perhaps in this way, by conveying a woman’s image peculiar to Rajasthani women oral traditions, that Chundawat’s recentering genuinely roots in a Rajasthani folk tradition.

Well before the 18th century, Carans and other bards had produced many written versions of Mumal’s story, which they spread beyond the limits of Thar on the whole of the geographical area of the future state of Rajasthan. These texts were rediscovered by the learned elites who, shortly after the creation of the state of Rajasthan in 1949, undertook to preserve their cultural heritage and to build a regional identity. Published in 1957 in one of the many folkloristic reviews which had just sprung up, one of these manuscripts constituted the hypotext of Chundawat’s retelling. Chundawat added a new link to the already long chain of recenterings and thus participated to the traditionalisation and regionalisation of the story. The study of the successive recentrings does not only make it possible to discover the various meanings which were given to the story, but also illuminates the way this story of Thar became a story of Rajasthan. The investigation of recentering is thus meaningful in more than one way.

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Singing Texts and Reading Chapbooks: the Bhojpuri Tradition

Catherine Servan-Schreiber

In spite of the conventional assertion that India favours oral culture, compared to the West, in many a case, several factors show that the world of the oral performance is not cut off from other medias, whether graphic or written expressions. Long before the popularisation of printing, those of the singers who could write and read would note down the content of their songs in small exercise-books known as puthi. But what is true for traditional village singers, both man or woman, is even more in the case of the wandering singers. Regarding the long medieval epics, or gatha, sung by the bhojpuri wandering singers, their memorisation is the more difficult, as musical rhythm is quite irregular and contents are not necessarily versified. Furthermore, as the singers most often perform outside the native village, they cannot bring their children along to train them, and let them benefit the performing moment to impregnate themselves with the gathas contents, as it is the case in the qawwali tradition, for instance, where children often attend the singing session inside the very singing group. Such reasons may lead a singer to readily appeal to the help either of puthi or of printed booklets. In the same time, the public’s taste for the gathas auditions and the eagerness to await the arrival of the wandering singers are undoubtedly reinforced by the purchase and reading of gatha under the form chapbooks versions. Hence, the question of the memorisation and transmission of bhojpuri gathas cannot be broached without an inquiry into the chapbook printing industry.

1. Oral performance and the selling of chapbooks: striking coincidences

Among the four main trends which have inspired the bhojpuri tradition of gatha (the mystic quest of the Shaivite Naths, the desire to glorify the chivalric tradition of the Rajputs, the mercantile vocation of the nomadic castes, and the pervasiveness of Sufism), all the repertories have interesting parallels.

They are to be found in other South Asian contexts too:
- In the case of the zawal tradition, which is closely related to the gatha tradition, Caran’s story is actually a rewriting of the story of a man searching for the succession of the throne of a large kingdom, which is a typical story of the zawal tradition.
- In the case of the qawwali tradition, the story of Mumal is similar to the story of a man searching for the succession of the throne of a large kingdom, which is a typical story of the qawwali tradition.
- In the case of the song tradition, the story of Mumal is similar to the story of a man searching for the succession of the throne of a large kingdom, which is a typical story of the song tradition.

The parallels are striking, and they suggest that the tradition of gatha is not isolated, but is part of a larger tradition of storytelling.
themselves on never using any chapbook version, all other artists do. Though it is not as obvious as the silk industry or the glass bangles craftsmanship, the market of bhojpuri chapbooks is an urban phenomenon which is very successful. An inquiry into the popular printers of chapbooks and on their sales policy reveals the wide scale of the sector, inside the bhojpuri-speaking belt as well as outside of it. The most active of the bhojpuri printers, and the oldest, is certainly Thakur Prasad, of Kachauri Gali, in Varanasi. He is the owner of two presses, one in Bombay and another one in Varanasi. He has published all the titles of the epic repertoire, including folk songs, kahans, (prose stories), kissa (stories from arabo-persian origin), and popular dramas. His tiny shop in the narrow lane of the bazaar is always busy with customers. The price of a chapbook varies from 10 to 25 rupees. The printrun is usually 1000 copies for one title. Chapbooks are not only sold at his shop, but also sent throughout UP, Bihar and Calcutta, in Mahatma Gandhi Road, where he has opened a branch.

In Patna, the commercial orientation of the printing press, Narayan and Co, in the area of Salimpur, is slightly different. It has specialised in the printing of successful popular songs and film songs, together with gathas. The printrun is from 1000 to 5000 copies. D.N. Lal, the owner, has published all the titles of the bhojpuri songs repertoire, gatha and dramas. He sells about 10,000 copies of gatha chapbooks, and 50,000 copies of songs chapbooks a year. The chapbooks are diffused to Assam, Delhi, Bombay and Nepal.

In Calcutta, all the Bengali main printers of the Mahatma Gandhi Road contribute to the printing of bhojpuri folklore. For the last 50 years, Loknath Pustakalay founded by the Trivedi family, has an important clientele. His printruns are from 15,000 to 20,000, and he reprints the titles every two years. Next to him, Bholanath Pustakalay and Sachdev Prakashan also provide bhojpuri chapbooks.

The chauwatiya (chapbook), as well-known, is a small-size, cheap, light publication, easily carried and handled. Once printed, chapbooks are sent to numerous places of sale, either by train, lorries, or by special bicycles which hawkers have equipped with a thela (platform). But whereas this activity has vanished in Europe and it is still alive in north India. The paikar (pedlar) carrying two jholi (bags) full of chapbooks on his shoulders, sings the repertoire of epics while walking along the roads. His areas of sale are usually the maidan (circles of places) of big cities, bazaars, vicinity of railway stations, temples, dargah (tombs of the muslim saints), and mela (fairs). Sales are done either from small carts or straight on the pavement. On Calcutta maidan, every Sunday, while the singers of Alha-Udal perform the epic, the sellers of bhojpuri chapbooks are in the space around. On the Patna maidan, where the performance of Alha-Udal is a daily event in the month of July, many stands of chapbooks also await the customer. The annual itinerary of the wandering singer shows a great similitude with that of the paikar. Their performing places also quite often coincide with the selling places of printed gatha. Unless it would rather be the circulation of these chapbooks which follows the respective itineraries and halting places of the bhojpuri wandering singers.

2. From oral texts to printed chapbooks: The romanticisation of folklore

No doubt, the beginning of printing of bhojpuri folklore was linked to the colonial interests of British administrators. The collection of samples of bhojpuri epics was not undertaken for the sake of folklore, but in order to furnish good examples of the language to European officials, who were encouraged to learn the vernacular languages of the districts committed to their care. George Grierson, who had undertaken the first collection and edition of bhojpuri gatha, explained that ‘This would be not only equally practically useful, but would also be an assistance to students of philology in Europe, and to missionaries’ (Gupta, 1970, 45). At the time of the mass printing industry development, around 1880, the folklorists who collected gatha were belonging to the brahmanical minority. In the modern times, they are more the product of the literate segments of castes such as Yadavas, Koiris, Kurmis, Bhumihar Rajputs or Byaparis. Their name appears on the first page of the chapbooks, and sometimes, their pictures. The most prolific of these collectors was Mahadev Prasad Singh, from Shahabad district.

The matter of fidelity of a printed version to an oral one, from which it derives, has been often debated. As a pioneer in discussing the transmission of oral texts, G. Grierson himself often insisted on his faithfulness to the oral version he had: ‘The song is published exactly as it was taken down for me from an itinerant singer of the Shahabad district. I have allowed no theory of my own to interfere with the text obtained’ (Gupta, 1970, 137). According to the account of the father of Vishvanath Trivedi, the printer of Loknath Pustakalay of Calcutta, Mahadev Prasad Singh used to transcribe in the written form the entirety of the repertoire of the wandering singers who would regularly perform near the pond of his village. And the formule included in the printed texts clearly indicate the oral origin of the versions collected: ‘my friends, listen to my story’, or ‘noble audience, listen to my story’, or ‘And now listen to what is coming next’, ‘And now lets see what’s happening to so and so...’. But when it comes to the printing of chapbooks, the suspicion of far reaching transformations arises. Frances Pritchett notes that with the indian mass printing industry, ‘Ephemeral texts are produced’. They are controlled only by the publisher. They are often anonymous, often ascribed to an author who may be a plagiariser, translator, compiler or editor. Far more important, however, are those changes which affect the structure of the plot itself’ (1985, 20).

Between the oral performance of artists who sing a text, and the content of the bhojpuri chapbook which is printed, several major shifts are noticeable. Care is taken to soften the martial inclination of the bhojpuri hero. Blood shedding battles, kidnappings and rapes are not described as they are in the oral context. A concern for introducing moral and chaste values where the oral texts
show freedom of relation between men and women, is prevalent. While the bhojpuri folklore insists on a mystical quest or in a rajput ideal of land conquest, and leaves no place for love stories, the printing chapbooks with its more and more glamorous coverpages and illustrations, seem to emphasise a romantic view. Where oral and folk traditions insist on situations of rupture, the chapbook attempts to transform a folk culture into an idyllic pastoral world. These changing elements, once printed, may be incorporated in the oral performance and step by step change its nature.

Such transformations are not specific to the culture of Indian popular mass printing. The contribution of the chapbook literature, with its centralising impetus, has often been perceived as a factor in cultural impoverishment. This was the case in the history of the printing of French folklore in modern France (Muchembled 1978, 348-366). From the oral texts sung by wandering bards to a mass printing industry, printed folklore has gone through a series of changes, losing its caste specificity, and prevailing. While the bhojpuri folklore insists on a show freedom of relation between men and women, is

A pattern of sociability:

In spite of the competition of other medias, such as cassettes of folklore songs or filmi git, the taste of the public for the long versified gatha has not faded. For the bideshia (the bhojpuri worker outside the Bhojpuri Anchal), who, far away from home, enjoys listening to the oral performance, the buying of a chapbook is a means of keeping alive the link with his ancestral land, while waiting for the arrival of the wandering singers in his city of adoption.

Though much less appearing than religious chromos, the illustrations included in the chapbooks play an important role in the imaginary. Some of them, such as the scene when the wife of Bhartrihari faints as he comes to beg at the door of his palace, Prince Vijaymal playing the gulli danda, or Raja Kunvar Singh cutting himself his wounded arm in the middle of the Ganga River, are quite famous, and embody the bhojpuri pathos. They add a dramatic dimension to the oral performance, and increase the veracity of the character whose exploits are sung. The public has favourite passages of a story, like the arriving of Udal in the court of Alha, or the begging of alms by Bhartrihari from his mother. How the singer will perform, is the moment they expect. As long as the singer comes only once or twice a year in a village, reading the sung story in a chapbook recreates the intimate atmosphere of the oral performance and helps awaiting for this magic moment.

The question of the fidelity to an oral tradition is not very relevant in a domain where creativity constantly defines itself in the fertile space between oral and written forms. This circulation, back and forth, both of wandering singers and chapbooks, shows a pattern of sociability as rooted in an urban culture and in a rural one. It is a sign of the vitality of a popular literature which has managed to sustain itself despite massive social changes and competition.

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