



## Research article

# Kajari Folk Songs: Mechanism for Emotional Regulation

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## Abstract

This paper investigates *Kajari* folk songs as a coping mechanism, shedding light on their role in providing therapeutic support to women in North Indian society. Traditionally sung by women during the *Sawan* month (monsoon season), these songs serve as vital tools for women to navigate and cope with the constraints of society and gender norms. Despite the extensive research on North Indian folk songs, *Kajari* has received limited attention through this emotional lens. This article utilizes a secondary data analysis approach to examine *Kajari* songs from five different books, translated from Bhojpuri to English and subjected to thematic analysis. The focus is on unravelling the emotional turmoil experienced by rural women, attributed to factors such as male migration, the social issue of second-wife, unpredictable forces of nature, unfulfilled sexual desires, and mental and physical suffering. The paper delves into the intricate interplay of women's emotions, highlighting their resilience and resistance. Ultimately, it underscores the pivotal role of *Kajari* songs as safety-valve for women in North Indian society.

**Keywords:** Folk songs, Safety-valve, Left-behind women, Therapeutic Impact, Emotional Identity



**Gender Equality, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**

## Introduction

Folk art forms play an indispensable role within any community or nation's tapestry, profoundly impacting its people's collective psyche. Bascom (1953) demonstrated that these creative expressions serve as a defining force in shaping cultural identities. Archer Taylor's elucidation of "Folklore" as a continuum of connected narratives encompassing tales of diverse types, including Märchen, jests, legends, cumulative tales, exempla, fables, and etiological tales, alongside ballads,

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lyrics, folk songs, charms, proverbs, and riddles (Kongas, 2019), underscores the intricate psychological interplay within these cultural artefacts. As an art form, the folk song holds a unique psychological resonance. It serves as a poignant medium for encapsulating everyday individuals' multifaceted moods and emotions. Dr Shanti Jain, in her book *Kajari*, aptly characterizes folk songs as the "Soul's voice" (*Atma ke swar*), emphasizing their capacity to encapsulate a spectrum of emotions, struggles, and life experiences (Jain, 2014). These songs serve as psychological mirrors, reflecting the intricate tapestry of individual's and communities' inner and intrapsychic worlds. Exploring the diverse facets of the Kajari song becomes a psychological journey, enabling a deeper understanding of the development of core Indian culture and sensibility through the medium of song.

Moreover, it profoundly influences modern social and psychological structures, shaping how we perceive and interact within our contemporary context. By embracing Kajari's transhistorical aspect, we unlock valuable insights into the evolution of specific cultural identities, revealing the intricate interplay between tradition and psychology. Etymologically tracing the origins of the term "Kajari" or Kajali (Kohl or Kajal), originally used as eye makeup in Eastern cultures, serves as a reminder of how even everyday objects can carry profound psychological and cultural significance in the human experience.

Smita Tewari Jassal defined the genre Kajari as a type of folksong mainly performed by middle- and lower-class female members of society in rural areas (Jassal, 2012). It is believed that during the month of Sawan (The north Indian monsoon season that falls between July and August), the dark clouds prompted native women and men to celebrate nature by singing folk songs that gradually became the mode of expression and an inextricable essence of their culture. This genre is sung across the country with slight variations but is prevalent in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and some parts of Bihar. Since Indian culture has a song for every occasion, ritual and festival, and Kajari song falls under the category of seasonal songs like *caita*, *fag* and *barahamasa*.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> There are multiple views regarding the origin of Kajari songs. Renowned Hindi poet Premghnan associates the genre with the goddess of *Vindhyachal* (Mirzapur district) because of her other name, *Kajjalla*.<sup>ix,v</sup> Bhartendu Harishchandra associates it with the death of a famous king, Dadurai of Mirzapur, further supported by Grierson (Prasad, 1987). It is also believed that there was a daughter of King Kantit. Due to the separation from her husband, her lamenting voice became a Kajari song. Therefore, it is inferred that Mirzapur is the citadel of Kajari songs. Later, these songs were disseminated across Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.<sup>vi</sup> As Edward O. Henry quotes Stephen Slawek, who said, "Kajari's from Mirzapur has become particularly well-known in the *Banaras* area (Henry, 2006: 91)." These songs pictured both joy and sorrow of human life, like the celebration of nature, solidarity against the hardships of life, a sense of joy, desires on one hand and Labor migration, separation of lovers, socio-economic conditions, daily struggles, unspeakable grievances, and frustrations on the other. Does it give a sense of recognition of emotions and identity and an artistic representation of who they are? Thus, creating literature on shared emotions for others to interact, relate and internalize. As a folk song, expressive art is one of the markers of rich cultural heritage. Still, nowadays, the tradition of expressing through cultural practices is disappearing, depriving the women/men of a medium through which they represent their true selves.

Despite earlier intensive research, north Indian folk songs still attract scholars and academicians to probe deeper into them. Still, academicians and scholars are working on North Indian folksongs in general and Kajari songs, as Laxmi Ganesh Tewari (2015) discusses most North Indian folksongs and provides a general introduction to these folksongs. Many male and female folk genres of folksongs were introduced by Edward O. Henry (1976), except the Kajari Song. Another scholar, Smita Tewari Jassal (2012), explored Kajari songs from the perspective of work songs. She considers these songs tools for laughter and jokes that help them escape the monotony of pastoral work and negotiate with the social structure. Shanti Jain (2014) discussed every detail of Kajari songs, but the book is limited to a general introduction. In his paper, S.D. Mishra (1969) focuses on the motherly aspects of women through the matrix of *Sohar* and Wedding songs.<sup>vii</sup> Finally, I. Srivastava (1991) presented a range of north Indian folksongs as a tool through a critical lens that helps women break and conform to prescribed gender roles. Asha Singh (2015) elaborated on migration in the Bhojpuri region, compared the men's articulation of migration to the songs of females, and traced the differences between the singing traditions of male and female performers. She has selected both men's and women's genres except Kajari songs. Neha Singh (2016) deals with the issues of suffering and struggles of women due to male migration and how these women articulated their grievances through songs (specifically *Bidesiya* culture and songs).<sup>viii</sup> Asha Singh (2017) refers to male-out migration in the Bhojpuri region from the perspective of left-behind women and songs as markers of protest for them. The paper discusses the varying emotions of left-behind women from the matrix of Kajari songs because scholars and academicians either introduced Kajari songs here and there or mentioned them concisely without drawing much critical conclusion in this specific genre.

## Research Methodology

The paper has adopted a qualitative approach to study the secondary data set (Kajari songs) collected from the five books on north Indian regional songs. Despite the availability of various North Indian folksongs, we limited our focus to a particular type of seasonal song (Kajari songs) of the North Indian region from the following five books- *Kajari* by Shanti Jain (2014), *Folk Songs from Uttar Pradesh* by Laxmi Ganesh Tewari (2006), *Cultural Background of Folksongs* (1972) By Vidya Chauhan, *Bhojpuri Gram Geet* (2000) and *Awadhi Lok Geet: A Collection of Awadhi Folklore* (1978) by Krishna Deva Upadhyay. This paper has specific inclusive criteria, such as including only Kajari songs and only those songs that depict the multifaceted nature of women's problems, like their coping strategies with the male migration through songs and how the phenomenon of male migration affects their intimate relationships, and psychological issues resulting from separation and communication gap hardships. A total of 30 songs are selected from the books mentioned above. This paper uses songs as an expressive cultural tool for women to conform to or confront the patriarchal notion of gender roles. These songs are translated into prosaic English from the Devanagari script and translated reverse to maintain the translation standard. The data presented here were analyzed, and patterns were observed, categorized, and represented using six-phased thematic analysis procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke in 2006 (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This paper uses the concepts of emotional regulation and narrative identity as a theoretical lens to understand the intricate ways these musical expressions serve as therapeutic narratives and identity construction. Emotion is a mental state accompanied by various psychological changes. It can be experienced as both positive and negative, fleeting, and prolonged with varying intensity (Gillespie & Beech, 2016). Due to music's potent emotional impacts, individuals may wish to use it in various ways to regulate their emotions. For instance, some people might wish to become more positive emotionally or utilise unpleasant emotions to accomplish a particular objective (Tamir, 2009). Similarly, women use folk songs to regulate and channel their animosities and frustrating emotions as Lonsdale and North (2011) highlighted that listening to music regulates/manages the different moods. McAdams (2001) proposed that people create their identity through constructing the stories about their lives. Similarly, McLean, Pasupathi, and Pals (2007) have developed a sociocultural model of narrative identity and suggested that narrative identity builds slowly over time as people tell stories about their experiences to and with others. The idea of folk songs as emotional regulators is aligned with the concept of narrative identity as they construct and negotiate their identities by conveying their experiences through folk songs. It further explores how women use them to make sense of their experiences and create a cohesive narrative.

## Male-Migration

Male-out migration is a prevalent phenomenon in the north Indian region. Migration gave birth to distinct folk culture in the Bhojpuri region (Singh, 2016), where *Biraha* (a genre of folksong performed by the *Ahir* community), *Bidesiya*, and *Kajari* are some of the most popular and celebrated genres among the locals.<sup>ix,x</sup> After the abolition of Slavery (1833), the labor crisis arose in British controlled colonies since labors of the Bhojpuri region were highly trained in sugar cultivation and production of jaggery, it triggered the colonizers to convert the northward section of Indian continent into a big market to fulfil the need of Labor crisis (ibid). Transportation of laborers from the rural areas in Bhojpuri agricultural society initiates the process of creative production in the history of orality (especially folksongs) (Singh, 2017). Such male out-migration compelled men to leave their women, family, and land behind, and the resultant suffering and stress of these left-behind women took a creative shift. These songs embody their sorrow, frustration, sense of loss and longing. As Roy (2011) pointed out, prolonged physical separation and accumulated workload and responsibilities tend to increase left-behind women's mental stress. Such emotions are expressed vividly in the following lines-

*Piya tajake hamke gaile paradesava na,* (Jain, 77)

*You deserted me and went to a foreign land,*

Though leaving the native place is a practical strategy to improve the economic and social status, it haunted the left-behind women constantly. These women let their emotions vent out through these words. It also suggests that sometimes, these men develop a parallel family and never return to their homeland, which adds to their insecurities. These songs traced the historical factors of migration and external and internal migration patterns. Most *Kajari* songs are termed migration destinations *Pardes* or *bides* (Foreign Land). Many songs, such as *Mirzapur*, *Bengal*, *Rangoon*, *Braj*, and *Mathura*, specify migration destinations.

*Sone ke thali me jevana parosalo; Jevana na jevale.*

*Hari mor chalale Bangal.* (Upadhyay, 335)

*I served him on the golden plate; but he did not eat.*

*He left me and went to Bengal.*

*Aap gaye madhubanava are sawanva* (Jain, 77)

*Oh sawan! He went to Madhuban* (Braj Region).

It is believed that the rainy season or sawan stimulates women's sexual desires, resulting in the unsatisfied desires of youthful wives further aggravated by the migration of young men. A left-behind woman's mind is occupied with her husband's absence, and there is a constant hope of their return. Though the separation of the wife from the husband resulting from migration appears to be an accepted behavioral trait (ibid., 32), these songs still provide a cathartic effect and assist them in expressing their rage and resentment. Kajari songs underline the desperation that women experience in connection with the mass migration of male labour (DeNapoli, 2013).

## Second Wife

There is always the psychological pressure that women are prone to succumb to their inborn insecurity concerning the presence of the 'Other' women in the lives of their spouses (Roy, 2011). Many sayings and songs address the issue of the second wife frequently. The left-behind women address this issue as a social problem threatening their societal position. Their fear and insecurity about other women may be the reason for their lamenting songs during the absence of their husbands (Singh, 2015). Along with expressing their collective pain, they used these songs to criticize their husbands and challenge the societal norms that legitimize this practice of bringing a co-wife or developing a parallel family at the migration destination. There are specific reasons based on which society justifies this practice, such as barrenness or failure to bear a male child, inability to perform household duties, and men's frivolous nature (Bhatnagar, 1985).

*Gaye hamase karake ghata suna' sautina ke sath*

*nahi bhejale jabse gaile sanesava na.* (Jain, 77)

*You betrayed me and went with another woman*

*You did not even send any message.*

As mentioned earlier, along with economic, social, and personal problems, the fear of the second wife also enhances their suffering and sense of insecurity. Due to their frivolous nature, these men take another wife or develop a parallel family at the migration destination. The issue of a second wife threatens the position of these left-behind women in society. Therefore, they treat it as a collective social problem. Since the patriarchal structure of society does not allow women to question male authority, they register their complaints in a very subtle way and release stress and tension through such songs.

Since the nomenclature Kajari is associated with Lord *Krishna*, and his departure from *Vrindavan* is sometimes treated as the subject matter of Kajari songs. Therefore, *Kubja* (A hunchbacked lady

from Mathura whom Krishna met, rescued, and beautified) is used here as a metaphor for a second wife or co-wife. Kubja invited him to her house. Mention is there in the *Bhagvat Puran* that Lord Krishna went and fulfilled her desire as she was mesmerized by his charm. These women use the metaphor of the hunchbacked woman to denote this issue of other wives. She symbolizes the other women in the Bhojpuri region. Many songs address the other women as hunchbacked women associated with Krishna and Kubja or Kubija whom Lord Krishna has rescued and made beautiful (Singh, 2015: 180).

*hamake bhulaile aise bhaile niramohiya rama*

*hari jay base kubadi ke bhavanava re hari.* (Jain, 76)

*He has deserted me and become ruthless,*

*He settled in the house of a hunchbacked woman.*

Therefore, the issue of the second wife, the cause of their further deprivation is expressed through these songs. Though they cannot possess the ability to transform their situation or resolve their problem, singing out these insecurities and fears provides comfort and has a relaxing effect on their mind. Narayan has also mentioned that in folksongs, where women sing out their anxiety and fear, such performances relieve nature and provide comfort (Narayan, 1997).

## Malevolent Nature

Nature is an acting agent in constructing the consciousness and identity of a community. The images and visuals created in folksongs are rooted in people's cognition. Folksongs use culture-specific images and metaphors across the world. Despite having many standard features, folksongs have certain culturally determined features worldwide (kóczy, 2018). 'Avifauna Imagery' (Sharma, 2020: 99) (bird imagery) is prevalent in different cultures and communities. Usually, nature is associated with the soothing effect or benevolence. However, in Kajari songs, natural elements such as birds, wind, rain, and clouds all have negative effects on the body and mind of women due to the predominant emotion of separation. The visual impressions of natural phenomena are essential and "elementary experiences" of peasants regarding the world, which fill their imagination and give rise to attaching associative meanings to them (ibid., 14). Nature is presented here as a harsh enemy inflicting pain on *Virahini* or *Viyogini* (Henry, 2016).<sup>xi</sup> Every part of nature and surroundings, even inanimate objects, appear painful and unwanted. Instead of providing comfort and relief, these elements intensify the pain of *virahini*. Even the empty beds, flowering mahua tree, the feeling of the warm breeze, the hovering bee, the nightingale's song—all these help to suggest the Sringar-Ras, the erotic feeling combined with the pain of separation (ibid).

*Agan gagan sakhi bahat purvai rama,*

*Marat piya dukh bhari re hari.* (Upadhyay, 138-139)

*O, dear friend, the Purva wind is blowing,*

*It makes the pangs of separation fatal.*



A breeze or wind has a comforting impact on human beings in the rural Indian setting, but the Purva wind (Easterly wind) acts as an enemy here. The same beneficial wind is a pain inflictor for a left-behind woman whose husband is away from her. Nature torments her mind during the absence of her husband. Therefore, each element of nature contributes to the pain of left-behind women as the moon seems hot to a wife due to the separation, the heat in the lotus leaves, and the cuckoo's melodious voice seems harsh. Even the gentle wind seems painful to a woman experiencing separation (Upadhyay, 2020: 347-48).

*Chali thandi pawan mora jiya larje.* (Jain, 78)

*The cold breeze intensifies the pain in my heart.*

*Suni-suni mor papihan ki dhuni,*

*Jobana fadake na.* (Jain, 81)

*The voice of cuckoo and peacock,*

*they make my youth pine for my lover.*

Sounds of birds, such as peacocks, cuckoos, and beetles, seem unpleasant to these women, and these sounds heighten the pain of separation. Even their sweet voice is unbearable for them because it makes their hearts pine for their absent husbands and lovers. Natural elements assume the role of conspirer and impact these women contrary to their nature. Birds are symbolically used as thematic material as the cries of the bird *Papiha* remind the separated women of their husbands (Achuthan, 1987).<sup>xii</sup> Kajari songs are primarily associated with the rain and the monsoon month. The same rain that is a boon for fields appears as a reason for their turbulent state of mind, which is evident in this line, '*It is raining and lightning that tempts my heart*' (Upadhyay, 2020). In the Bhojpuri region, the same rain, and clouds function as a life-giver to millions of peasants but the same function as an enemy for left-behind women. Therefore, rain is unpleasant and painful for those separated from their husbands/lovers (ibid., 355).

## **Sexual Desire**

Male out-migration is still a prominent issue in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and some parts of Bihar. It creates a new culture of lamenting women and causes mental instability due to unconsummated marriages, unfulfilled desires, and unarticulated emotions. Due to the societal structure of rural areas, they are not allowed to express their sexual longings and intimate desires, and if they do so, they are labelled as bad wives. Women are taught to control their sexual desires; if not, they face societal wrath (Roy 2011). These songs provide them with gender-segregated space to articulate the unarticulated desires that are often unmet. They can sing what they cannot speak in the patriarchal society. Folklore adequately engages with the narratives that deal with female sexuality explicitly (Raheja & Gold, 1994). Mostly, these songs are like coded messages or 'hidden transcripts' (ibid., 26) that can be decoded easily by an insider rather than an outsider. Folksongs play an essential role in maintaining the sanity of these women and function as an appropriate outlet for such painful situations. Through songs, women discuss the issues of sexuality, physical

desires, and erotic pleasures (Dlamini, 2009). In Kajari songs, these women sing their sexual longing overtly and covertly, but the latter find much space in their repository.

*Gavana le aaye ghar baithaye. (Jain, 77)*

*He dumped me hereafter performing gavana.*

Gavana is a post-marriage ritual where the woman is brought from her natal home to her marital home. However, the word is treated here in a symbolic way to express the intimate issues of women. Performing gavana symbolizes the consummation of marriage and connotes the sexual act. Since they cannot share their views or express their sexual desires explicitly, they voice them in the guise of songs. This view is also supported by Singh (2017), as she wrote that this ritual marks her puberty and symbolizes the consummation of marriage. However, women use these images that are culture-specific and not entirely comprehensible by outsiders.

*Khadi bheeru piya tore anganawa,*

*Bhar de rangile Manmohan, meri khali padi hai gagariya. (Jain, 78)*

*Oh, my dear husband, I am standing alone under the rain in your courtyard,*

*Oh, my beloved husband, Fill this empty pot.*

The lines mentioned above indicate the ambience and arousal of sexual imagery. Words used for addressing the partner or lover suggest the speaker's mood. Here, the speaker treats the woman as an empty pot or container that needs to be filled by her husband. The present image connotes the need for the fulfilment of sexual desires.

*Bhari uthat hook jiyara me,*

*Sooni dekh sejariya na.*

*Tum bin nath kate nahi ratiya,*

*Talafe jaise machariya na. (Jain, 79)*

*When I see the empty beds,*

*the night seems longer than usual without you,*

*As it agonized me like a fish.*

Though the images created by these women are very commonplace and ordinary, the images incorporate deeper meanings. The image of an empty bed without a husband and fish (out of the water) has sexual connotations. She is pining for her husband's love and intimacy; the long night adds to this longing. The image of fish is compared with the sexually unsatisfied woman. Like the lack of water torments the fish, so is the case with women. The woman is undergoing the same pain in the absence of her partner because of her unfulfilled erotic needs. Words for fruits also connote sexual desires (Barman, 2019). Since there is always male surveillance, they sing it with the help of sexual imagery such as ripe fruits, gavana, empty beds or beds decorated with scented flowers, and serving foods on a plate. All these images connote singing their sexual frustrations.

*Asi baras ke bhaya budha tu jas hamar parababa rama*



*hari ham barahai baris ke abahi bala re hari*

*jab lag cadhe javani hampar taba laga tu mari javya rama. (Jain, 82)*

*Oh, Rama! You are as old as my grandfather,*

*Oh, Hari! I am a young girl of twelve,*

*When I arrive at puberty, you will be near your death.*

Child marriage is a widespread practice in rural areas. Unmatched marriages and resultant problems between couples are prevalent issues. Moreover, the age disparity between couples prompts problems like physical and mental incompatibility. These songs raise their voice against such conservative practices and depict specific issues they are prohibited from speaking about daily. Similar views are found in Jassal's interpretation of the Kajari song, who pointed out that early marriages and alliances with substantially older men or those much younger and the resulting sexual incompatibilities are hinted at in this Kajari song (Jassal, 2012). This song also deals with one such unmatched marriage, and the bride is complaining about it and pointing toward the older men's sexual malfunction or impotence.

*Agiya lagaib baba aage agahanava,*

*Samaiya hamar bital ho naiharava. (Jain, 86)*

*This desire for consummation is unbearable for me,*

*I wasted my time here (In my natal house).*

Folk music contains implicit and explicit instances of singing sexual desires and intimate scenes. This song overtly expresses the desire for sexual craving and fulfilment; even her natal house does not provide solace. She wants to engage in sexual activities because it disturbs the peace of her mind. The song's idea of home, protection and identity is subverted as being in her house is a burden and waste of time for her. There is a longing for unity, intimacy, and hope for reconciliation in their hearts, leading them to mental breakdown and frustration. Songs are tools for coping with such silenced yet natural desires. Aastha Tiwari stated in her article about Rajasthani songs that these songs address sexual desires, cravings, intimacy, expectations, and eroticism (Tiwari et al., 2020).

In male-dominated societies, women are prohibited from speaking about their insecurities, longing, loneliness, and sexual desires because rural communities define these issues as taboos. Women are not supposed to discuss such things in a social space. The song is crucial for women who address such issues and do not find any voice in day-to-day life because society treats them as taboos (Dlamini, 2009). They transgress the boundaries of a patriarchal society through songs.

### **Conformist and Resisting Women**

Folksong portrays women as either conforming to gender roles or raising their voices against injustice and inequalities imposed on them by society simultaneously. Women are classified as 'good' (traditional) and 'bad' (immoral) across the nations. Good women adhere to the norms and roles provided by society, whereas bad women defy such gender stereotyping. Kajari songs

perpetuate similar ideas about women and incorporate the stereotypical image of conformist and resisting women. They appear as non-conformists who are disdainful of social restraints prepared to challenge the established authority of social norms and customs, and willing to forcefully articulate the injustices and inequalities to which she is subjected (Srivastava, 1991). Some of the songs describe them as submissive and acquiescent; others depict them as bold, daring, and rebellious (ibid., 282) because Kajari songs capture their daily domestic struggles when they sing about the performance of gender roles both in the fields and daily chores.

*sona ke thali me jevana parosa hari jevana liye hama thadhi*

*kaha rahi jale hari*

*jhanjhar gedua gangajal pani hari paniya liye hama thadhi*

*kaha rahi jale hari* (Chauhan, 245)

*I served the food on a golden plate, and I waited with the food the whole night,*

*Where do you stay at night?*

*I have arranged water in a jug, and I waited with water the whole night,*

*Where do you stay at night?*

It shows the conformist and subversive attitude at the same time. A woman performs all the household chores and questions her husband's night stay elsewhere, which further implies objection to her husband's alternate sexual alliances with another woman. Images like performing household duties, bearing and nurturing children, and endlessly waiting for the husband's arrival strengthen the idea of submissive women in folksongs. Similarly, the delightful food and beverages are consistently followed by the presentation of aromatic betel leaves and a seductive bed adorned with petals, symbolizing intimate moments. Nevertheless, the ongoing refusal of these tempting treats intensifies a sense of avoidance and rejection, ultimately deepening women's sexual dissatisfaction and letdowns. (Jassal, 2012: 147-148).

*Sasu ke dant battisi re bahu ki bahi godana*

*sasur jevana na jevela mora nihare godana*

*jahu hama janati sasur niharaba tu godana*

*sasura nahi re godaito apan bahi godana* (Upadhyay, 335)

*Mother-in-law has artificial teeth, and daughter-in-law has a tattoo on her arm.*

*My father-in-law is staring at my tattoo instead of eating,*

*If I was aware of your nature that you would stare at my tattoo,*

*Oh, Father-in-law! I will not have this tattoo.*

This song shows the wicked nature of males in society as the father-in-law continuously stares at his daughter-in-law's tattoo. However, in rural areas, it is prohibited for the father-in-law to see the face of the daughter-in-law. She could not say anything against the head of the family, but she denounces such behavior in her song. She said she would not have it if she had been aware

of the male gaze. Their attitude of questioning, rejecting material possessions and singing the obscene and taboo creates the subversive dialogue in folksongs. Thus, Women's songs and narratives consistently craft satirical and rebellious critiques of how gender and familial roles are portrayed in epic texts, male-dominated folklore genres, and a significant portion of everyday discourse (Raheja & Gold, 1994).

*jo mor saiya tuhu jaiba bidesava tu bidesava jaibo na*  
*hamar bhaiya ke bolav ham naiharva jaibo na*  
*jo mora dhaniya tuhu jaibu naiharva jaihu na*  
*jatana lagal ba rupaiya otna dei ke jaihu na* (Chauhan, 246)  
*Oh, dear wife, if you want to go home,*  
*Return the money that I have spent on you.*  
*Oh, my husband, if you want your money back,*  
*Make me (a virgin) as I was at my father's home.*

These women outwit their male counterparts and challenge males' stereotypical outlook through their witty dialogues. The wife wants to go to her natal home, but the husband demands the money he spent on her, compels her to bring up the issue of virginity. To prove her point, she said if you ask for money, will you be able to return my virginity or make me as I was at my father's house? Thus, displaying the intellectual and courageous nature of the same women. Here, even representation of their suffering through the singing became a subversive act. Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger asserted that although songs may not 'directly challenge existing social and cultural structures, the performance of an alternative may become subversive' (Flueckiger, 2018: 103). They counter the societal impositions through a bold and vulgar use of language as they cannot use such language within the structural boundaries of society. As Veena Das asserts, 'Folk performances would belong to poetry and stand outside the male order of law and language' (Gold, 1997: 108). In folksongs, these women do not act as passive observers but break the silence and register their protest. They sing, criticize, and condemn men's frivolous nature and social evils like untimely marriage and ill-treatment by husband's family members.

These expressive art forms are a treasure trove of rural women. Their songs gave them an identity they were deprived of in the real world. Having a social space apart from male surveillance has fostered an arena where women create and sustain self-representations that privilege women's points of view (Narayan, 1987). These songs challenge the social setup and its imposing and subjugating hegemonic ideologies. These performances do not reflect a previously existing and congealed social reality but constantly create, recreate, authorize, or undermine the everyday world's social practices and cultural forms (Raheja, 1997). Their wit and repartee undermine these oppressive and hegemonic ideas. Their repertoire of songs reflects their effective negotiations within the patriarchal setup. Though these songs cannot bring any radical or significant transformations in their situation, they are instrumental in expressing their internal feelings and hopes. These songs offer startling commentary on women's lives in contexts that otherwise seem, in various ways, to have silenced women or at least made them invisible, especially in public discourse (Jassal, 2012).

## Mental and Physical Suffering

Husband's absence, financial burden, and additional workload induce left-behind women's physical and mental deterioration. They have to perform tiresome household duties along with work in the fields. Moreover, these women experience mental trauma from their insecurities, anxiety, fear, and frustrations as their husbands live in a strange city. In addition, a complete lack of communication further traumatized their mind. Patriarchal society's norms also contribute to their suffering. The ethos of the state, coupled with patriarchy, has increased the vulnerability of women to physical and mental pains; there are songs deeply soaked in the psychophysical pain of women (Shekhawat, 2020).

*din bhar baithi mai ankh bichaye,  
rati mai dekhau sapanava re sawanva* (Jain, 77)  
*I eagerly waited for you the whole day,  
Oh, sawan! I dreamed about you at night.*

As mentioned earlier, the month of Sawan or the rainy season, torments the woman who is not with her husband, and the constant hope of her husband's return upsets her mental peace. She wants reconciliation with her husband, but it is impossible in his absence. Now, her unconscious mind is also occupied with the thought of her husband. Even the shower, the light air and the thunder make the husband's absence more unsufferable and make their pain unbearable (Kaur & Dwivedi, 2018). One of the songs quoted below by Archana K. Roy, in her book *Distress Migration and 'Left Behind' Women* (2011), captures the mental stress of left-behind women-

*Rahari me ghunela rahari ke khuntiya, gagri me ghune ho pisanava  
Goriya je ghunele apan naiharva, piyava ghunele kalkatava.* (Roy, 177)  
*The field is lying untilled, the floor in the earthen pot is rotting inside the home,  
the wife is rotting in her father's home, and the husband is rotting away in Kolkata,*

During the non-availability of a husband, the whole world seems futile and useless for the woman. She sees no activity inside and outside as everything has stopped because her husband is not with her. She tries to find her life's purpose while staying in her natal home, just like her husband is struggling and wasting his time in Kolkata. Multiple factors are responsible for their mental and physical suffering. The lack of physical companionship is one of them, as men stay in distant places because of migration. In addition, many left-behind women experience heightened psychological stress from their husbands' absence (Roy, 2011).

*Kahele Jageshar piyava nahi ghare aile rama,  
Khai bikh tjab paranava re hari.* (Jain, 76)  
*Oh, Rama! My husband did not return home,  
Oh, Hari! I will commit suicide by drinking poison.*

These women have to undergo the pain on two levels- Physical and Mental. They are left behind physically and mentally and hope their husbands will return. Present troubles, insecurities, and the

absence of their husbands increased their psychological problems, prompting them to commit suicide. Kajari songs suggest that prolonged separation due to the absence of husbands leads them to develop a tendency to suicidal thoughts. Since the migrating population is primarily young, newlywed wives must suffer a lot as the scholars stated that sexual frustration among younger women was high (Arnold & Irfan, 1983).

*Dehava galela jaise noon ho.*

*Hiyava ke marma baidavo na jane*

*Lagal karejava me ghoon ho.* (Jain, 79)

*My health is deteriorating day by day,*

*But nobody knows the pain in my heart,*

*These thoughts kill me day by day.*

The song perfectly exemplifies these women's mental and physical problems during their husbands' migration. A woman's health degenerates gradually because of anxiety resulting from the thoughts of her husband's well-being and whereabouts. Such problems intensify in the lack of physical presence and the communication gap with the husband. The marriage of girls at an early age also becomes the cause of their mental and physical problems. Imagining life without their husbands is painful for them. These women and young wives long for physical and psychological support from their husbands. Collectively, these disturbing emotions affect their physical health as well. These songs incorporate varying emotions of these left-behind women and help them vent out these disturbing emotions. They help them lighten the burden of their daily chores and provide an escape from the dire consequences of mental breakdown.

## **Conclusion**

These cultural practices and expressive traditions form a composite image of a social group, particularly a country. These songs are the aesthetic resources through which one can probe into the psyche of these deserted and lonely women. Their verbal art can capture women's joys and sorrows, struggles, insecurities, and many emotions. Due to its cathartic nature, it becomes an integral part of their day-to-day lives. It provides a sense of comfort and hope to the women left behind. In his lecture titled 'To Explain Tradition', Elliott Oring discusses the reasons for disappearing art forms. He said, "These traditional products are dying out in the wake of the industrial revolution. However, they must be documented before they vanish entirely (Oring, 2021)." H. Bergson's metaphor of the safety valve appropriately defines the cathartic component as it helps them release pressure nonthreateningly to the system (Jassal, 2012). So, such songs address unheard emotions, grievances and unregistered protests. Since figurative and metaphorical language forms a hidden transcript or a coded message in these songs, it will be an excellent area to address. Future research should strategically examine the use of literary devices in Kajari songs and changes in the level of themes, vocabulary, and performances in these songs.

Folk song is a traditional form of entertainment, but not limited to it, as it provides a personal space for performative expressions. Further, they serve as an escape from the harsh realities of

daily life for both the performers and participators. These songs are verbal expressions of their inner emotional state. In order to understand the culture of loss and pain of these left-behind women, it is essential to document and preserve these traditional practices of communities or social groups. Such creative practices are one of the mediums through which they construct their identity and locate meaning in an everyday context. These songs function as an agency through which they accept, negotiate, interrogate, and register their protest. Jassal shared a similar view and observed that songs not only provide creative amusement but also 'serve to induce feelings of solidarity, develop, nurture interrogation skills, and sharpen the women's negotiation power (Kumar 69). Multiple reasons are responsible for the declining popularity of indigenous practices of this type. For instance, the mechanization of agricultural activities, modernist aversions to conventional indigenous cultural practices, and post-globalization access to easy-to-consume means of entertainment defer young girls from participating in such tedious rituals (ibid., 71). Kajari songs have their significance and value in the traditional north-Indian folk culture as they can be considered a storehouse of the social, economic, mental, and bodily narratives of native women. They motivate them to acknowledge and confront the consequences of daily life, including unhappy marriage, relative deprivation, and a sense of loss.

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### **Endnotes**

- i. Caiti is a genre of northern folk singing tradition. Since it is sung in the month of Chaitra (March-April) therefore, it is named caiti.
- ii. Barahamasa is another seasonal song like Kajari and caiti. These songs mention all the twelve Hindu months and express the pain and longing of women in the absence of their husbands or lovers.
- iii. Since fag is sung in the month of Falgun (Mid-February to Mid-March), thus is known as fag. Men on the Holi festival in India mainly perform in this genre.
- iv. Vindhyachal refers to multiple meanings such as place, goddess Vindhyachal and the Vindhya Mountain range.
- v. Kajjalla is another name for the goddess of Vindhyachal. The Kajari festival starts with the song offered at this temple in the month of Sawan.
- vi. Mirzapur is a district known for Kajari songs as the genre originated and disseminated from the other parts of the region.
- vii. Sohar falls under the category of ceremonial songs. These songs are sung during childbirth, especially on the birth of a boy.
- viii. Bidesiya is a theatrical art form and a singing tradition. Bhikhari Thakur was the father and significant practitioner of this art form. Males mainly perform the genre about their migration, nostalgia, and homesickness.



- ix. The literal meaning of birha is Virah (separation), as these songs have a strong sense of pathos. The Ahir community sings these songs.
- x. Ahir is a community of cowherds.
- xi. Virahini or viyogini is a woman living alone during her husband's absence.
- xii. Papiha, or Common Hawk Cuckoo, is a bird that symbolizes the helplessness and longing of departed lovers. The image of Papiha is very prominent in the folk singing tradition of India.

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## Appendix

(1) Gori bahiya sabuj rang cunari  
piya chodi caleni ho paradesava  
jau tuhu chodi cale paradesava  
bataye jau gunava ho augunava

(2) Piya tajake hame gaile paradesava na  
gaye hamase karake ghata suna' sautina ke satha  
nahi bhejale jabase gaile sanesava na  
nahi kala dina rat jaba se cadhal barasat  
kaba aihai mohe ehi ba andesava na

(3) Aile savanava ghare nahi re sajanava rama  
hari dekhe bina tarase mora nayanava re hari  
hamake bhulaile aise bhaile niramohiya rama  
hari jay base kubadi ke bhavanava re hari

(4) Hari aye sawan mas  
sajana ghara nahi re hari  
hamase kari karar gaye sajan  
begi dhana ghari aibau re hari  
hari na ghar aye syam  
likhe nahi pati re hari

(5) Aise mausam me mulayam jiyara  
dhada dhadake na  
damaki damini dau mari  
tada tadake na  
jhumi jhuki kala badarava  
kada kadake na

(6) Piya nahi aye bhavanava are sawanva  
Gauna le aye ghar baithaye  
aap gaye madhubanava are sawanva  
din bhar baithi mai ankh bichaye  
rati mai dekhau sapanava re sawanva

(7) Karu kauna jatana ari o ri sakhi  
more nayano se barase badariya  
udi kali ghata badal garaje  
cali thandi pavan mor jiya larje  
thi piya milan ki aas sakhi  
parades gaye more savariya

(8) Saiyan bilami rahe paradesava  
sapanehu dikha suratiya na  
sawan mas garaj ghana barase  
cahu disi jhuki andheriya na  
bina piya jiya rahi ghabarave  
cama camake bijuriya na  
piya rat rahyo papiha  
koo karat koyaliya na  
bhari uthat hook jiyara me  
suni dekha sejriya na

(9) Asi baras ke bhaya budha tu jas hamar parababa rama  
hari ham barahai baris ke abahi bala re hari  
jab lag cadhe javani hampar taba laga tu mari javya rama  
hari tab hamar fir hoy kaun haval re hari

(10) Kothava par bole kothi vala ho ciraiy  
ki banava me bolela ho banava morava  
morava ke boli suni bihare karejava  
se kai d' baba ho hamaro gavanava

(11) Hari kaha bade tum rat kaha rahi jale hari  
sona ke thali me jevana parosa hari jevana liye hama thadhi  
kaha rahi jale hari  
jhanjhar gedua gangajal pani hari paniya liye hama thadhi  
kaha rahi jale hari

(12) Sasu ke dant battisi re bahu ki bahi godana  
sasur jevana na jevela mora nihare godana  
jahu hama janati sasur niharaba tu godana  
sasura nahi re godaito apan bahi godana

(13) Runjhun khola na kevadiya ham bidesava jaibo na  
jo mor saiya tuhu jaiba bidesava tu bidesava jaibo na  
hamar bhaiya ke bolav ham naiharva jaibo na  
jo mora dhaniya tuhu jaibu naiharva jaihu na  
jatana lagal ba rupaiya otna dei ke jaihu na

(14) Rahari me ghunela rahari ke khuntiya  
gagri me ghune ho pisanava  
goriya je ghunele apan naiharva  
piyava ghunele kalkatava

(15) Mirzapur kaila gulzar ho  
kacauri gali sun kaile balamu  
ehi mirzapur se udale jahajiya  
piya cali gaile ho rangoon ho| kacauri gali  
panva le patar piya tor dhaniya  
dehiya galela jaise noon ho| kacauri gali  
hiyva ke maram baidavo na jane  
lagal karejava me ghun ho| kacauri gali

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