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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WORSHIP IN THE MAURITIAN BHOJPURI FOLK SONGS

Jayganesh Dawosing

*Lecturer, Department of Bhojpuri, Folklore & Oral Traditions, Mahatma Gandhi Institute,
Moka, Mauritius*

jayganesh1201@yahoo.com

Abstract

Research Objectives: My paper aims at studying the psychology of worship in the Mauritian Bhojpuri folk songs. Songs from the Mauritian ‘Geet-Gawai’ (Bhojpuri songs sung before the wedding ceremony in Mauritius) will be analysed. Themes like pantheism, fear and awe in religion, nature worship or nature mysticism will be discussed. How do these singers perceive worship? Which theories are reflected in these songs? For how long will this tradition of worship exist?

Methodology: Besides discourse analysis, interviews with the singers have shed light on these questions.

Research Findings: Mauritian Bhojpuri folk songs depict the belief that reality is same as divinity. Everything is part of a merciful and eternal God. Theory of Pantheism of Baruch Spinoza prevails in the analysis where a similarity is also seen in the Vedas-philosophy of Advaita (Non-Dualism). This ceremony depicts that there are no barriers of caste and class as it contributes in the making of a strong multiracial community identity. It is no longer only for women as men are also actively participating in it.

Keywords

Geet-Gawai, Psychology, Worship, Pantheism, Bhojpuri, Folk-Songs, Traditions

1. Introduction

The Mauritian Bhojpuri folk songs are vibrant and spicy. For several decades, a tradition coming from the ancestors of India has been kept alive in this small island. They came here as indentured labourers and developed the island into a beautiful land of Culture. Among the various cultures, the Bhojpuri Geet Gawai is a popular one. Geet Gawai is a musical ensemble that vehicles and encapsulates the intangible cultural heritage brought to Mauritius by Indian indentured immigrants 182 years ago from the Bhojpuri belt of India and form part of the mosaic of Mauritian Intangible Cultural Heritage(ICH). With the recent nomination of the Mauritian Geet Gawai in this category (ICH) by the UNESCO, the analysis of these folk songs has become of paramount importance. The element of worship in Hindu traditions is primordial. Fundamentally, every human being has got his own reason to pray. The psychology of worship in these Mauritian Bhojpuri folk songs is interesting to study.

1.1 A brief of Geet Gawai

Geet-Gawai is a pre-wedding ceremony performed one or two days before the wedding ceremony and comes as a precursor to other rituals and practices involved in a wedding in the Hindi family. In early days Geet Gawai was performed for an entire week. It is a combination of rituals, prayers, songs, music and dance which is also a vivid way to express in the Bhojpuri language and oral traditions. It is spontaneous and melodious and is rooted in the lives of the performers and tradition bearers. There is usually one lead singer followed by the group of ten to twelve other women singers.

The tradition bearers who have preserved this rich oral musical performance are known as Geetharines. They have learnt the Geet Gawai in their tender age from their mothers, mother-in-laws, grandmothers – nanis, dadis and aunts such as phouphous and mowsis. It is an intrinsic part of their lives as they breathe and live it. The Geet Gawai depicts a harmonious blending of the different aspects of the cycle of life and rites of passage. The Geetharines have safeguarded the transmission of Geet Gawai from generation to generation till the present time.

There are several steps in Geet Gawai performance which starts where women of the family and neighbourhood dressed in traditional dresses come together in the groom's or bride's house to be seated in a semi-circular fashion.

The first ritual is the 'lagan-kholna' where five married women, with their veil (dupatta) on their head sits on their feet in circle or semi-circle. They sort out turmeric pieces, unhusked rice grass and money contained in a piece of cloth while women sing songs called

as 'Lagan-Geet'. The (Lagan Geet) is followed by 'Sumiran' and 'Sandhya' in honour of gods and goddesses.

The above is followed by sanctification of the performance place and house called the 'dharti bandhai' that is performed also through songs. It symbolizes purification of the place. The ritual is followed by the 'dholak-puja' as a sign of paying respect to the musical instruments and is a ritual between the mother of the groom or bride and leading drum player. After the above rituals the songs are accompanied by musical instruments such as the dholak (two headed drum) and household items such as the 'thali' (brass plate), spoons (chamach) struck against the rim of a 'lota' (brass container) and two wooden pieces to produce rhythmic beats. The performance continues with several wedding (shaadi) songs such as 'Suhaag-geet' songs, Mahadev songs and finally leading to the climax of the evening, the 'Jhumar'.

Geet Gawai moves beyond family to all Mauritians in the form of 'Gamat' and stage performances. This extension of the element in public domains is vibrant and enjoyed by everybody. Even non-Bhojpuri speakers also perform Geet Gawai.

Several types of songs form part of the Geet-Gawai. Some of them:

- Lagan – Geet – When the women present at the pre-wedding ceremony declare that this auspicious date has been selected and ask for the community/ those gathered to bless the bride and the groom.
- Sumiran also known as Debi-Debta ke Geet (songs of divinities) – Sumiran is a collective devotional singing and natural human expression of love and joy for God or the Divinity. (S.Boodhoo, 1993)
- Sandhya – Songs to invoke the Goddess of Dusk to come and give her blessings.
- Dharti-bandhal – Songs invoking deities and they are requested to stay and purify (sanctify) the place.
- Dholak-puja – The dholak puja is symbolical and it pays respect to the instrument which will be resonating on this auspicious occasion till the end to create a joyful atmosphere.
- Suhag-Geet – Suhag is sung for gods and goddesses, acknowledging their presence and calling them by their names and to give their blessings to the bride/bridegroom.
- Jhoomar/Jhumar – Bhojpuri Jhoomar or Jhumar is a strong form of music, song with dance. (S.Boodhoo, 1993)

What is the psychology of worship in the Mauritian Bhojpuri songs? Why are there certain rites and rituals to be completed before the main performance of dancing? How are

these expressed through songs and gestures? The main focus of my paper will be centred on these questions where the psychology of worship will be analysed and discussed.

2. Context and Methodology

Samplings

For the study, three songs have been chosen from the Mauritian Geet Gawai which are prevalent during the performance. These are folk songs of worship which I will be presenting as per the following table:

Table 1: *Bhojpuri songs with sources*

<u>Song Title</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Type of song</u>
1. Din bhar Sandhya mai	Sanskar Manjari(S.Ramdin)	Bhojpuri invocation song Sandya geet
2. Taar bandha dharti	Mrs Lilo Mathur	Bhojpuri invocation song Sumiran Geet
3. Hiyanwa ke dharti maiya	Sanskaar Manjari(S.Ramdin)	Bhojpuri invocation and jhumar song

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):

CDA comprises of three dimensions (Fairclough 1990). Discourse as text is the first dimension. Discourse as discursive like something created, circulated and absorbed by the society is the second dimension. The third dimension in CDA is discourse-as-social practice, i.e the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse is seen to operate. (Fairclough 1992a:93)

The third dimension in CDA is discourse-as-social practice. (Fairclough 1992a:93)

All the three dimensions will be used for the analysis, particularly the second one, that is discourse-as-discursive practice Bhojpuri songs are full of meanings and the objects of discourse analysis can be: discourse, writing, talking conversation, communicative event. Hence, the psychology of worship in the Bhojpuri folk songs have interesting components to be analyzed.

2.2 Questionnaires/Interviews

For a deeper understanding of the psychology of worship in the Bhojpuri folk songs, a questionnaire was prepared and three Bhojpuri folk singers commonly known as ‘Githarinn’ were interviewed. The questions were mostly on their personal experiences as lady singers in

the Geet Gawai ceremonies and about the rites and rituals attached to it before there start dancing. Their answers will be analysed together with the songs.

Here are the questions put to the informants:

1. About their life history.
2. Since how long do you sing in Geet Gawai?
3. What is the origin of Geet Gawai?(How,why, when it takes place)
4. What are the different types of songs in a Geet Gawai?
5. What instruments are used in it?
6. What is dholok puja?
7. Only dholok is worshipped?
8. What about the other instruments like lota(water container), chimta(iron tong with
9. What is Dharti Bandhayi(worship of Mother Earth)? Why and how is it done?
10. Do you think people know about it-why is the earth worshipped and how it done?
11. Tell us something about your group? Why, when, how?
12. Youth and Geetgawai- Relevancy-their interest
13. Is it commercial as well, that is a good means of living for a person?
14. What will be your message to the youth who wish to join Geetgawai?
15. As per your experience, is there any change between the Geetgawai of yesterday and that of today?

3. Analysis and Discussion

Table 2: Song No.1 with translation

Bhojpuri song No.1	English Version
<p>1. Din bhar sanjya maiya nadi teere sanjh beriya ori tare ho</p> <p>Kehi more sanjha manayi kekar ghare jaayib ho</p> <p>Kehi more sanjya kekar ghare jayib ho</p>	<p>Mother Lakshmi has been sitting near the river bank for the whole day and now , during sunset, she has come near the yard and is asking: ‘Who is going to receive me at his place tonight? Where shall I go?’</p>
<p>2. ghar mein se niklelan dada ta dada apan dada ho</p> <p>More ghare sanjya Manawa hamare ghare aawahon ho</p>	<p>Then Grandfather comes out of the house and says: Oh Mother! Come to my place! I will worship you! I will offer you a seat and shower flowers</p>

<p>Baiseke debon singhasan phul chitraayi debon ho Patuka pasari pahounva lagab hamare ghare awahoun ho</p> <p>3. Din bhar sanjya maiya nadi teere sanjh beriya ori tare ho</p> <p>Kehi more sanjha manayi kekar ghare jaayib ho</p> <p>4. Ghar mein se niklelan baba ho, baba apan baba ho More ghare sanjya Manawa hamare ghare aawahon ho Baiseke debon singhasan phul chitraayib debon ho Patuka pasari pahounva lagab hamare ghare awahoun ho</p> <p>4. Din bhar sanjya maiya nadi teere sanjh beriya ori tare ho</p> <p>Kehi more sanjha manayi kekar ghare jaayib ho Ghar mein se niklelan chacha ta chacha apan ho More ghare sanjya Manawa hamare ghare aawahon ho Baiseke debon singhasan phul chitraayib debon ho Patuka pasari pahounva lagab hamare ghare awahoun ho</p>	<p>around you I will touch your feet after having covered you with cloth, come at my place Mother Lakshmi has been sitting near the river bank for the whole day and now , during sunset, she has come near the yard and is asking: 'Who is going to receive me at his place tonight? Where shall I go?'</p> <p>Then father comes out of the house and says: Oh Mother! Come to my place! I will worship you! I will offer you a seat and shower flowers around you I will touch your feet after having covered you with cloth, come at my place Mother Lakshmi has been sitting near the river bank for the whole day and now , during sunset, she has come near the yard and is asking: 'Who is going to receive me at his place tonight? Where shall I go?'</p> <p>Then uncle comes out of the house and says: Oh Mother! Come to my place! I will worship you! I will offer you a seat and shower flowers around you I will touch your feet after having covered you with cloth, come at my place</p>
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3.1 Analysis of Song No.1

The Goddess Luxmi has spent the whole day near the river bank and now that dawn is creeping in, she is looking for a place to spend the night. She goes to her favourite devotees who are ready to welcome her as per rites and rituals.

Normally, the Goddess Luxmi is mostly worshipped on the festival of Light, Diwali by the Hindus for wealth and prosperity. It is believed that on Diwali Luxmi visits all homes. As a symbolic gesture many people paint the feet of Luxmi entering from the threshold. Throughout the year, prayers are offered to Luxmi but prayers on Diwali are most popular. Businessmen offer prayers to Luxmi and open new account books. Since it is customary to first offer prayers to Lord Ganesh it is popular to first establish a temporary temple within the home with idols of Lord Ganesh and Goddess Luxmi and then offer prayers. (www.mangalmandir.org)

Here, Goddess is asking to the devotees who is ready to welcome Her to-night and in a descending order of age, the grandfather, the uncle and the father responds positively to Her request.

As per Hindu tradition, this Goddess Luxmi is said to be unsteady and transient and does not stay at one place for long. Since everyone desires that she stay within the home permanently, prayers are offered to Luxmi. (P.Bhalla, 2006). The art of attracting Luxmi through devotion is often hidden and not easy to attain. This is because of a strict direction by Vishvamitra, a great sage, who declared that the procedures must be kept secret and revealed only to able disciple. (P.Bhalla, 2006)

In Hitopadesh, 178, it is said:

Utsaahsampanmadirghasutram kriyavidhigyam vyaneshvasaktam

Shooram kritagyam drihra sawhridamcha luxmi swayam yaati nivas heto

Whoever is enthusiastic, active, capable in his work, not addicted to vice, grateful and devotedly friendly shall find that Luxmi voluntarily comes to reside in his home. (www.riiti.com)

Here, in this song, Goddess Luxmi is welcome by the grandfather, father and uncle who offer her beautiful seat, cloth and flowers. They touch her feet and seek her blessings for a happy life.

Table 3: Song No.2 with translation

Bhojpuri song No.2	English version
1. Taar bandhi dharti upar asmaan ge maai	I am warding off evils from both the earth and the sky
Ghumi pheeri bandhila dev asthaan ge maai	Dancing in a circular motion, I tie the god of this place
2. Gor tohar lagila dharti ho maai	Oh Mother Earth! I seek your blessings
Bitu bhar jagahiya humro ke daan ge maai	Please give me some space to dance
3. Ke hawein guruwa ke guru bhai ge maai	Who is the Spiritual Master and who is his brother?
Kekare bharose baandhi asthaan ge maai	Upon whose trust shall I rely for protection tonight?
4. Ram hawein guruwa lachooman guru bhai ge maai	Ram is the spiritual Master and Luxman his brother
Unkare bharose baandhab asmaan ge maai	Upon their trust I will rely for protection
Bitu bhar jagahiya humor ke daan ge maai	Oh Mother Earth! Give me some space to dance
5. Ojha ke ojhaai baandhab daiyin ke gun age maai	I will secure myself from the evil doers and witches
Humro ke daan ge maai bitu bhar jagah hiya	Give me some space to dance
Bitu bhar jagah hiya humro ke daan ge maai	

a. Analysis of Song No. 2

This is another '*dharti bandhayi*' song where the folk singers and dancers are worshipping Mother Earth with the end loose of the saree (anchra) and they bend down, seeking her blessings. It is only after the completion of this rite that they are allowed to start dancing.

Long ago, there used to be witch craft and other superstitious beliefs. The folk singers would always sing such songs to protect their dancers and performers.

It has been observed that the evil eyes mostly affect those who are tender, children, women and pets. Women are invariably affected at the time of marriage or when they are going through a pregnancy. When a man is affected the common symptoms include mental

tension, uneasiness, lack of balance, aches and pains, disturbed digestion and similar things.
(Bhalla, 1990)

Table 4: Song No. 3 with translation

Bhojpuri song No. 3	Bhojpuri song No. 3	English	English
1. Hiyanwa ke dharti maiya naam nahin janila Bitra bhar jagah hiya humro ke daan de maai Bitra bhar jagah hiya humro ke daan de maai	I do not know the Mother Earth of this place Oh Mother! Please give me some space Oh Mother! Please give me some space		
2. Hiyanwa ke surooj baba nam nahin janila Humro ke daan ge maai bitra bhar jagah hiya Bitra bhar jagah hiya humro ke daan de maai	I do not know the God of Sun of this place Oh Mother! Please give me some space Oh Mother! Please give me some space		
3. Hiyanwa ke bhramha bisoon nam nahin janila Humro ke daan ge maai bitra bhar jagah hiya Bitra bhar jagah hiya humro ke daan de maai	I do not know Lords Bhramha and Vishnu of this place Oh Mother! Please give me some space Oh Mother! Please give me some space		
4. Hiyanwa ke sato debi nam nahin janila Humro ke daan ge maai bitra bhar jagah hiya Bitra bhar jagah hiya humro ke daan de maai	I do not know the Seven Sisters of this place Oh Mother! Please give me some space Oh Mother! Please give me some space		
5. Hiyanwa ke dih sayer nam nahin janila Humro ke daan ge maai bitra bhar jagah hiya Bitra bhar jagah hiya humro ke daan de maai	I do not know the name of the Protector of this place Oh Mother! Please give me some space Oh Mother! Please give me some space		
6. Hiyanwa ke bare jethe nam nahin janila Humro ke daan ge maai bitra bhar jagah hiya Bitra bhar jagah hiya humro ke daan de maai	I do not know the name of the elders of this place Oh Mother! Please give me some space Oh Mother! Please give me some space		

7. Hiyanwa ke bhulal chukal nam nahin janila	I do not know the names of the forgotten of this place
Humro ke daan ge maai bita bhar jagah hiya	Oh Mother! Please give me some space
Bit a bhar jagah hiya humro ke daan de maai	Oh Mother! Please give me some space

3.3 Analysis of Song no.3

This is a famous ‘Dharti Bandhayi’ song where womenfolk seek the blessings of Mother Earth. They also invoke the blessings of all the other gods and goddesses whom they normally do prior to any auspicious rendering. They are here asking for a space to the Goddess of Earth where they can perform.

The planet earth is normally considered as a mother. Many cultures revere the land as ‘Mother Earth’. This is because land, like a mother, provides all our needs. It feeds us, clothes us and provides us shelters. It fulfils all our needs. The earth has seen good times, but has also been a witness to all kinds of atrocities. Like a mother, the earth teaches us patience, tolerance, generosity and humility. It is the reason why the folk singers here offer prayers to her and seek both her permission and blessings before starting to dance on her. (Bhalla, 1990)

As per Mrs Jootun, the practice of touching the earth gives us an opportunity to convey our gratitude to Mother Earth and to God, who made it. Each of us is indebted to Mother Earth for her bounty. It is our helplessness that we cannot help placing our feet on the mother who gives us so much. Our apologies and gratitude are the only solution to this predicament. This is why this custom is done by touching the earth with the ‘anchra’.

In the Vishwamitra Smriti, 1/44-45, the following prayer is suggested:

Sumudravasane devi! Parvatstanmanditate

Vishnupatni namastubhyam padasparsham kshamaswa me.

“One who is covered with the great oceans as clothes, one who cares for all living beings in the universe, one who gives life through the streams of milk that flow in the form of rivers, one whose breasts are in the form of the great mountains, O Mother Earth, wife of Vishnu, forgive me for placing my feet upon you.

During the last moment of a man’s life, he lies in the lap of the earth. His dead body returns back to the soil. Hence, we worship the earth. The adoration of folk people to Mother Earth is not baseless. There is no doubt that the devotion of these illiterate innocent women of the village toward the earth is going to surprise the educated modern generation. But they will

also feel and understand the ultimate reality behind it. (S.Ramdin, 1989). This song is sung using almost all the instruments involved during the Geetgawai. It is a pre- jhumar.

3.4 Recurrent ideas

Categories of recurrent ideas and practices in the songs

After the above analysis, where the prevalent ideas are clustered and developed into 'umbrella' categories, the following can be concluded:

3.4.1 Pantheism

Pantheism is the belief that reality is identical with divinity, or that all-things compose an all-encompassing, immanent god.(P.Harrison,2012).

In all these three folk songs, we can see the theory of 'pantheism' of Baruch Spinoza. Goddess Luxmi, Mother Earth, Dih, Sayer, Ram, Luxman, Lord of Sun, all the pantheons of Hinduism are present, even the 'forgotens' are present in these songs.

3.4.2 Comparison with non-Christian religions

Various pre-Christian religions and philosophies were thought to be pantheistic by some 19th-century theologians.

According to them, there was a similarity between Pantheism and Ancient Hindu philosophy of Advaita (non-dualism). The 19th –century German Sanskrit's Theodore Goldstucker even remarked that “ a western system of philosophy which occupies a foremost rank amongst the philosophies of all nations and ages, and which is so exact a representation of the ideas of the Vedanta, that we might have suspected its founder to have borrowed the fundamental principles of his system from the Hindus.”(W.H Allen. 1879.p32)

In the late 20th century, some declared that pantheism was an underlying theology of Neopaganism, and pantheists began forming organizations devoted specifically to pantheism and treating it as a separate religion. (Paul Harrison, *Elements of Pantheism*, 1999.)

Pantheism is mentioned in a Papal encyclical in 2009 and a statement on New Year's Day in 2010, criticizing pantheism for denying the superiority of humans over nature and seeing the source of man's salvation in nature. (Caritas In Veritate, 7 July 2009 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantheism#20th_century)

3.2.3 Fear and Awe in religion

Fear is both the natural and emotional way one reacts to an existing or imaginary danger.

It is expressed or experienced as an emotional reaction towards something such as a person, animal, object, activity or situation. It is the utmost important emotion which one experiences with a well-developed nervous system including animals.(hinduismatoz.com)

According to one of the folk singers, Mrs Lilo Mathur, long ago, the kings and rulers managed their subjects through fear of authority and fear of God.

3.2.3.1 The Manifestations of Fear

Here, through simple gestures, the Githarines only try to erase their fear through dancing, kneeling, bowing, warding off evil eyes with money, lighting the camphor and touching the earth.

These are simple fears, which most of us experience in our daily lives compared to more intense fears caused by extreme conditions and situations.

3.2.3.2 Transfer the burden of your fears to God

According to Jayaram, often, our fears are born out of our belief that we are separate from the Creator and the rest of the creation. It is a sign of lack trust or faith in ourselves and in God. We are afraid because we do not believe "sincerely" that God is with us or God is part of our life. (hinduismatoz.com)

Thus, these folk singers, through all these rites and rituals of the geetgawai, transfer the burden of their fear to the gods. This is also a sign of respect to all the gods, mainly Mother Earth.

3.3 Nature worship: Mother Earth

The worship of Mother Earth is a universal phenomenon in many indigenous cultures. There are innumerable examples of festivals, rituals, songs, and myths that celebrate the gifts of Mother Earth all over the world, revealing the intimate sense of togetherness and harmony that exists between man and nature in tribal societies. (ccrtindia.gov.in)

In Christianity as well as in Islam, conservation of the environment is based on the principle that nature and its components are created by God, and humans are entrusted with the responsibility of protecting it. Many religions and moral philosophies have professed the unity of all life on earth and the obligation of human beings to care for them. (S.M. Nair, 1997).

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam; and others place great emphasis on the values, beliefs, and attitudes that relate to the cross-cultural universality of respect for nature and the elements that constitute the universe. The concept of sinning against nature existed in various religious systems. The performers seek the permission of Mother Earth before dancing as this may be considered as a sin. (ccrtindia.gov.in)

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Therefore, it can be concluded that the folk singers of Mauritian geetgawai are perpetuating a living tradition which they adopted for several decades from their ancestors from India. The 'dharti bandhai' is an important part which they have been doing for years in honour of Goddess Luxmi. Prayers to Mother Earth, out of both fear and respect, are offered and reverence is paid to almost all the gods and goddess of the Hindu pantheon. Great importance is given to nature worship in this ceremony which definitely will live for many years. Mauritian Bhojpuri folk songs depict the belief that reality and divinity are same. The universe is made up by a merciful and eternal God. Theory of Pantheism of Baruch Spinoza prevails in the analysis where a similarity is also seen in the Vedas-philosophy of Advaita (Non-Dualism). Collective cultural memory is represented by the Mauritian Geet Gaai since the barriers between caste and class are broken. This helps to strengthen the bond between the different communities present in Mauritius. Youngsters can be trained about the different aspects of the Geet Gawai. There should not be conflict between modern and traditional way of doing it. As a folklore, Geet Gawai is not static. Modern instruments are incorporated by certain groups which should be encouraged. Together with the Mauritian Segga, the Geet Gawai also should be organised in the local hotels by the Ministry of Arts and Culture and Ministry of Tourism to give a better expose of the Mauritian Culture to the tourist visiting the island.

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"The idea that Unity that is rooted in nature is what types of nature mysticism (e.g. Wordsworth, Robinson Jeffers, Gary Snyder) have in common with more philosophically robust versions of pantheism. It is why nature mysticism and philosophical pantheism are often conflated and confused for one another."

- "[Wood's] pantheism is distant from Spinoza's identification of God with nature, and much closer to nature mysticism. In fact, it is nature mysticism
- "Nature mysticism, however, is as compatible with theism as it is with pantheism."

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