is ours than there can be no question of regionalism or casteism. (my translation)

The national scale is a methodological suicide for the region. Krishna Deva Upadhyaya through his description is providing a template for nationalism. This template can be used on any population, not just the Bhojpurians. For the argument does not answer the question - What is the Bhojpurians relationship with the nation? Rather it answers - What ought to be the Bhojpurians' relationship with the nation?

Thus, Upadhyaya makes it clear that 'studying' Bhojpuri through its folksongs is not done with any intention of 'denationalization.' On the other hand, he calls his academic work a contribution to 'national integration' like many other scholars of the region. To meet his goal, he characterizes Bhojpuri region an important site of *national* cultural production. This imagination is furthered by placing Bhojpuri region within Hindu cosmology and events in the epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana (Upadhaya, 1991, p.24). The aim here is to establish the significance of Bhojpuri language, literature and region within the taken-for-granted national scale in historical and mythical time.

Upadhayaya places Bhojpuri within an ideal 'national' space (within its politics and history). Efforts to conceptualize Bhojpuri are pursued as a 'national' project. It would be interesting to juxtapose a sociological reading of Upadhayaya's 'local' or 'regional' stories of song collections which he calls 'geet anveshan yatra' with the larger 'national' goal of 'integration' and 'conservation of folk culture in Bhojpuri region' (See Upadhyaya 1999, p.4). These local concerns are symptomatic of the discontents one would have with the 'national Hindi space.' Also, it captures the local, scattered, unpleasant journeys through the lives and expressions of women and lower-castes in the region to arrive at the 'national' conceptualization of Bhojpuri.

For example, Krishna Deva Upadhyaya tells his reader that he was initiated into the process of documenting folksongs and thereby the language/people and region with the help of his sister and mother. He admits the difficulties he faced in capturing Bhojpuri pronunciations in Hindi script. To correct his diction, he would often insist his mother to sing them again and again to confirm and finalize the exact pronunciation of words (1999: page 3-4).

Upadhyaya, in his book, describes and conceptualizes himself, his ‘respondents’ (women and lower-castes) and their songs in the context of caste and gender. As an example, I would like to quote a few sentences from Upadhyaya’s (1999) field accounts:

जेठ कीदुपहरी में किसी चमार या दुसाध (एक अस्पृश्य जाति) के घर में जाना जब घर के एक भाग में शूकरावतार विराजमान हों, कितना कष्टकर है - इसे भुक्त भोगी ही समझ सकते हैं. घर में ना तो बैठने का स्थान और न ही खड़े होने की जगह. गन्दगी का तो कहना ही क्या. दुर्गन्ध की मात्रा भी कुछ कम नहीं थी. ऐसी भीषण परिस्थिति में एक अस्पृश्य जाति के घर जाकर उससे प्रार्थना कर गीत लिखना, सचमुच गीतों के पीछे पागल व्यक्ति का ही काम हो सकता है. (p. 5)

[To go to a *chamar*’s or *dusadh*’s (an untouchable caste) house on a hot summer day, where you will find a pig in a corner, is so painful that only someone who has experienced this will understand. There was no space to sit or even stand. What can one say about the filthy environment; it was stinking too. Only a mad person (like me) can go to an untouchable’s house and request for songs.] (my translation)

The material condition of the above-mentioned households should also be understood as the material conditions of the Bhojpuri speech community. Recently, Siddharth Malhotra, a bollywood actor, compared speaking Bhojpuri to open defecation and ‘latrine feelings.’ Popular material associations with Bhojpuri tell us a lot about the status of the language and its people within the national space. In the above passage, Upadhyaya is describing a lower-caste settlement which he visited to collect songs. The description mirrors the apathy of an ‘outsider’ in such a settlement where pigs breed and homes stink. This outsider belongs to a different caste and a different location. He is also a researcher who is mad (passionate) about collecting songs. The narrative of passion proceeds quite unapologetically throughout the anthology.

This passion (which has a national goal) is used to justify occasions when he had to threaten a lower-caste woman, with the help of his friend to collect sohani songs (sung during the process of weeding). Similarly, during his field-visit in Gorakhpur he coerced an Ahir singer to sing for him with the help of a ‘learned’/distinguished’ Pandit in the village (Upadhaya, 1999) The learned Pandit explained the significance of documentation of folksongs to the Ahir singer by stating that Upadhyaya was a *Vidvan-Brahmin* who had visited the ‘low’ caste villager’s humble abode (ibid., p. 7). Very clearly, pre-existing social capacities, communicative resources and material privileges were utilized often unethically to collect and conceptualize Bhojpuri for a Hindi-reading national elite.



It is important to note at this juncture, as a part of my doctoral work I collected songs from the same area. In fact, Sarathua village mentioned in Upadhyaya work is just a few kilometers away from my village – Dihari in Bhojpur Bihar. Unlike, Upadhyaya it was almost impossible for me to convince the men in my Ahir village to sing for me. My people were extremely skeptical of my intellectual abilities. In fact, they pointed out that ‘you are neither a man nor a Pundit,’ two broad classes worthy of knowledge production. Being an Ahir woman, I could neither explain my people the importance of research like a man nor could I communicate the fear of religion as a pundit.

Further in his work, Upadhyaya being a conservationist laments over the fact the educated Ahirs and Dhobis have forgotten their songs or are ashamed of their songs. He feels the same way about western-educated urban or rural women who are unwilling to sing for him. He writes,

अहीरों और धोबियों के लड़के जो शिक्षित हो गए हैं वे अपने बपौती के गानों को याद करना और गाना अपने सम्मान के विरुद्ध समझते हैं. वे इन्हें असभ्य गीत मानते हैं, और यदि जानते भी हो तो लज्जा के मारे नहीं गाते. (Upadhyaya, 1999, p.8)

[Literate Ahir and Dhobi boys feel embarrassed and humiliated to sing the songs they have inherited. They think of these songs as ‘asabhya’ (uncouth) and even if they know the songs they do not sing them out of embarrassment.] (my translation)

The conservationist thrust of Upadhyaya’s work emerges from an oft-repeated desire for an ‘unchanging’ folk-society which supplies the raw-material for constructing a timeless nation. The need for women and lower-castes to continue their cultural productions unaffected by modernity is part of this desire. Thus, we do not find any mention in his work about lower-caste mobilizations, across religion, which were questioning social and economic relations in late 19<sup>th</sup> and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> In the list of Upadhyaya’s many omissions, the absence of Bhojpuriya Muslims is both intriguing and notorious. Having accepted Bhojpuri as a fodder dialect of Hindu-Hindi would logically lead to this omission.

### **Reproducing *Sati-Kulta* Binary**

Regional Scholars including Upadhyaya have used oral cultural productions to codify Bhojpuri women’s language and expression as ‘broken voices’ with deep emotive qualities of pain and suffering.

The suffering of the society during historical processes like mass intercontinental migration was primarily captured through women’s words and expressions, irrespective of the singer’s gender. This continuing phenomenon is largely a product of gendered linguistic expressions where pain, suffering and grief are identified with women’s language. It is an example of gendered division of emotional labour. The sorrow of women’s expressions can be juxtaposed with the fearless, adventurous’ images of men in Bhojpuri society.

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<sup>5</sup> See Prasanna Kumar Chaudhary and Srikant’s books *Bihar mein Samajik Parivartan ke Kuchh Aayam* (2001) and *Swarg Par Dhawa: Bihar mein Dalit Andolan 1912-2000* (2015), Vani Prakashan

Drawing from folksongs, Krishna Deva Upadhyaya codifies Bhojpuri women's linguistic expressions, sense of morality and body in his work *Bhojpuri Lok-Sanskriti* (1991):

पतिव्रता स्त्रियों--विशेषकर भोजपुरी स्त्रियों का प्रधान गुण उनका पातिव्रत धर्म है। वे मन, वचन और कर्म से पति-परायणा होती हैं। पति कितना भी कुकर्मी, कदाचारी, दुष्ट तथा पतित क्यों ना हो परन्तु वे अपने मुंह से उसके कुकृत्यों का किसी से उल्लेख तक नहीं करतीं। पति जीविका के लिए परदेस चला जाता है, वहाँ किसी स्त्री के माया-जाल में फँस जाता है। वह अपने बच्चों तथा स्त्री के लिए पालन-पोषण के लिए रूपया भेजने की बात तो दूर रही, प्रत्युत उनकी खोज-खबर लेने के लिए चिट्ठी भी नहीं भेजता। फिर भी जब वह दस पंद्रह वर्षों के बाद घर लौटता है तब उसकी उपेक्षिता स्त्री उसका हृदय से स्वागत करती है। वह अपने कष्टों की अनुभूति को भुलाकर, अपनी उपेक्षा करने के लिए पति को उलाहना तक नहीं देती। घर में गरीबी के कष्टों को वह सहर्ष सहती रहती है। फिर भी वह पति सेवा को ही अपना परम धर्म समझती है। इस प्रकार भोजपुरी नारी सहिष्णुता, सतीत्व तथा सदाचार का पूर्ण प्रतीक है। (Chapter 2: 'Bhojpuri samaj mein striyon ki dasha', p. 21,)

[Chaste wives- Bhojpuri women's main quality is their virtue. They are virtuous from heart, speech and deeds. Even if, the husband is sinful and wicked, they do not expose them in front of others. Husband migrates for livelihood and gets lured by some other women. He doesn't send money for the upkeep of his wife and children nor does he send them a letter. After all this when he returns home, the betrayed wife welcomes him whole-heartedly. She ignores her pangs and does not taunt him. She happily bears the poverty and despite this she thinks that her main duty is to serve her husband. Thus, Bhojpuri women are a symbol of tolerance, virtue and morality.] (my translation)

Bhojpuri folksongs soul-scripted in the context of migration have produced two oft-repeated creative subjects – the left-behind wife and the migrant husband. These subjects are idealized with the help of indexical expressions, metaphors to characterize the gender binary in Bhojpuri society. Krishna Deva Upadhyaya (in his 1991 book) conceptualizes the 'left-behind' wife as the ideal type for all women (married or unmarried) in Bhojpuri region. He quite unconvincingly asserts that in spite of absent husbands Bhojpuri women remain faithful, chaste with no signs of discontent. The codified images of Upadhyaya is evidenced in the mass production of unchanging 'sati' Bhojpuri women through famous Maithili-Bhojpuri folk singer Sharda Sinha's renditions. Sharda Sinha is revered by the Bhojpuri and Hindi creamy layer as she represents traditional Savarna femininity. This representation aided by her own 'high-birth' is perceived as a stark contrast to largely Bahujan women performing 'vulgar' Bhojpuri songs. Recently Kalpana Patowary, an Assamese-born OBC Bhojpuri singer has come under severe attack by upper-caste Bhojpuri men for her rendition of Bhikhari Thakur. The latter have been accusing Kalpana for 'using' Bhikhari Thakur to whitewash her early days of singing 'vulgar' Bhojpuri songs.<sup>6</sup> In her response to these attacks she questions the meanings of vulgarity and convincingly argues that an entertainment worker like her has no

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thelallantop.com/bherant/delhi-universitys-assistant-professor-munna-pandey-writes-about-bhojpuri-singer-kalpana-patowarys-role-in-degrading-bhojpuri-music/>



real stake in producing Bhojpuri lyrics.<sup>7</sup> What might have really disturbed upper-caste Bhojpuri men about Kalpana is a question one needs to ask. Her unconventional visualization of Bhojpuri songs, her socio-economic location and her ability to view Bhojpuri through Assamese and not Hindi, a crucial difference, might have shaken these men.

Another kind of woman Krishna Deva Upadhyaya has spoken extensively about is widows. He has presented a picture that widows are even more virtuous and to maintain their chastity they never remarry. To quote:

भोजपुरी प्रदेश में नारी के सतीत्व का आदर्श बहुत ऊँचा है। पर पुरुष से विवाह की कल्पना तो दूर की बात है, किसी अन्य पुरुष से किसी प्रकार के संपर्क की भावना भी ये स्वप्न में भी नहीं कर सकतीं। अंग्रेजी में एक कहावत है 'सीजर की स्त्री संदेह से परे है।' इसी प्रकार हम बिना किसी संकोच के कह सकते हैं की भोजपुरी नारी के चरित्र के विषय में किसी भी प्रकार की भी आशंका करना नितांत निर्मूल है। [...] आज लाखों की संख्या में, इस प्रदेश में अक्षत योनि<sup>8</sup> बाल विधवाएं विद्यमान हैं जिन्होंने जीवन भर अपने पति का कभी मुख भी नहीं देखा। गवना होने के पहिले ही विधवापण के शाप से अभिशिप्त हो गयीं, परन्तु फिर भी अपने मृत पति की स्मृति में, अपने अलौकिक सौंदर्य तथा कांचन काया को जला-जला कर भस्म कर रही हैं। ये अपने बाल वैधव्य के दुःखद दिनों को तिल तिल कर काट रही हैं परन्तु ये पुनः 'सप्तपदी' की कल्पना भी नहीं करतीं। यह बाल विधवाओं का दुर्भाग्य ही समझना चाहिए की विधाता ने उनके भाग्य में चिर वैधव्य के साथ ही दीर्घ आयुष्य<sup>9</sup> भी लिख दिया है।

[The ideal of virtue is quite high in Bhojpuri. Thinking of marrying another man is beyond comprehension, they can't even imagine having any extra marital relationship. There is a saying in English, 'Caesar's wife is above suspicion.' Just like that we can say without any hesitation that doubting Bhojpuri women's character has no basis. [...] Even today, there are thousands of 'virgin' child widows in Bhojpuri state, who have not even seen their husband's faces. The curse of widowhood fell upon them before they went to their husband's house through *gawana* ceremony. Despite this, these women are burning their sacred beauty and gold like body in memories of their dead husband. They are somehow spending the widowhood but cannot even imagine a second marriage. This is such an unfortunate situation that along with the widowhood these women have got a long life.] (Upadhyaya 1991: 25 from chapter 2: *Bhojpuri samaj mein striyon ki dasha*)

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dailyo.in/arts/bhojpuri-music-kalpana-patowary-bhikhari-thakur-legacy/story/1/21560.html>

<sup>8</sup> **अक्षत योनि** literally translates as a women whose vagina has not been penetrated; The nearest English equivalent is 'virgin'.

<sup>9</sup> He has exemplified this with Bhojpuri folklore: राँड के दिन कभी ना ओराला which translates as: days of a widow are never over.

The ‘Sati-Savitri’ image codified by Upadhyaya was in no way an isolated conceptualization. Several scholars have pointed out that the ideal-types of ‘upper-caste’ women were central to the production of a national ‘hindu’ culture (Sinha: 2000a, 2000b; Chaterjee:1998, Chaudhuri:1999). Quoting from Yuval Davis and Anthias, Chaudhuri points out that women were imagined as reproducers of communities, boundaries, ideologies, cultures and its symbols. Upadhyaya follows the same path to codify Bhojpuri women. This path dependency is visible in every other speech community, where gendered savarna ideal-types become the primary objects of emulation.

Apart from these ideal types of Bhojpuri women Krishna Deva Upadhyaya mentions ‘deviant’ cases like कुलटा (*kulta*), the characterless woman. He writes, ‘परन्तु समाज में कुछ स्त्रियां ऐसी होती हैं जिनका आचरण उचित नहीं कहा जा सकता [there are some women in society whose conduct cannot be termed as proper]’ (1991: 29). Another ‘deviant’ case is लुबुकी [*lubuki*], the brainless talkative women. He writes, ‘भोजपुरी प्रदेश में कुछ स्त्रियां ऐसी पायी जाती हैं जिन्हें आसानी से ‘लुबुकी’ की संज्ञा दी जा सकती है [In Bhojpuri region, there are ‘some’ women who can be easily termed as ‘*lubuki*’]’ (1991: 38). In the appendix to the book he adds few other categories such as फूहरि [*phuhari*], a woman who is dirty, who does not take bath often, who smells, who does not comb her hair properly, who does not know how to cook, etc. (1991: 373). He emphasizes that though such women are not many in ‘Bhojpuri society,’ they do exist. Upadhyaya’s classification of women is informed by social beliefs of the caste system. The ideal of *sati* is epitomized in Savarna femininity; on the other hand, the ideals of *kulta*, *lubki* and *phuhari* are constructed based on upper-caste assumptions about lower-caste women.

My own research on Bhojpuri folksongs, expressions and metaphors tell me that Bhojpuri women do not easily feature within the dominant binary of *sati* – *kulta*. Nor can they be characterized as ‘broken voices’ which epitomize pain. Women have produced linguistic resources which communicate anger, jealousy, revenge, progress, non-normative sexuality etc., through their orality. However, pointing out this multiplicity works against the ‘national’ image of women and more specifically Hindu Savarna women.

### Concluding Thoughts

Bhojpuri is not only described but also defined in relationship to Hindi. It is described as a dialect, real sister, and ingredient of Hindi. The attempts by Bhojpuri to claim autonomy is looked at with suspicion by Hindi literary circles.<sup>10</sup> This suspicion continues to characterise any struggle for linguistic autonomy even today. Having said that, it should be noted that through Bhojpuri language and its oral cultural productions, its society and culture are understood within methodological nationalism. This is not the case of Bhojpuri alone. Most of the languages in India were in a way or other forced to claim allegiance to the idea of India and actively produce valuable

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<sup>10</sup> <http://thewirehindi.com/13725/arguments-against-the-inclusion-of-dialects-in-the-eighth-schedule-of-the-constitution/> & <http://thewirehindi.com/14280/debate-on-inclusion-of-dialects-in-the-eighth-schedule-of-the-indian-constitution/>

national creations. However, one needs to distinguish languages with an established script with those which do not have (or were not allowed to have) any script of their own. Further, the proximity to Hindi complicates Bhojpuri's independent existence as geographically and demographically Hindi claims the same language community.

The political and cultural significance of a language depends on its territorial claims. Bhojpuri's autonomy is seen as a threat to Hindi's territorial claims and alternatively the 'idea of a largely Hindi-speaking India.' Methodological nationalism through Hindi has meant dishing out ideal versions of caste and gender without any evidence of conflict or diversity. The 'national' is consumed as nostalgia by the pre-dominantly male, upper-caste analyst by freezing 'lower-castes' and women in the relic of national imagination. Thus, K.D. Upadhyaya turns a blind eye to lower-caste and dalit mobilizations which articulated modernity from the margins. Such conceptualizations of Bhojpuri continue to inform the contemporary political claims.

The subsumed identity of Bhojpuri under the shadow of a nation which pre-supposes subordinated, unchanging relic-like, rural roles to lower-castes and women (majority) has consequences to the social and demographic variables of the region. The constructed inability of Bhojpuri to be a language of knowledge production and business in modern institution has had deep-seated impact on the capabilities of its people. This subordination is resurfacing with a lot of vigor in the debates surrounding Bhojpuri's official status. A rigorous enquiry into the linkages between society, development and language is very important.

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