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Shifting *Pardesh*: Labour Migration and the Reconfiguration of Space in North India (19th-20th centuries)

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Note to the reader: this paper is part of a chapter of my PhD dissertation, which I am reworking. In the following text, I have tried to lay out the overall frame of the argument, and bring in some of the narrative and analysis. The passages in italics summarize the parts of the paper which could not be developed here.

सैयाँ सुनत बानी ¹	Do you hear, Ô my beloved?
हवड़ा कलकत्ता के बीच हवड़ा पुल के नीचे	Between Calcutta and Howrah, under the Howrah Bridge,
भागीरथी बहेली महान सइयां सुनत बानी ॥टेक॥ (...)	Flows the river Bhagirathi. Do you hear, ô my beloved? (...)
दूनू ओर धकम ठेला, लोग चले जइसे मेला,	On both sides people come and go, it looks like a fair
बीचे ट्राम मोटर एक्कावान॥ सैयां सुनत बानी (...)	In the middle rides the tramway, the motor car and the horsecar. Do you hear, ô my beloved? (...)
धर्मतल्ला में जादू घर के, चिड़ियाखाना अलीपुर के	There is the theatre in Dharmatala, the zoo in Alipore

¹ Kavi Ramchandra Bhakt, *Naveen Bhojpuri Sagar*, Calcutta: Shree Loknath Pustakalaya, no date (purchased between 1990 and 1993), song no. 36.

लोग बड़ा करेला बखान।। सैयाँ सुनत बानी

People keep talking about it. Do you hear,
ô my beloved ?

ससुराल में अइली अव से देखे खातिर हिया
तरसे,

Ever since I have come to the home of my
in-laws (*sasural*), my heart longs to see it,

कब आस पुरी भगवान।। सैयाँ सुनत बानी

O God, when will you grant my wish? Do
you hear, ô my beloved?

नइहर में सुनले रही पिया कलकतिया हई,

In my mother's home (*naihar*) I was told
that my beloved is a Kalkatiya,

पुलिस के हउवे जवान।। सैयाँ०

That he is a police constable. Do you
hear, ô my beloved?

असवा पुराय द सैयां, चलो अबकी दईयां,

Fulfil this wish of mine, O my beloved,
let us go this once

समय पर बनायब जलपान।। सैयां०।।

I will prepare your meals on time

This song, drawn from a chapbook published in the early 1990s, is located at the juncture between several structures and imaginaries of mobility. Its lyrical theme – the longing of the wife for her husband, gone away to some distant land (*pardesh*), also known as *viraha* – has constituted a popular trope in various oral traditions and regional literatures of South Asia at least since the medieval period.² Many popular ballads and tales thus narrate the wanderings of the husband, away on a spiritual quest, in the service of a distant king, or leading a trading expedition, in keeping with the various forms of mercantile, military and pastoral mobilities characteristic of medieval and early modern South Asia.³ The focus of the song on Calcutta as the new *pardesh* reflects the emergence of a distinct migratory configuration from the 19th century onwards, characterised by the rapid expansion of new forms of long-distance wage labour. Calcutta, as the main urban centre of eastern India, its principal port and, from the late nineteenth century,

² In its earliest manifestation, it was associated with the lyrical form of the *chaumasa*, the song of the rainy season, associating the description of the rains and the longing of the *virahini* (the woman left behind). Some of the earlier instances of these songs are found in the work of the Sanskrit poet Kalidasa (ca 4-5th century CE). Charlotte Vaudeville, *Barahmasa. Les chansons des douze mois dans les littératures indo-aryennes*, Pondichéry : Institut Français d'Indologie, 1965

³ *Ibid.* On patterns and practices of mobility in the Gangetic Plains, see, Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy. The ethnohistory of the military labour market in Hindustan, 1450-1850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990

its largest industrial cluster, became the embodiment of this new form of mobility, and of the conflicting aspirations and anxieties which accompanied it. The song embodies this spatial configuration in another way, as it belongs to a collection entitled *Naveen Bhojpuri Sagar* and was published by the Shree Loknath Pustakalaya in Calcutta, underscoring the city's centrality to Bhojpuri print culture.

The paper examines the complex and evolving spatial configurations produced by North Indian labour migration over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries.⁴ It argues that the rapid expansion of long-distance wage migration from the 19th century onwards gave rise to a distinct socio-spatial structure, centred on the articulation of bi-local rural-urban settlements. Using cultural representations of mobility, such as the one presented above, as an entry point, the paper seeks to understand the nature of this configuration, and the tensions that traversed it. It also examines how this bi-local structure intersected both with older forms of mobility and with the territorial frameworks of region (linguistic and administrative) and nation that were taking shape during the same period.

The paper builds on the rich body of historical studies on labour circulation in South Asia. This scholarship has demonstrated the longstanding importance and diversity of forms of mobile livelihood, while also highlighting the complex ways in which the incorporation of the subcontinent in the colonial capitalist economy reconfigured patterns of mobility. These transformations included the curtailment of mobile livelihoods, the emergence of new circuits and infrastructures of circulation, and the persistence of historically embedded forms of mobility.⁵ The paper expands this literature in two ways. First, it foregrounds the production of a new spatial configuration, centred around the articulation of rural and urban settlements, as a crucial structure underpinning the commodification of labour and as a key framework through which this process was experienced by contemporaries. Shifts in spatial imaginaries, the paper argues – from representations of the “distant land” to those of the relation between the “home”

⁴ “North Indian”, in the context of this paper, refers broadly to the eastern part of the Gangetic plains (roughly corresponding to present day eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar). This area, which spans several linguistic regions – Bhojpuri, Magahi and Maithili – constituted a relatively coherent region of emigration (that is, a region characterised by interconnected and enduring patterns of mobility) in the 19th and 20th century.

⁵ Important contributions to this literature include: Anand Yang, “Peasants on the Move : A Study of Internal Migration in India”, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10, 1 (Summer, 1979), pp. 37-58; Douglas Haynes and Tirthankar Roy, “Conceiving mobility: Weavers’ migrations in pre-colonial and colonial India”, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 36, 1 (1999), pp. 35-67; Ian Kerr, “On the Move: Circulating Labor in Pre-Colonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial India”, *International Review of Social History*, 51 (2006), Supplement, pp. 85-10; Claude Markovits, Jacques Pouchepadass and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Society and Circulation. Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750-1950*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003; Ravi Ahuja, *Pathways of Empire. Circulation, ‘Public Works’ and Social Space in Colonial Orissa (c. 1780-1941)*, Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2009; Nitin Sinha, *Communication and Colonialism in Eastern India. Bihar, 1760s-1880s*, London and New York: Anthem Press, 2012

and the “outside” – help illuminate not only this transformation but also the meanings and tensions associated with it. Second, the paper examines the way the rural-urban configuration produced by migration intersected with the consolidation of new political and administrative structures. In contrast with the shift from pre-colonial to colonial migration regimes, the reconfiguration of labour mobility over the 20th century has received comparatively little attention, reflecting the longstanding tendency of historical studies to treat 1947 as a natural endpoint. The paper takes the coexistence of incongruent spatial imaginaries in the Bhojpuri repertoire as an entry point for analysing the uneasy relation between the trans-local spaces of mobility, on the one hand, and the territorialised structure of the late colonial and postcolonial state, on the other.

A second dimension which I wanted to touch on, but cannot integrate convincingly at this stage, concerns the focus on cultural representations as a crucial site where these spatial configurations are articulated. The point here is to reflect on the way cultural representations both mirror and shape reality: the way mobility appears in the songs and plays under study was shaped simultaneously by the codes of the literary tradition that these songs belong to (often dating back to the medieval period if not beyond), the changing conditions of their production (the shift from oral traditions to commercial print, for instance), and the changing reality of migration itself.

The paper is organised into three parts. It begins by tracing the shift from circulation to migration and the emergence of the rural-urban dichotomy as a new dominant spatial structure. It then zooms in on the figure of the *Bidesiya* as the embodiment of a new form of commodified labour mobility. Finally, it examines the way this rural-urban configuration coexisted with other spatial formations, particularly the emerging territorialised imaginaries of nation and region.

1) From circulation to migration: the making of the rural/urban dichotomy.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the consolidation of colonial rule and the integration of the subcontinent into imperial circuits of capitalist exchange and production profoundly altered the political economy of the Gangetic plains and the circulatory practices of its inhabitants. While existing forms of mobile livelihoods were disrupted, and at times suppressed, new forms of mobility developed, both within the subcontinent and beyond, as migrants from northern India came to form the bulk of the

recruits sent to work on the sugar plantation in overseas colonies under the system of indenture.⁶ This composite assemblage of migratory practices, spanning varying distances, rhythms, and destinations, coexisted with the emergence of rural-urban migration (and, specifically, migration to a new type of urban an industrial metropolis) as a dominant pattern: Calcutta (including the neighbouring industrial areas of Hooghly, Howrah and 24-Parganas), emerged not only as the main destination for north Indian migration; but also as the epitome of the new structures of mobility.

The Bhojpuri cultural repertoire articulates both the long history of mobility, and the emergence of a new migratory structure. The present section beings by examining continuities in the representation of mobility, both in terms of lyrical theme (viraha) and poetic forms (such as the barahmasa). The longevity of this lyrical tradition not only reflects the continued importance of forms of mobile livelihood; it also helps reproduce this continuity, by providing a cultural template within which a wide range of diverse, and potentially discontinuous practices, can be subsumed. At the same time, these cultural representations mark a shift in mobility practices, as an older imaginary of circulation was progressively displaced by a movement between rural and urban spaces.

From *Pardesh* to *Bidesh* to *Kalkata*

In the medieval repertoire, the distant land is referred to as *pardesh*, a term evoking “a place away from the home”. Many of the texts published in the nineteenth century, on the other hand, use the term *bidesh*, which adds to the notion of distance one of foreignness. Badri Narayan Tiwari argues that this lexical shift was connected to the development of colonial migration – *bidesh* referring to overseas colonies such as Mauritius, Java or Suriname where north Indian migrant emigrated in large numbers from the 1830s onwards.⁷ The geographical referent of the *pardesh* also tended to change over time, becoming increasingly associated first with “the East” – an association which seems linked to the

⁶ On the disruption of circulatory practices see: David Washbrook, “Progress and Problems : South Asian Economic and Social History, c. 1720-1860”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 22, 1 (1988), pp. 57-96; Sandria Freitag, “Crime in the Social Order of Colonial North India”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 25, 2 (May, 1991), pp. 227-261; Sinha, *Communication and Colonialism*, *op. cit.*, especially Chapter 5; Radhika Singha, “Settle, Mobilize, Verify: Identification Practices in Colonial India, *Studies in History*, 16, 2 (2000), pp. 151-198. On the emergence of new forms of mobility: Lalita Chakravarty, “Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in a Dual Economy – British India, 1880-1920”, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* XV, 3 (July-September 1978), pp. 249-328; Pradipta Chaudhury, “Labour Migration from the United Provinces, 1881-1911”, *Studies in History* 8, 1 (1992), pp. 13-4.

⁷ Badri Narayan, “Bidesia Folk Culture in India”, in Mousumi Majumder, *Kahe gaile Bides, why did you go overseas?*, Allahabad: Mango Books, 2010, pp. 144-145

development of the colonial regime of circulation in the nineteenth century.⁸ By the early decades of the twentieth century, and most emblematically in Bhikhari Thakur's play *Bidesiya* (likely composed and first performed in the 1920s) Calcutta had become the embodiment of the distant land. The centrality of Calcutta as the embodiment of the new *pardesh* hints at an important shift in the representation of mobility: the "distant land" is now identified as a *place*, rather than a broadly defined region of circulation.

The shift from circulation to urban migration did not only involve a shift in destination, but in the very nature of mobility. This shift is dramatized in *Bidesiya*, through the character of Batohi. One of the well-established messenger figures in the *viraha* literature, Batohi embodies itinerance by his very name – 'bat' meaning the pathway, he is occasionally referred to as "*bat batohia*", the traveller, wanderer on the road. In the play, the character of Batohi is at the juncture between two historical forms of mobility. While his name evokes older forms of itinerance, he describes himself as being on his way to Calcutta to earn some money (*nagad*, cash). His ambiguous position is particularly obvious in this encounter, taking place at the train station, as Batohi is faced with the necessity of buying a train ticket to go to Calcutta

बटोही - टिकट कथी के?

Batohi - What is the ticket made of?

समाजी - कागज के।

Samaji (a passer-by) - Paper

बटोही - कती मूटी के?

Batohi - How big is it?

समाजी - हती मूटी कअ।

Samaji - That big

बटोही - हमारा के बुरबके समझतारऽ? तीस गो

रोपेया लागे जात बा, त नान्ह-बार के सूते बइठे

लायक ना होई त लेके का होई (...)

Batohi - Do you think I'm stupid? for thirty rupees, if it's so small that you can't sleep or sit on it, then what is the use? (...)

समाजी - ए बाबा, त खरचे-बरचे रावां पास में ना रहे,

त कलकाता का चल देलीं (...)

Samaji - Eh Baba, if you don't have money to spend, why did you leave for Calcutta? (...)

⁸ In the medieval period, the 'East' (*purav*) usually referred to the Awadhi and Bhojpuri speaking area of eastern Hindustan, due to their location to the east of the imperial centres of power in Delhi and Agra. An embodiment of the overlap between different geographical imaginaries, can be found in the Bhojpuri cultural repertoire, in the poetic form of the *purvi* (easterner). In his survey of the genre, the ethnomusicologist Edward O. Henry noted that there existed two contradictory explanations for its name: the fact that it originated in the Bhojpuri speaking region of eastern Hindustan, on the one hand, or the fact that it deals primarily with the theme of the absent husband, who has gone to the East to earn money. Edward O. Henry, "The Purvi in Bhojpuri-Speaking India: Structure and Flux in a Disappearing Genre", *Asian Music*, 37, 2 (Summer-Autumn, 2006), pp. 6-7

बटोही - हम का जानत बानी कि रेल में आ टिकट में Batohi - What did I know that all my money
के हाली दाम बुकनी हो जाई हो? would go in buying the ticket?⁹

Batohi, the perennial wanderer of old thus finds it difficult to adapt to new modes of transportation – including the need to pay a fare. His bewilderment, aimed at provoking the laughter of a public that is also living through these changes, can be read as a signifier for the uneasy intersection between old and new forms of mobility.

The rural/urban dichotomy and the making of dual households

The shift from circulation to urban migration was accompanied by the crystallisation of a new spatial structure, as the older dichotomy between familiar and foreign was increasingly reframed as a divide between rural and urban. The section first traces the articulation of the rural/urban dichotomy in the Bhojpuri repertoire and reflects on the role played by cultural representation in (re)producing this dichotomy, by entrenching the image of the “modern” urban space, and of an idealised ruralit).

Cultural representations of mobility do not simply emphasise the division between rural and urban spaces, however: they also dramatize their interconnectedness. This is particularly visible in the reconfiguration of the figure of the second wife, the “other woman” who seduces the husband and detains him away, in the distant land (*pardesh/bides*). The Bhojpuri tradition holds multiple images of the second wife, the rival for the husband’s affection, not all of them connected to the theme of mobility. She is sometimes identified as a woman belonging to a lower caste, such as the Malini (woman of the gardening caste) or the Tamorin (selling betel leaves), perhaps in connection with contemporary practices of hypogamous second marriages. In songs of *viraha*, she often appears as the “woman of the east” or the *Bengalin*, the enticing seductress. Much as the *pardesh* is usually left undescribed, and undefined, the woman of the east often appears as an abstract figure, her beauty, guile, and aptitude in sorcery and magic evoking the attraction of the *pardesh*.

As with many other established tropes of the *viraha* tradition, the figure of the other woman was re-appropriated and transformed over time, to suit new realities. Bhikhari Thakur’s *Bidesiya* embodies this shift, as it shows the play’s eponymous hero settling a second household in Calcutta, after leaving his

⁹ Bhikhari Thakur *Rachnawali*, op. cit., pp. 34-35

loyal wife in the village. At first sight, the play appears to be built around a clear-cut opposition between Pyari Sundri, the village wife, and Randi, Bidesiya's second wife. Randi seems to fit the stereotype of the urban woman/second wife as a woman of loose moral – an identity she bears in her very name, which means a prostitute, a clear antithesis to the “Pretty Darling” (Pyari Sundari) that is Bidesiya's first wife.¹⁰ When Batohi finally reaches Bidesiya, he finds him and Randi playing cards, a stark contrast to the weeping, virtuous, Pyari Sundri.

Figure 1 – Bidesiya and Randi playing cards. Illustration from an undated chapbook



The ambivalence of the urban household also appears in some of the pictorial representations included in the chapbooks. Here, Bidesiya and Randi are depicted playing cards, while their children watch. The opulence of their surroundings may be interpreted as signalling either the profitability of urban employment, or an excessive, and perhaps immoral affluence, or both.¹¹

Yet, Bidesiya's urban settlement is also presented as a second household, one that is a great deal less virtuous, but parallels the rural home. Despite the negative connotations attached to her person, Randi is also depicted as a home maker (*gharwali*), a wife to Bidesiya, and the mother of his children. As Batohi's presence forces Bidesiya to reveal Pyari Sundari's existence to Randi, their conversation establishes the equal claim of the two women¹²

¹⁰ The following analysis of the play is based on the version published by the Bihar Rashtra Bhasha Parishad. See Bhikhari Thakur, “Bidesiya” in Nagendra Prasad Singh (ed.), *Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali*, Patna: Bihar Rashtra Bhasha Parishad, 2011 (first edition 2005), pp. 26-58

¹¹ Undated chapbook. The picture was taken by Indira Prasad (Delhi University) from booklets she consulted in Arrah. I am very grateful to her for sharing these

¹² *Bhikhari Thakur Rachnawali*, p. 44

रंडी - प्यारी कवन?

Randi – Pyari who?

बिदेसी - घरवाली।(...)

Bidesi – the mistress of my home (gharwali)
(...)

रंडी - हम हैं कि वह?

Randi – Am I or is she?

बिदेसी - दोनों।

Bidesi – Both of you are

Similarly, when Bidesiya announces his desire to go back to the village, Randi begs him not to leave her. Her entreaties are a perfect echo to Pyari Sundari's earlier attempts to dissuade him from going to Calcutta. The relation between home and distant land is thus portrayed as a tension between two concurrent households, making manifest the interconnection between "village" and "city".

2) Commodified labour mobility and the making of the *Bidesiya*

The section examines the link between the emergence of the Bidesiya as a new figure of mobility and the tendency towards the commodification of labour migration. Contrary to earlier figures of mobility, such as the trader Shobha Nayak traveling to Bengal and Morang with his caravan of pack bullocks, the natnis (tattoo maker) Hirni and Birni, touring the north Indian countryside, and the ascetic and martial figures of Bhojpuri folktales, the bidesiya and the kalkatiya seem to embody a relatively undifferentiated mobility, dissociated from communally and occupationally specific patterns of circulation. The section examines the place assigned to money (as wage or remittances) in the Bidesiya repertoire, as well as the social relations underpinning mobility (the relation between husband and wife; the place of children and the extended family).

3) Enumerative geographies and the territorialisation of mobility

This third and final section aims to re-inscribe the rural-urban configuration within its broader spatial context at two levels : first, by locating it both within a broad, heterogeneous and changing geography of mobility (the Calcutta connection as one among many and itself taking different forms); and second, by situating it within the changing territorial structure of the (post)colonial state. It does so by tracing

the spatial imaginaries embedded in another popular genre, which can be described as songs of enumeration.

The most common form of this trope shows the woman making a list of the various items (usually jewellery and clothing) which she expects her husbands to bring back, associating each with a different place. It is difficult to date this genre with precision – its antiquity is not as attested as the trope of the *viraha*. It is certain, however, that it constituted a very popular genre: numerous such songs are found Updhyaya's collection as well as in chapbooks throughout the twentieth century, and it also travelled, along with other Bhojpuri poetic forms, to the different plantation colonies where north Indian labour settled, including Mauritius.¹³

The structure of gendered (im)mobility developed in these songs is rather similar to that of songs of *viraha*: the woman, located in some vaguely defined intimate space, addresses her husband either before his departure, or as she anticipates his return. In this poetic mode, the husband's mobility is tied to a structure of consumption rather than the geography of distant employment associated with the *pardesh*. The main difference between the two tropes lay in the nature of the connection imagined between the intimate space and the outside world: while the evocation of the *pardesh* revolves around the rupture between two distant, and irreconcilably different places, enumerative songs stress the link between the home and the outside world, embodied by the different objects the husband is meant to bring back home. These songs, furthermore, build a geographical imaginary that represent space as a constellation of connected places, spread over the subcontinent. In one late nineteenth century version of this poetic form, attributed to Khalil and Abdul Habib of Benares, the places mentioned include Karnal, Poona, Nagpur, Chapra, Calcutta, Muhamadabad (unidentified), Burdwan, Patna, Punjab, Sonapur, Bengal, Ijanagar (unidentified), Jhansi and Nepal (in this order).¹⁴

Over the course of the twentieth century, enumerative geographies were also used to support territorialised imaginaries, associated with the development and consolidation of national and regional political constructions. Raghuveer Narayan's nationalist poem *Batohia*, composed in 1911, delineates the nation's territory physically, culturally and spiritually, through an enumeration of its places, deities

¹³ Servan-Schreiber, *Histoire d'une musique métisse*, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Durgashanker Prasad Singh, *Bhojpuri ke Kavi aur Kavya*, Patna: Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, 2001 (1st edition 1957), pp. 173-4

and poets. The traditional figure of itinerance that is Batohi serves to connect circulatory practices with the discovery of the nation: “Go, go, Batohi my brother, see Hindustan (*Hind*) and come back”.¹⁵ Bhojpuri popular publications also served as vehicles for the propagation of nationalist imaginaries well into the postcolonial period. A striking instance is found in the chapbook *Nayka Bihaan Lok Geet* (folksong of a new dawn), published in Patna in 1990. Though it does not appear to be a government sponsored publication, the songs collected in the chapbook – organised under such headings as *Yojna Geet* (song of the plan), *Phasal Geet* (song of the harvest) and *Vikaas Geet* (song of development) – embrace the rhetoric of national planning and economic development, and build a spatial imaginary centered on the geography of planned industrialisation. One of the “songs of development” builds on the familiar trope of the wife, eagerly awaiting the return of her husband, gone away for work. The song then proceeds to draw a national geography of production, by assigning each family member to different locations, all emblematic of planned industrialisation: one pair of brother- and sister-in-law work on the Bhakra Dam, the other in the steel plants of Rourkela and Bhilai, while the woman’s husband is employed in the fertiliser plant of Sindri. By the end of the song, the longing wife is revealed to await not just her husband’s return, but their common departure, and the song closes with the following injunction “Go and visit Durgapur, Barauni, Maithon. These are places of pilgrimage.”¹⁶ This echoes Nehru’s famous phrase describing the large state-owned industrial and infrastructural projects promoted in the years following independence as the site where the postcolonial vision of “a modern, secular nation-state with a ‘socialist pattern of society’ would take concrete shape”.¹⁷

In other texts, the territory evoked through enumeration is regional, as in the song entitled “Two *natnis* are roaming around Patna city”, attributed to Bhojpuri poet Bhaleshwar Yadav, and published in the early 1990s.¹⁸ The poem uses traditional figure of popular itinerance – professional tattoo makers, *natnis* are associated with communities of mobile entertainers and performers – to delineate the contour of a region defined, much like in *Batohia*, by its physicality as much as its cultural traits. The text starts with the *natnis*’ itinerary – between Patna city, Baliya and Bhojpur – before moving to a description of their repertoire of tattoos, which includes religious sites (Ganga and Gangotri “the residence of Shankar Bhagvan” (Shiva), Sitamarhi and Janakpur (both associated with the goddess Sita)), industrial centres

¹⁵ The poem is reproduced in Singh, *Bhojuri ke Kavi aur Kaviya*, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-217

¹⁶ Bharat Singh “Bharti”, *Nayka Bihan Lok Geet*, Patna: Narayan and Co. Booksellers, 1990, Song. No. 32

¹⁷ Christian Strümpell, “The politics of dispossession in an Odishan steel town”, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 48, 1 (2014), p. 50

¹⁸ Kavi Santosh Mishra, *Naveen Bhojpuri Sagar*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-34

(Jhariya, Dhanbad, Bokaro), nationalist figures (Rajendra Prasad, Jagjivan Ram and Kunvar Singh), and poets (Vidyapati, the famous poet of 14-15th century North Bihar, Bhikhari Thakur and Mahendra Misir, another celebrated Bhojpuri poet of the late nineteenth early twentieth century). The space so delineated largely corresponds to the administrative region of Bihar (prior to the formation of Jharkhand in 2000), extended to integrate the Bhojpuri districts of Eastern UP. It is also overwhelmingly associated with Hindu cultural and religious markers, hinting at the entrenchment of communally differentiated cultural imaginaries.

The resulting territorial scaffolding is shot through with tensions: the nation-state accommodates uneasily the region as a concurrent unit of territorial affiliation, and the region itself is confronted by the lack of congruence of its linguistic, cultural, and political boundaries. This appears in Bhaleshwar Yadav's song, where the linguistic-cultural territory does not match the administrative unit: the Bhojpuri speaking population is spread between the states of UP and Bihar, both of which accommodate various other linguistic groups. The "regional" industrial centres of Jhariya, Dhanbad and Bokaro evoked in the song have also been the object of concurrent regionalist claims, leading to the division of Bihar and the constitution of a new state of Jharkhand in 2000.

The geographies of circulation and urban-rural migration sit uneasily with these new territorial constructions. The different imaginaries presented here hint at contradictory possibilities: while the trans-local geographies of circulation embodied in songs of enumeration only partially fit the border of the new nation-state, the mobility of labour can also be subsumed within the nation-making project. The long-standing tradition of mobility, and its inscription in the Bhojpuri cultural repertoire, played an important role in the production of a sense of "regionality" in northern India – though, as Kathryn Hardy discussed for a more recent period, the region so delineated did not match any single administrative or linguistic referent.¹⁹ On the other hand, the consolidation of the region as a locus of political and social affiliation over the second half of the 20th century also had implications for the bi-local configurations underpinning rural-urban migration, as the mobile worker from north India increasingly became framed as a regional "other" – a tendency enhanced by the rise of "sons of the soil" politics from the 1960s onwards.

¹⁹ Kathryn C. Hardy, "Constituting a Diffuse Region: Cartographies of Mass-mediated Bhojpuri Belonging", *BioScope*, 6 (2), 2015, pp. 145-164

Note: another dimension which I could not convincingly tackle at this stage concerns the way the paper speaks to recent studies on the link between mobility, cultural production and regional consolidation, particularly in the context of the Bhojpuri cinema. While this literature tends to focus on contemporary developments (post 1990s), the paper hints at the longer genealogy of the processes of regional consolidation and foregrounds the tension-ridden interpenetration of heterogeneous spatial configurations (from older networks of circulation to the bilocal rural-urban households, to interlocking territorial formation of nation and region). In this respect, its perspective differs from Kathryn Hardy's concept of "diffuse region", which tends to emphasise the fluidity of geo-linguistic boundaries.