

# SINGING LANGUAGES

*Regional Music Industries in the Hindi Belt*



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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY  
Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla

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*Dedicated to the memory of my late sister*

PRATIBHA [1957-1994]



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# Foreword

Although this monograph was submitted with the Indian Institute of Advanced Study [IIAS], Shimla by its due date in 2018, I had requested the concerned authorities to delay the publication with a specific end in view. I wanted to supplement my study on Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh with some further work in Jharkhand soon after my stint in Shimla [2016-2018] came to an end. The purpose was to expand the terrain of work geographically, linguistically and culturally, enabling me to use the rather expansive phrase 'Hindi belt' in the title with greater license. Thanks however to the climate of research grants in the subsequent period, my attempts to procure funds for work on Jharkhand failed repeatedly. Just as I was mustering up my personal resources to finance a research stint in Jharkhand, we were met with the miasmic gusts of the Covid pandemic that made all free-wheeling travel impossible for over two years. To avoid further delay, this volume thus has to go to the press largely as it was in 2018. My continuing work on the Hindi belt will have to await another volume and hopefully an adequate research grant.

My two years at the Institute of Advanced Study [IIAS], Shimla were made enormously fruitful with great help from the staff of the institute as well as the numerous colleagues who were freely available for wide-ranging discussions and rarely shied away from making incursions into academic fields far beyond their formal calling. Similarly, as area experts in a variety of fields, they rarely discouraged intruders who often came in with bold queries and hypotheses bordering on plain rampage, welcoming all such overtures with amused but encouraging gestures. The 'Thursday

Presentations,' [a weekly afternoon routine followed by high tea at the Fellow's Lounge] revered at the institute, had a lasting impact on many a Fellow who recovered from their long-held biases and theoretical tethers with great willingness and pleasure, and also hefted somewhat isolated scholars like me out of their well-practised ruts. Rather strikingly, even though it was pleasing to have one's work acknowledged by a colleague from the same or similar field, the fresh learning often came in the shape of queries and critique from Fellows attached to the most distant fields of research.

Often these discussions overflowed into the numerous uphill and downhill walks and get togethers at the Fellows' residences over glasses of tea and stronger beverages. What we all gained from the free and unclouded exchanges during the two-year stint is comparable to no other experience for its intensity but that perhaps of writing an early PhD, though without the formal constraints or concerns of career moves. It is indeed ironic how a rarefied intellectual atmosphere can smoothly land us back to native realities, whereas the hard realities of professional chores may only see us stuck over doctrinaire positions and stray away from the solid ground of fresh experience! Unlike the bureaucracies elsewhere, the often-amused IAS staff indulged our idiosyncrasies with affection and understood the irony well, thanks to their longstanding experience with 'half-mad professors' roaming its lordly corridors, since the late 1960s. The institute personnel, right across to its forever toiling gardeners, seemed aware that the relative isolation of the Fellows in Shimla has indeed fructified in dozens of masterly tomes published by the IAS in the last six decades. Their goodwill was also passed to the friendly shopkeepers of the Boileganj market down below, who saw us with awed reverence, as haloed visitors from an exoplanet who nevertheless require their daily grocery.

I thus have to express my deep gratitude to the institution and more concretely the people, the faces that crowd my mind as I write these lines. I do of course hope that the incoming generations of the Fellows at IAS will enjoy the same degree of effervescent freedom and spontaneous ease of debate and disagreements in

carrying out their self-assigned projects. For every chapter of a volume read in peace and quiet, for every item of empirical data analysed, the institute at Shimla offered the unique reward of a view of the hoary cedars and oaks, and on a clear day, the snowy peaks glistening on the horizon through the enormous viceregal windows. These deserve my gratitude too!



## CHAPTER I

# Introduction

### **Why a Comparative Study of the Regional Music Industries?**

This volume is a culmination of the research work carried out during the period May 2016-May 2018 in Shimla at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study [IIAS], and forms the basis for a comparison between the entertainment industries in Himachal, Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana. The study in Himachal was preceded by fieldwork in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh in 2009-10 and in Haryana in 2013-2014 along similar lines; the purpose being to map the growth of the regional cultures and languages through modern media technologies such as compact discs and the internet, and other props and vehicles of the digital format. It is important to declare at the outset that the research strategy employed in the three states differed somewhat and these differences were dictated by the practical situations on ground and also the methodological approach appropriate to the specific contexts. Such differences however do not affect the comparability of the three different regions since the chief research objectives remain entirely the same.

In the case of Himachal Pradesh, I was able to cover as wide a terrain for fieldwork as possible during the initial stint of research in 2016. The expectation was that over time a good overall scanning of the cultural terrain would reveal those prominent sites of research that deserve more attention than the rest, in order to lend depth and density to the final outcomes, embracing the selected regions from the Hindi speaking parts of India. The ethnographic

and secondary research were thus preceded by what may be termed a longish phase of reconnaissance in and around Shimla, its numerous suburbs and residential satellites, including the semi-urban countryside. Following the logic of fieldwork based on snowballing contacts thus, the monograph may seem somewhat uneven in terms of the findings presented. But in the chapters to follow, there will be a more detailed explanation for the choice of this research strategy. At this introductory stage, suffice it to say that looking at the cultural terrain of Himachal Pradesh on its own has helped me as a researcher to shed off likely biases carried from earlier work done in Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. It may seem overcautious to reiterate this but it seemed important for a substantial comparative study to look at each region on its own before getting down to elaborate comparisons. This can only be done by making due note of the concerns derived from the artists, producers and the personnel of the culture industry of the specific region, rather than a wholesale imposition of one's own preoccupations as impinging legacies from earlier studies. A similar research strategy was followed in the case of Haryana. The researcher ensured that he did not overwhelm his study of Haryana with concerns inherited from the preceding project on Bihar and this decision in hindsight proved vital to the success of the study in Haryana, opening up fresh and at times unforeseen sources and terrains of empirical material. To put it somewhat philosophically, it must be understood that the intent to compare by itself implies that the chosen entities are or must be comparable. The weight of such presumption is considerably lightened if one begins to look for the uniqueness of each entity with the same keenness that is devoted to the comparable features. In this sense, the present monograph carries what may be called a broad cultural topography of the Himachal region even though it may be lacking in detailed and in-depth information on some of the research sites and their relative significance. To put it more practically, after considerable sniffing around the cultural landscape, the researcher acquired sufficient clarity of purpose and planning to begin a more intensive quarrying of information and perspectives at the scrupulously selected sites. In plain workaday language the researcher would

like to admit that coming from Bihar, Haryana had earlier offered a slightly exotic and unfamiliar territory, whereas ethnographic work in Himachal definitely seems to address a yet higher degree of the 'exotic' or cultural distance, demanding a much more intense effort at empathy and understanding. This was naturally followed by admittedly greater levels of frustration over failures as well as satisfaction over insights gained through the grind of fieldwork and the probing queries that may have annoyed my numerous local interviewees. They had to bear the burden of their own puzzle in our recurrent encounters – namely, why should a visiting scholar target them with so many intense and often intricate queries over the mundane and 'taken-for-granted' matters of their daily lives? That many of them became friends over time and even looked forward to my visits may be taken as a validation of my work in the field. Even though the artists and other professionals in Bihar, Haryana and Himachal were pleased to find an outsider take such deep interest in their professional practices and life in general, and even took some pride in what they insisted on seeing as free publicity, they were also wary of being judged by an alien who promised to expose their interiors to the world far beyond their ken. All these complex reciprocities may make a researcher feel like an 'unreal' wraith shifting between myriad identities and roles on a daily basis. Such are the ironies of ethnographic work! Every return from the field and the ethnographer faces a fresh jigsaw of the self to be brought apart and reset all over again.

The research work in Himachal Pradesh began with what has become a basic assumption for the project now—namely, the regional languages spoken by significant populations in the Hindi speaking parts of the country have been able to use the digital media as vehicles of growth and expansion. This has allowed them to register their voluble presence in our soundscapes and public arenas, going far beyond the threshold of families and communities. This is definitely not a theoretical assumption but one based on fieldwork done earlier in the regions of Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. However, this happy tale of growth and expansion is not universally applicable. While a critical level of demographic allegiance may enable a relatively smaller language

to flourish, a sub-critical population may not be able to provide a sustainable market for the cultural products. This can be rather disabling and even drive a tongue to decimation if not extinction. In a rather tautological formulation for our purposes and a highly specific context here, one may define ‘criticality’ of the population by assessing the extent of growth evinced by the culture industry of the specific language; unless one is able to detect other valid indices such as a blatant lack of allegiance or support among the speakers of the language that may affect the fate of a language and culture. The hidden determinant, cutting through the tautological formulation here, is of course the set of technological affordances and their economic consequences for the specific locale.

On the other hand, the technologies associated with the digital media may accord what may seem like disproportionately greater advantages to the languages that were lacking in status and visible presence till some time ago. A good illustration may be provided by the cases of Bhojpuri and Maithili from Bihar—ironically, Maithili despite its long and celebrated literary status and its substantial wealth in print, often seems overwhelmed by Bhojpuri, especially in the realms of cinema and music, entirely perhaps due to the logic of numbers. The brute fact remains that Bhojpuri, with its population of 150 million or more, is able to swamp the entertainment industry in the region, leaving the Maithili speaking audience with little choice in the matter. What for instance Bhojpuri, Maithili or Magahi, the three prominent Bihari tongues and several others do have in common, is that they, together and separately, provide an alternate cultural space mostly alongside but occasionally in resistance towards the Hindi mainstream. This is thus, a story interweaving the issues of language and culture, of high, low and middlebrow aesthetic status as well as the political sociology of the region, seen through the lens of culture. The story is remarkable in that, right till the 1980s, the regional tongues seem to have shrunk away from wider literary circulation even within their own denoted regions, as Hindi made its unimpeded inroads with heightening literacy and urbanisation. There was a tacit consensus on how many, if not all the regional languages in the heartland have had their day and with the growth of literacy



may even evaporate or remain confined to museums and sundry print outlets. But the period between then and now has turned this belief upside down even though the growth has not been uniform, nor has it followed a common template. Each regional language and culture, despite the commonalities, seems to have had to carve its own pathway in the digital era. This research project is devoted to the study of these diverse pathways observed in the Hindi speaking areas of the country and the broader implications of this cultural process, that are nothing short of profound for India as a nation. More specifically, the present monograph aims to outline, in some depth, a hyphenated ethnographic journey through Bihar-eastern Uttar Pradesh-Haryana to Himachal Pradesh. The empirical material has of course enabled me as a researcher, to formulate wider theoretical observations and perspectives, and raise questions to be faced in the next phases of the project at other regional sites in the 'Hindi heartland' or somewhat less prejudicially labelled the 'Hindi Belt'.

The story of the present research begins with a brief stint in 2009, when a SRTT [Sir Ratan Tata Trust] funded project enabled me to rove around in the Bhojpuri speaking parts of Bihar with the aim of investigating the employment potential of the Bhojpuri music industry. The seeds of a deep puzzlement had been sown much earlier of course, in 2006, when I began to look at what then seemed a most unlikely explosion in the Bhojpuri film industry. A longer project on Bhojpuri cinema in 2009–10 took me to Bombay, where I was able to get a close view of the innards of the Bhojpuri film industry and its workings, including the entire production and distribution chain. This was inevitably followed by some serious hermeneutic reflections on the content of the new crop of Bhojpuri cinema. Behind the puzzlement lay a sneaking, though gargantuan assumption that I had harboured and shared with the Hindi/English speaking intelligentsia around me for years and had to jettison in a hurry within weeks of fieldwork. Before my encounter with the phenomenal rise of Bhojpuri cinema in early 2000s, the assumption had been that with a relatively thin presence in print and with no other variety of hope on the horizon, the story of Bhojpuri has perhaps, for all practical purposes come to an end,

except as a vestige, a nostalgic reminder of a past, or a stock of words and idioms to be selectively absorbed by the Hindi juggernaut. You may extend the same logic and the same sentiment to several other regional languages, of course. In fact, I thought Bhojpuri may soon find itself confined solely to domestic conversations and over time evaporate altogether as Hindi and English fully usurp the linguistic spaces at home and in public life, alternately cannibalizing or shoving out a rustic tongue with little conceptual capital or cultural energy. But the ethnographic fieldwork and persistent textual analysis of the films proved otherwise, every step of the way, persuading me to abandon a rather premature and blinkered bias. I soon came to realize that I was not dealing with languages without a future but with languages emerging from a brief period of dormancy to devise their varied futures with an eager assurance. Clearly, our relation with our languages is much more than utilitarian, functional or 'rational' and they lie at the very core of our mode of being among communities and nations.

There was yet another, and perhaps an equally outstanding surprise waiting for me just round the corner—at the onset of my fieldwork on Bhojpuri cinema in Mumbai, I had hastily and avidly presumed Bhojpuri films to be the presiding form of cultural production in the digital era. Repeatedly however, the film personnel in Mumbai reminded and reiterated to me that Bhojpuri music was a far greater industrial entity, with a size up to ten times [or more] than that of its film industry. My initial reaction to them came as an incredulous retort—why don't you switch to Bhojpuri music in that case? The film industry personnel, steeped in cinema and big money as they were, assured me that the music industry led them away from Mumbai and was an agglomeration of diminutive cottage industries compared to the enormous Mumbai monolith. Despite its cultural conspicuousness thus, the shiny fabric of Bhojpuri cinema hid behind itself, the overarching and omnipresent reality of its music. Significantly, the music industry, unlike its cinema, was based largely in Delhi and not Mumbai and was moving rapidly to its major bridgeheads in Patna, Banaras and smaller towns in the region through a process of technological, industrial and economic decentralization. The

invisibility of Bhojpuri music industry, ironically, was caused by its omnipresence over an extremely wide terrain. Thus, the bias mentioned above was in fact turned upside down repeatedly as I roamed the countryside of Bihar, speaking to scores of young and aging male and female singers, often with unlikely and striking demographic profiles, like young girls from wealthy upper caste families, who boldly expressed their determination to join the trade and make a mark as committed professionals. Far from a picture of decline, Bhojpuri seemed to be flourishing in the most startling manner, not through books and magazines or print of any kind but through cinema and music. This seemed remarkable enough to justify the insertion of the phrase 'singing languages' into the very title of the volume! Later on, as I moved on beyond Bhojpuri to other languages and tongues, it became clear that while not many regions had the means to produce or sustain their own cinemas, their cultural energies readily found a fuller expression in the more manageable realm of music. Through the several phases of my research in the Hindi regions, I discovered an enormous cultural landscape humming in its dozens of singing tongues to make their presence felt. It was often difficult though, for an imperceptive outsider passing through the big and small towns, to register the loudspeaker sounds above the din of the traffic and the general hubhub.

The other remarkable facet of Bhojpuri that a middle-class person like me found difficult to swallow, was that the audience support and following for both cinema and music came not from the city-based middle class who never tire of asking the government of the day for a constitutional-legal status and acknowledgement for Bhojpuri but from the poorer and rustic sections, migrants and well, just the 'riff-raff' in the language of the genteel society of Bihar. The unavoidable question that I faced was how to make sense of this cultural-linguistic gulf and a process of growth where the middle classes were reduced to the role of carping critics and driven to the sidelines as helpless audience who cannot escape the Bhojpuri sounds. Of course, the Bhojpuri intelligentsia is always ready to comment on the low quality of the cultural product but with little to offer by way of an alternative! I was compelled

to question the legislative authority of the urban middle-class intellectual who seemed to have so little at stake in the fate of the Bhojpuri language. With English and/or Hindi as their vehicles of communication, the educated middle class continue to look at Bhojpuri largely as a nostalgic vestige, and at the most, as a register of Hindi to be employed in highly localized communicative contexts. Like the proverbial dog in the manger, they wish to have 'Bhojpuri', though they know not what to do with it!

As for me, a middle class, upper caste Bihari investigator, I was impressed with the prodigious quantity of cultural products, even when their low quality seemed lamentable. A similar perception may be applicable to segments of other languages such as Haryanvi, Magahi, Bundelkhandi or other regional/subregional tongues, although the notoriety of Bhojpuri in this regard has been the most abiding and is by now a widespread cultural cliché in the country. This puzzle seemed to me highly inviting, intellectually, and I began to wonder if in the manner of English and Hindi, we are also in a position to see something of the future of Bhojpuri and numerous other regional languages. The paradox of quantitative profusion and the alleged qualitative 'waning' can be very confusing both esthetically and ethically and not easy to discern or digest in an unambiguous way. But I see the paradox as part of a larger question; namely, what is the cultural meaning of the sort of the growth that regional tongues like Bhojpuri are witnessing and where it is likely to lead—succinctly put, this question has been the chief motivating factor behind my enquiries, not only in Bihar but also Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. These inquiries are part of a larger project to navigate through the entire terrain of Hindi and map the states of the big and small regional languages within the domain of the modern digital media. The graph of growth outlined here is spurred by the modern technologies of production and circulation—twin questions that are impossible to separate even at the analytical level. The story of the so-called 'waning' of the local cultures is of course entwined with how the educated regard and assess a family of cultural products nourished by their own quasi-literate neighbours, the 'riff-raff' whose patronage has allowed

Bhojpuri cinema and music to grow enormously in the last four decades. What however, the critics of Bhojpuri films and music do not seem to appreciate at all, is that a language and culture need to continue to survive, to exist robustly and prosper before they get a chance to turn refined—if Bhojpuri was a language in decline and distress, there would clearly be no need to discuss the intricacies of taste and quality. Bhojpuri music and cinema seem to be ensuring that such extinction does not happen, as the voice of Bhojpuri gets louder and bolder to the point of being threatening, even before it makes place for some finesse and charm associated with refined culture. At this point, it is of course seen by the educated classes, mainly as a nuisance and a menace to their cultural self-regard, although a fast-heightening scholarly attention to the subject may see a rapid change of attitudes very soon.

Despite my initial preoccupations with Bhojpuri, it did not take me long before I was able to look around and notice that the case of Bhojpuri was not unique and there are other regional languages that are witnessing growth of a certain kind. It is indeed possible to do a simple Google search to trace the presence of various musical forms and genres, in a variety of languages, as a part of the global entertainment industry. The trajectory of growth for the languages however, despite some common features, is far from being uniform. I was soon able to see that not all regional languages are growing at the same pace or growing at all. There are also languages that are getting left behind in the digital race of our time. A very good example is provided by Bhojpuri itself which may be seen as a victim of Hindi but has also managed over time to overshadow a number of languages in Bihar such as Magahi and Vajjika, to name a few. Spanning across Bihar, into eastern UP and spilling into Nepal, as well as the several migratory hubs and settlements across the country, Bhojpuri may indeed be seen as a menace in the media market to the several smaller languages. Bhojpuri has even managed to eclipse, to a great extent, languages that enjoyed a classical status not so long ago—Maithili, Awadhi, and Braj with far smaller following, are the languages that come to mind most readily. There is thus a jostling and elbowing, characteristic of

an agonistic relation among the regional languages, that cannot be ignored, especially if one aims to look at the wider linguistic landscapes and their frequent tectonic shifts.

How the regional languages, right from Bihar to Haryana to Himachal, have been empowered by the modern technologies of production and circulation and, consequently, how many of them have managed to create a level field in their relation to Hindi as well as English, is a puzzling tale, with several unexpected turns and twists. If we go back to the history of the recording industry and replicable music in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, we find a rapid growth of the gramophone records at the outset. Within a few years, we have pioneers and entrepreneurs from Europe and America arriving in this country, to record and produce discs and to sell them in the local market with little or no clue about the content or the language. This story plods on for above a century and the impoverished regional languages find it difficult to take to the relatively expensive technology that was affordable only among the wealthy. Almost after a whole century, comes in the cassette technology, around the late 1980s, to revolutionize the market, although the government owned radio kept the musical fires alive, leaving open the germinal possibility of an enormous market to be explored at length. To this day for example, All India radio FM, Shimla broadcasts songs in a number of Himachali languages, allotting brief periods of time to each of them, in a judiciously set order, during the weekdays. These may be heard in the late afternoons with live phone calls from listeners and fans. But it was really the arrival of the CDs, the digital replication, that made the regional music supremely affordable for the producer as well as the buyer. It is also a technology that ensures immortality for the various digital forms through what I term 'archiving as default', innate as it is to the digital format. Through the word 'default' I mean to focus on the relatively secure nature of the digital technology that remedies the several problems of physical preservation associated with the analog media. When you secure music in the 'cloud', you effectively, or at least in theory, grant it the boon of immortality rarely seen in the world of flesh and blood or physical matter such as the bromides. Peter Manuel and several

other authors have told us this story before [1993]. But it is a story to be retold and updated over and over again in the case of each regional language and culture, since it is not languages that grow or decline but the human beings and communities that give them a life, continue to cling to them, modify their linguistic habits and commitments or at times choose to leave them behind. The story of the regional cultures and languages is thus not really a reified tale of impersonal entities called 'culture' and 'language' but that of living people who stand for them in their daily lives, through visible and demonstrable practices as well as vocal advocacy. This remains true as much for Bhojpuri as for Haryanvi or the numerous languages and cultures of Himachal Pradesh.

At this point, it is important to emphasize the twin tales of how a rising vernacular middle class created an audience ready to receive the products of the newly arrived cassette technology, followed by the compact discs, MP3, thumb drives and the internet in quick succession. In fact, the rise of Bhojpuri and other tongues in the Hindi belt and elsewhere can only be understood through the compounding of the two—the new technologies as well as their new audiences—not one or the other alone. This point is best illustrated through the example of the dramatic rise of Bhojpuri cinema.

During my fieldwork in Mumbai, undertaken before extensive ethnographic groundwork in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh in 2008-2010, within weeks my conversations revealed that the Bhojpuri film producers, not surprisingly, had ready answers to queries about the new Bhojpuri audience sustaining the cinematic kickstart. Keenly focused on a newly emerged market for cinema, they were aware that their core audience comprised of the migrant masses from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, quite simply because their bulk revenues came initially not from Bihar or Uttar Pradesh but the distant migrant hubs like Mumbai, Surat, and Gurgaon. A Bhojpuri producer nuanced this view further by pointing out that after almost a decade since 2000, his box office returns from the Bhojpuri homeland were hiking up consistently to match the migrant destinations where large populations from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh had converged. In a critical transition around

2010, the revenues were tending to be evenly shared between Bihar and the popular migrant hubs across several states in the country.

This tale of migratory mobility however comes yoked with an equally, if not more significant, phenomenon of social and political mobility, often designated as the ‘Mandal era,’ that has continued to define the society and polity of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh since the 1980s. The political rise of the middle castes such as Yadavs, Kurmis and Dalits, who rose to pre-eminence in the region, transformed these societies rapidly, producing regional leaders like Laloo Yadav, Mulayam Yadav, and Mayawati, who were to dominate the politics of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the following decades [Kumar Sanjay 2019]. Unlike its earlier stint in the 1960-1990s and its several decades of diminution, Bhojpuri cinema in its new avatar since the 2000s, was shunned by the educated middle class, resonating exclusively with a newly emerging and upwardly mobile vernacular mass of castes and social classes. While the young male migrant made the stereotypical support base for the new Bhojpuri cinema, I was compelled to fashion the label ‘vicarious migrant,’ to characterize the migratory milieu of the families in the village, who depended on remittances sent from numerous Indian metros and the gulf countries [Tripathy 2012]. This may also explain the presiding theme of the new Bhojpuri cinema and music—the unwavering and unvarying juxtaposition of the city and the village, where the narrative action and the lyrical themes see-sawed between its urban and rural frames, forever reiterating the new cultural tensions faced by the migrant at home and abroad. These migrant protagonists were however not middleclass students or professionals with aspirations for well-paid careers, but the semi-skilled labour, still ill at ease in the urban settings and closely attached to their rustic ethos.

By 2004, after the landmark hit ‘Sasura Bade Paisewala,’ Bhojpuri cinema converted its singing star Manoj Tiwari into a cinema star, thereby setting a trend that continues to this day, with some exceptions. Nirahua, Khesarilal, Pawan Singh, the major Bhojpuri stars from recent years, are all former singers in a template set during the early 2000s. That Bhojpuri cinema of the new millennium could not depend on the fickle patronage of the



genteel classes, is made evident in its volatile filmography since the 1960s [Ghosh 2006]. Instead, in its newly acquired stability in the 2000s, it pointedly addressed a populace that had made gains through two forms of mobility since the late 1980s—the vertical-upward social mobility of castes represented by the OBC rule of Laloo Yadav, as well as the lateral mobility of migration that saw rising incomes, remittances and displacement among the middle and lower castes. The remittances from cities like Mumbai, Surat, Jalandhar and other emerging sites empowered and created a new audience for both Bhojpuri music and the new Bhojpuri cinema, steeped in the vernacular milieu but with a wide exposure to the city, its cultural tropes, and its technological props. As expected, all this found a direct reflection in the content of the new Bhojpuri cinema and music by injecting the rustic ethos with urban milieus that began to pervade the regions. Attention to the enabling force of technology and the social ferment and mobility that coincided with it, must not make us oblivious to the changing content of the regional forms and genres.

To come back to the content and quality of regional music, Bhojpuri music has of course been even more notorious for its vulgarity than cinema and almost a national exemplar in crudity! But as I moved on to other regional languages such as Haryanvi and the numerous tongues of Himachal, I had to constantly face the question of quality and content and not simply the bountiful growth of these tongues on the modern media platforms. There is an admission I must make at this stage—in many cases during my ethnographic work in these regions, during my conversations with the members of the profession and the avid audiences, I saw a clear disconnect—while I persistently drew their attention to the increasing presence of their musical and theatrical forms in formats such as the CDs and the internet, as insiders, they seemed more concerned with the quality of the material produced in the specific cultural context. This can only mean that the insider is generally more or equally concerned with the matter of quality, whatever she may mean by it, than impressive economic quantifications and the increasingly louder presence of their culture on various media platforms. At some point it also dawned

on me that they implicitly, at times even explicitly, referred to a 'pristine' or 'pure' past as a given when the prevalent forms were at their glorious height and how the new technologies and exposure to other cultures has caused a serious decline in the quality of the content. I suppose educated people like me may prefer the term 'authenticity' or 'uniqueness,' using them cautiously and sparingly nevertheless, as explicitly conceptual constructs with a low ontological weightage rather than a state of being per se. We prefer these labels and epithets to the so-called idea of 'purity' which has a definite ahistorical or even bottomlessly mystical ring about it. The intensity of the lament varied from region to region and person to person within Bihar, Haryana and Himachal but remained integral to nearly all the ethnographic conversations all the way from Bihar to Himachal. In fact, it became clear at an early stage of the study, that it was difficult for the regional language speakers to discuss their own cultural forms without the premise and the presumption of a 'golden era,'—a time when their art forms were not corrupted by various technological aids and gimmickry and pollution from external sources. This is as it should be, since to my understanding, the issue of quality lies at the very core of culture and quantities and magnitudes would seem rather secondary in the context of culture. Quite simply so, since we speak of diversion and entertainment mostly in terms of good, bad and average with greater concern, than the quantities or box office figures, even when we are influenced by them. The lamentations that seemed jarring at the outset, revealed an innate desire for cultural refinement through a reversal of the time sequence and a curious antinomy—what seemed desirable for the future was posited as already extant in the past, and thus at the same time as something demonstrably achievable and within the grasp but paradoxically, also irretrievably lost or unattainable forever. The 'golden past' thus transformed into a finger pointing at a nebulous future and not just a bygone mire of mushy nostalgia. The idea of 'purity' too, in effect, is in all likelihood meant to indicate the uniqueness of a cultural feature, practice or genre in however relative a sense. The semantic displacement from the future to the 'golden past' or from 'uniqueness' to purity are only a few examples of how a culture

comes to discuss and assess its own dynamics, irrespective of how the outsiders rank or rate it. Such uniqueness clearly accords an innate value to any given art form and thus duly dignifies it. Preference for a frozen intactness, rather than the fluidity imposed by external cultural contact, may similarly indicate just a desire to remain unmoved by the stirrings caused by unrelenting contact associated with the deluge of globalization. Evidently, cultural pride and superiority are often measured through the process of cultural borrowing, which is to say that the borrower's prestige is often considered lower than that of the source. To be swamped by another culture is often assumed to be a sign of a lacuna and that of avoidable surrender to cultural vulnerabilities! In Haryana for example, my discussions with the professionals on the Sang-Ragini form veered around two main themes—what the modern technologies of production and circulation have done to the purity of the forms and how the forms have been increasingly tainted by other cultures. The reality of the 'golden past' acquires a particularly fervent flavour when an aged individual has had a firsthand experience of the rapidly changing musical and theatrical practices several decades ago, and is able to present a graphic account of specific performances from memory. Extended conversations however allow an ethnographer to lend a date and place to the golden pasts, often posited in childhood and early adolescence, and also exemplified by illustrative artistic practices and norms quoted with some precision of time and place by the varied generations and age groups. All this of course reflected on the ever developing and unfolding tastes of the audiences from different generations. This was brought to me with great clarity by Varma, a sound-recordist and studio owner from Rohtak, when he explained how his family history and the musical trajectory of his region and the Sang form are interleaved in the most intimate way. Whereas the instrument banjo is now a days seen as integral to the Ragini-Sang form in Haryana, the fact is, it made its entry in the Sang arena precisely in 1945, when recordings of songs in Haryanvi were extremely rare. Varma's grandfather fetched a banjo from Delhi [Varma even told me the name of the musical shop in Kashmiri Gate, Delhi which continues to this day] modified

it to meet his requirements and brought it in as an alien sound, which found its haven in Ragini in no time. Varma's mother, then a young girl, mastered the instrument and acquired formally the trade name 'Banjo Devi', indicative of how Varma's clan, in a single complicit move, dragged the banjo into the very heart of Sang-Ragini. On the one hand Varma, the son, seems attached to the banjo theme for sentimental reasons, but the other Varma, the music expert, showed profound disgust towards an intruder that is currently seen as a bona fide native of Haryanvi culture. This is just one example and a rather minute one, illustrating changes that happen over generations but may even come as discreet waves of novelty within a lifetime! The native ideas of a 'golden past,' or 'tradition,' or 'cultural purity' are not semantic mists to be ignored, but may often translate into substantive aesthetic standards and practices.

I perhaps need to reiterate that the growth of the regional languages and cultures came riding on the shoulders of modern technologies—the cassette, the CDs and now increasingly the internet, not to mention the even faster developing technical props of amplification. The gramophone, the radio, the cassettes, the CDs, and the internet have all played out their roles almost in a linear chronological order, with each fresh wave pushing the predecessor into the realm of obsolescence. This is a story of rapidly decreasing costs and upsurges in accessibility, both financial and physical. There is here, an analogy between the print technologies of yore, which made the written word immortal and prevalent like never before in a somewhat analogous way. Unlike orality, the written word came etched in stones and hard clay to stay forever and to reach more and more and more readers through ever renewing editions, when the demand was there. The one singular difference that seems striking, is how the regional languages and cultures made an enormous leap, through the use of the opportunities offered by the cassette, CD and internet technologies, to make their presence felt beyond the ken of the local communities in the worldwide internet, at least in principle. An inadvertent click, for example may face a very startled listener in South America with a string of Haryanvi songs and shows and she may decide to click a

'like' or even develop sufficient fondness for it to make recurrent visits! In the process of course, these flourishing tongues disregard the arena of print almost altogether, largely leaving it to the mainstream languages like Hindi and English. At a most critical moment, the regional languages seem to abandon the skirmishes of the print arena to fight the greater battle of survival through the modern media. The message may be that it is the digital platform where we sort out issues related to both our muscle power and our ability to create beauty and charm. And yet, each regional language seems to choose its own path to attain similar aims, not to forget the languages which are yet to find their pathways and those that may never find one.

### **Shifting Research Sites: From Bihar-eastern Uttar Pradesh to Haryana to Himachal**

To be faithful to a comparative perspective, the prime focus of my project, I must also admit with equal forthrightness, how shifting from Bihar to Haryana and further was a cultural shock to an ethnographer like me, in several ways. I will illustrate this through an example from Haryana—with my base at the Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak in 2014, I decided to investigate the linguistic behaviour of post graduate students, with a focus on their everyday lives. Spending two days in one of the larger university canteens for this, I was surprised to find that the conversations in Hindi were noticeably rare, even though English phrases and sentences did register their frequent presence. This was very unlike university campuses in Bihar, a likely reason being the linguistic diversity in Bihar but perhaps also a sense of shame over the use of a rustic tongue in educated and somewhat formal surroundings. This is very indicative of the changing status of a regional language in daily life and in actual usage. During my undergraduate years in Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi in the early 1970s, it was not uncommon to hear snatches of Bhojpuri within the confines of the hostel rooms but the language, tone and the tenor changed beyond the informal realm! By 2018 however, the phone companies began to use Bhojpuri for their commonest recorded messages

such as ‘the person you are calling has switched off his phone.’ It is important to observe the overall shifting between the tongues practiced by speakers, both across differing social contexts as well as over the years, as the norms change almost unnoticeably. These mundane practices indicate the dynamic relations between the local tongues and Hindi or English, as the case may be. The different regions in the Hindi belt seem to differ in their linguistic impulses even at such rudimentary social levels, even though these differences are by no means static and vary along with the ‘updated’ status accorded to the components of the multilingual bouquet—Haryanvi and/ or Bhojpuri, Hindi and/or English.

My other favourite example of cultural shock is when, as an outsider to Haryanvi culture, I had presumed that the world of Sang-Ragini and music in general would be dominated by the Jats, the dominant caste. This turned out to be no less than a blunderous intuition, as I was repeatedly told that Jats are conspicuously absent from the industry and Gajendra Phogat, the only Jat singer I was able to meet in Rohtak, claimed somewhat exaggeratedly, that he is indeed the only Jat singer with any stature in Haryana. Gajendra also spoke to me movingly of a disturbing 10-year phase of his life, of how, after he joined the music profession, his father, a great aficionado of Sang, refused to speak to him, persisting right till his deathbed. There was a time when carrying the infant Gajendra over his shoulders, the father had often walked scores of miles just to attend a Sang-Ragini show, spending days and nights at the performance sites. These sights and sounds from early exposure to Sang made a permanent home in the heart of the little boy, unfolding, undesirably on the father’s part it would seem, into an enduring adult passion. Jats, the main landowning caste have indeed been Sang writers and of course the main patrons in Haryana, but they leave the performing role to other segments of the society. Another twist in the tale—even if you do chance upon a Jat singer, a Jat instrumentalist is an even rarer species, as that would be lethally *infra dig*. Regions adjoining Punjab and Rajasthan may be somewhat exceptional, in that the Jats from the bordering areas have increasingly taken to performing Ragini and Sang. Unlike Bihar where no specific caste seemed to dominate

the entertainment industry, in Haryana, the music industry was definitely, though not exclusively, in the hands of the Mirasis. Ironically, the castes in Bihar such as Bhagats and Doms, that functioned as the repositories of traditional cultural forms have been deprived of their roles, which is now played by sundry upper and middle castes. Notably, the two major forms Biraha and Chaiti are often associated with the pastoral caste of Yadavs or Ahirs in Bihar.

I met Mirasi families of varying economic status from Haryana, both affluent and far from well off and soon realized that this bottom layer of the caste society is what upheld the Sang tradition. A distant analogy may be seen here between Bihar and Haryana, in that, in both cases, it is the lower strata of the society that played the artistic role while the upper segments provided the patronage. Notably, compared to Bihar, Haryana is not characterized by a great deal of linguistic diversity. Second, unlike Bihar, Haryana seemed to be singularly dominated by a single overarching form Sang-Ragini. Despite the varied registers of the language, depending on the proximity from the neighbouring states such as Punjab, UP and Rajasthan, and despite the various sub-traditions and gharanas, there was no denying that Sang-Ragini stood out as the prime cultural force of the region. This on its own, lends a high level of ambiguity to the idea of cultural ownership and sharing. Unlike Bihar where no specific community seemed to dominate a wide range of cultural genres, the picture in Haryana turned out to be much clearer. The case of Mirasis seems even more extreme as they continue to be fulltime professionals rather than peasants who on occasions turn into musical-theatrical performers gifted with skills that get passed down the generations. Among the 20 or so Mirasi families I met in Rohtak, Haryana in 2013, not one owned a piece of agricultural land or practiced even marginal agriculture. The wealthier Mirasis tended to buy more of the modern amenities and vehicles and residential rather than agricultural properties. In Himachal however, the community of performers known as Turis or Mangalamukhi seemed to punctuate their agricultural activities with artistic performances on clearly defined occasions. A visit to their village below the Badidhar peak in Arki near Shimla

confirmed this as I spoke to a number of performers from the community. They invariably cultivated land in a village occupying a well-irrigated and verdant valley, performed ceremonial tasks on the marked occasions and also held government jobs in the nearby towns, including the capital Shimla. In fact, an early morning bus and an evening service of the State Transport Corporation between their village and Shimla was dedicated to the daily commuters travelling to and fro Shimla. It must be emphasized however, that despite the 'part-time' impression, the Mangalamukhi are integral to a ceremonial occasion, just as every Deo's or Devi's[deity] temple in Himachal has to have a band of musicians associated with it. More than singers, it is the 'Bajantri [instrumentalists]' in Himachal that are seen as the chief custodians of tradition. Rather unlike the Mangalamukhi/Turi of Himachal, the 'Baddis' of the central Himalayas, a caste identified with music and theatre, have been displaced almost entirely by other occupational groups, losing their inherited skills in the process (Fiol 2010).

Anyone who has toured the countryside in Himachal and queried from the local people about their temples in the most casual way, will be aware of the bewildering numerousness of the local gods and goddesses, their filial or hostile inter-linkages and the quintessential role music has in the lives of the gods and the mortals. This, by itself, may indicate the continued prevalence of a somewhat distinct sphere of traditional musical repertoire in Himachal. Unlike Bihar and Haryana villages and urban localities, where the current generations may at best have some faint impression of the local deities, I am yet to hear of a Himachal town or village where the local deities seem neglected or forgotten even when the ceremonial practices appear to be curtailed and somewhat compromised in comparison to the earlier pomp and participation. In a manner analogous to the many Himachal tongues, there are multitudes of deities dotted all over the Himachal landscape—they are often visible from the highways and roads and the central tales and miraculous episodes associated with them are widely known within their domains, lending them invariably with tremendous individuality. In the henotheistic vocabularies, the deities may be classified into the standard icons



such as Shiv or Durga but this taxonomy buries within it, the deep and discrete histories of the specific god or goddess presiding over a given region, with an elaborate web of interrelationships among them that would bewilder an outsider. Anyone delving further into the interrelationships among the local gods/goddesses would get the impression of an entire society or community of gods with different degrees of dependence, affinities, hierarchies and even hostilities among them, much in the manner of an earthier version of local society. A study focusing on a larger region may even give us a family tree of these divinities, backed by legends and ecologies of the regions in question.

In conversation with an outsider, a local villager is likely to describe her obscurely named [for the outsider] deity as Durga or Parvati but such description is just a handy way of quick communication. The vibrant presence of the local deities among the successive generations of the old and the young seems even more remarkable as Himachal Pradesh has the highest literacy rates, [up to 88 per cent] among the Hindi speaking states. The numerousness and variety of deities and musical codes and practices in Himachal is rather transparently and directly attributable to the numerous political entities, Thakurais and Riyasats, that split the region into its linguistic and cultural subregions, symbolically represented by the different deities (Singh 2006). The regional contrasts between Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Himachal can thus often be rather glaring, making a researcher wonder how their different trajectories were shaped historically, a story difficult and at times impossible to unravel at the local level.

If shifting from Bihar and eastern UP to Haryana thus brought up surprises of great empirical and theoretical import, the shift to Himachal was no less. As I began my fieldwork in and around Shimla and met personnel and people of various sorts, it became clear at the very outset, that I was dealing with levels of linguistic diversity I had not encountered before. This alone made me wonder if I would prove equal to the enormous challenge, given the mandated 2-year period of the fellowship. Much smaller than even Haryana, in terms of population [7 million approximately against 25 million], here was a land where the linguistic diversity was not

apparent to an outsider unless she dug deep. By way of supporting anecdotes, I will recount a few. The diversity of the local tongues far exceeded that of Bihar, where you can count the number of identifiable languages on your fingers. Tobden, the editor of the volume on Himachal, which is part of the People's Linguistic Survey edited by G.N. Devy, lists 25 languages for population of 7 million with sample sentences that clearly indicate the tremendous variety of vocabularies and phonetical slants, especially when you consider the far smaller population of the state (Tobden 2015) as well as a thinner spread over a large territory. This thinness becomes apparent even at the microscopic level when a so-called village in Himachal may turn out to have as few as five households [in some cases only one] huddled over a steep hill, a scale of habitation that in Haryana and Bihar will never be described as a village. But I soon discovered that this official list does not include many more tongues and registers which do not even have a clear-cut name. When I asked a music professor friend from Shimla what his native language was called, he was perplexed. He was very sure of the distinctness of his tongue in use in Kotgarh area of Shimla district but was compelled to call his father back home to give me a label. 'Sadochi' is how the local populace defines the identity of the language according to this father, although the word also denotes a geographical region. Normally, one would not, of course, expect an educated or even illiterate person to forget the name of her native tongue! During a conversation with Prof Shandilya, a retired music professor from the Himachal university, I was told that Himachal has as many languages as the Riyasats of the olden days, big and small, which may provide a backdrop to the linguistic diversity in a region divided by mountainous terrain and known till recently for its relative isolation. On the other hand, during an interactive session with music students from the Himachal University, when I asked what language was spoken in their native areas, the entire class decided to use the terminology 'Pahari', the fact being that it is at the most a generic and descriptive term used as a short cut for outsiders and there is categorically no specific language called 'Pahari' [literally meaning hilly or montane]. As the conversation deepened, the amused students gave me the gift of revealing the actual names of the tongues spoken in their families

and communities, although typically some of them continued to insist on the term 'Pahari'. One of these, a student from Bilaspur, may well have been a speaker of Kahloori or Bilaspuri!

Shifting from one fieldwork site to another is always an adventure, since you need to reorient yourself, gathering lessons from the cumulative learning acquired earlier, and more specifically, re-tailoring the methodologies employed in the study. The term 'methodological reflexivity' summarizes it all, like nothing else does. To give an example of an extreme sort, while in both Bihar and Haryana, I depended heavily on ethnographic interviews, I was given a clear signal in Himachal that I cannot stray too far off from the Indian Institute of Advance Studies [IIAS], Shimla [my host institution that follows the policy strictly] beyond a day or two at will and must restrain the urge to wander off for several days in search of ethnographic material. What also follows is that no travel grant was available to attempt the hectic travel that the snowballing interviews often pointed one towards, in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. I had to thus confine my fieldwork around the key sources and hubs where I could hold a number of fruitful conversations. But this necessitated a serious veering to a different methodological strategy in my road to research. What saved the day was the fact that through the last decade, since 2009, when I stepped into this research arena, the internet has come a long way and offers a cumulative wealth of material perhaps not available a decade ago. Supplementing the ethnography with the abundant material available on the internet, opened up new possibilities, despite the obstacles inherent in the method. It seemed likely, even at the outset of the research, that the overall handicap may be feasibly dealt with by identifying the key persons that lie at the core of the industry and thus, instead of relying on the sheer number and variety of professional profiles for the interviews, I sought out the key personnel crucial to the industry for both production and circulation. I was of course free to go back to the Shimla-based interviewees with fresh queries, as my internet-based work proceeded and a series of questions and dilemmas arose. Another advantage with Shimla, the capital of Himachal, lay in having access to experts and artists from all parts of the state.

There is thus a difference between the reflexivity of the theoretical kind, where one goes through an unceasing process of methodological renewal and revision, and one driven by the practical issues thrown up by research conditions and circumstances that dictate the direction the research may possibly take over time. These often go unadmitted as a researcher may find it below her scholarly dignity to confess what may be rather pompously called 'situational methodological compulsions.' I say this, notwithstanding the fact that my earlier research in Bihar and Haryana did not substantially include the internet as a source of information [used largely to provide a match against the ethnographic material generated in the field] and the Shimla project allowed me to properly tap a source I had somewhat neglected in the past. Thus, in the case of Shimla, over the prolonged research period I had to devise my own hybridized approach and instruments suited to internet-based material, through trial and error. The advantage here was firstly, while figures like the number of hits and clicks gave me a better idea of the quantitative aspects, adding a new dimension to a largely qualitative study. Secondly, the internet revealed to me with a newfound directness, the obscure world of the music audience, a relatively opaque area that had earlier remained largely ignored. To take, perhaps, the most telling example, the comments section on the websites allowed me to take a peek into the intimate world of quality and subjective assessment of specific pieces of music. Remarkably, unlike other music web links, the regional languages, especially the Himachal ones, do not seem to invite the vile vocabulary and exchanges among the audiences that has become typical of casual and often anonymous encounters on the internet. This may seem an oddity in the sublime and epicurean context of music and esthetic taste but esthetic quarrels appear to invite a far stronger language than even political faceoffs on the internet. These quarrels are however very common in the realm of Bhojpuri where hostilities among the loyal fans may spill out of social media into other physical platforms. But then Bhojpuri music concerts are notorious for their violence of both kinds—spontaneous, when members of the audience become unruly but also in those instances of planned

action when the music fans of a particular singer try to disrupt the concerts of the competing stars. The prevalence of strong emotions in the field of music may be compared to the hostilities among members of fan groupings characteristic of cinema and football across the globe.

Much used to admiring diversity for its own sake, I had presumed that the Himachal folk would see it similarly; as a gift to be valued for its own sake. It turned out that the boon of diversity can also become a burden, making it difficult for people to join a conversation together—the problem here may often be lack of familiarity and resonance rather than stark incomprehensibility. If you must strain your ears to understand a language or you find its words and sounds odd and funny, it should generally be different from yours. Hindi thus provides an overall solution in Himachal, where linguistic divisions go down to the *tehsil* [a micro-regional administrative unit] level. Hindi is also indispensable for Himachal as its northern districts of Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur speak an altogether different family of language and are seen as a radically different linguistic entity. But this story of diversity cuts both ways—music videos uploaded on the internet often clearly specify the exact geographical-cultural region the music comes from. Also, given that it is much easier to appreciate the music in a neighbouring language than trying to speak or comprehend everyday conversation, the state-wide musical culture has shown some tendency to intermix and come together on the same platform. Music, songs and a running conversation are thus two different pragmatic contexts and categories. My guess is the Himachali tongues, close cousins as many of them are, may come closer together more effectively through music rather than prosaic conversation. Ajay Varma, a singer and a physical education teacher [sports instructor] at a school in Rajgarh, Sirmour, admitted that apart from his Rajgarhi tongue, he can sing songs in the Shimla and the somewhat distant Kullu languages too, bringing together the upper and lower Himalayan tongues in a close embrace. This versatility alone would ensure that he is able to muster a larger audience than someone who must be confined to a single tongue. Unlike the vast Bhojpuri region and its migrant destinations going

into peninsular India, in Himachal, an artist would be expected to find a larger spread of audience by singing in as many of the regional tongues and styles as practically feasible.

Now in his mid-40s, Varma also informs, that he has been recording songs right since the cassette days [1990s] and regularly worked with Tanya Audio, a landmark music company of Shimla, which lay at the hub of the cassette and CD production and sale in the Shimla area and even beyond. Placed just below the Mall in Lower Bazar, Shimla, Tanya retains its old name but has now turned into a clothing shop—the owner Harvinder abandoned the music business due to a continued diminution of the music market in its physical avatars like cassettes and CDs, and shifted his trade to something completely unrelated. It is indeed useful to speak to such veterans, who have been through the entire life span of the music industry starting from the late 1980s. Some years ago [in 2014] in Rohtak, I once sat chatting with Bittuji for four hours, about his career, at the end of which he reminded me that not a single customer had turned up at the shop to buy a cassette or a CD. In fact, Bittuji was undergoing a transition in 2014 very much like Harvinder's, except he did not know what trade to turn to, at the age of 54. On the other hand, at Surendra Negi's studio in Shoghi, where I met Ajay Varma during and after a recording session, I found Negi uploading songs to the web for Varma directly from the studio, within minutes after the final recording. Negi, a veteran studio owner in his 50s started his career from Rekonpeo, Kinnaur and then shifted to Rampur before settling down in Shoghi in Shimla. He is widely known to be the most competent and popular recordist in Himachal but also a revered figure, almost an ustad in the entire Himachal region. Hailing from the upper Himalayas and making a home in Shimla also gives him the additional advantage of linguistic versatility that others rarely seem to have. Negi combines his recording skills with song-writing and composition as well. During the recording session, I found that Varma treated Negi as a guru and sought his approval in the selection of songs to be recorded and willingly modified the melodies of his renderings. Dhananjay, a recordist in Tutu, Shimla had a lot to say on how, with the internet taking roots

in the industry, musical tastes have changed radically, through borrowings from distant and nearby sources. He also confirmed how artists come to him from all over Himachal and even Jammu [from Jammu & Kashmir, the neighbouring state] just to ensure a decent quality of recording. This is vital, in view of the listener's expectations, which have gone far beyond the tinny timbre of pirated recordings on cassettes and CDs played on cheap players, acceptable earlier.

The ambivalence over diversity and commonality comes out the best in the case of the government where the department of public relations emphasizes the uniqueness of each region but the department of languages carries the brief of spreading Hindi all over the state. As I learnt over a period of time, a constant interplay between a deliberate emphasis on uniqueness of each sub-region and a ceaseless search for commonality is the enduring theme of Himachal culture, at both the official as well as informal levels. For some it might mean the government and the bureaucracy are unable to make up their minds over their policy targets but I feel that such ambivalence is built into the cultural-linguistic predicament of the region. As I found out during conversations with the cultural organizer and the District Language Officer [DLO] at the language and culture department, the frequent cultural competitions for the youth in the state emphasize the uniqueness of the sub-regions such as Chamba or Kullu, insisting strictly on the specific costume, rhythmic styles and instruments. Before visiting the DLO in Shimla I had thus assumed intuitively that his job would be to ensure that the sub-regional cultures and languages got their due as a sort of a balancing act on the part of the government. That this intuition was altogether faulty became clear within minutes of my conversation with the DLO. Unlike the cultural organizer's assignment of maintaining the status quo of cultural diversity, the DLO's official brief turned out to be to ensure and report on the usage and prevalence of Hindi in his own district and to organize Hindi Day in order to propagate the language through events and contests. Clearly, the government does not want to encourage the growth of an overlapping hybrid himachali culture such as an eclectic admixture of the Chamba and Kullu or

other dance and music styles. But the government exhibits some obvious anxieties in encouraging the use of Hindi as a language that inter-links the various sub-regions as well the entire state with the wider world of Hindi. These tensions are almost altogether missing from Bihar and Haryana, making the plight of Himachal significantly unique.

With significant income from tourism and horticulture, the Himachal state has been lavish in spurring the growth of the various sub-regional and pan-Himachal cultures. It does so by providing subsidies for books in the regional languages, by being a crucial part of the numerous fairs organized all over the state at various levels, and through numerous competitions for up to 45 cultural groups and bands which are registered officially and selected to perform on varied occasions. In February 2022, the Himachal government sanctioned the opening of a book stall at its central venue, the Gaiety Theatre, an old city landmark from the colonial times, that will display and sell works by Himachali writers in Hindi and other local languages.

The language and culture department and the public relations department of the state government in Himachal holds regular auditions that may be the envy of Haryana and Bihar, though of course, given its resources and the anxiety over a separate identity independent of the Punjabi culture, Haryana is way ahead of Bihar in this respect. Most of the artists interviewed by the researcher seemed to hold government jobs of various descriptions which may be taken as a form of indirect support by the government. As against this, the artists in Bihar, dependent on live shows for their livelihood, supplement their incomes through agriculture or other means, though again in the case of Haryana, it is not uncommon for artists to be employed by the department of public relations or Doordarshan and Akashvani. It is however rare for a Himachal artist, barring the top stars, to depend solely on her musical talents for livelihood through the commercial channels. The one obvious reason that occurs is that of scale—fragmented into smaller languages, Himachal finds it difficult to muster the audience numbers required to support the artists. This is where Bhojpuri proves to be a comparatively gargantuan force and Haryana has



the advantage of being a linguistic monolith more or less. Between Haryana and Bihar again, the contrast in linguistic predicaments may be understood through a single example from the related field of cinema—while in Haryana, a Haryanvi film is required to be a super hit in order to make any profit, there is rarely a Bhojpuri film that does not bring in the returns. This is also the reason why in Himachal, the purely commercial logic does not seem to work and the government must invest in its numerous languages and cultures. Unlike musical production that requires a smaller scale, the film industry in our time continues to be driven unavoidably by the logic of scale and demography.

During the fieldwork in and around Shimla, the researcher found that the educational institutions, colleges and universities often have music departments that are well-populated with faculty and students. The Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla boasts of having produced 50 PhDs in the past [till 2016] and of sustaining around 10 PhD students all through the years. According to Prof Mrityunjay Sharma from the department, the placement records of the department have been quite good as the students often find employment in colleges all over the state, in Doordarshan and various other government settings. This contrasts seriously with the information obtained in both Haryana and Bihar, where musical education is lagging far behind and is left to the mercy of home-taught or amateur performers.

One of the chief contrasts between Himachal and the other two states, is the number of fairs held in the state—with around half a dozen international fairs, 17 state level fairs and 38 district level fairs, an impressive score by any standards. The government actively participates in the fair committees. The fairs are systematically listed in a cultural calendar that forms part of the Annual Report by the public relations department of the Himachal government. Rather distinctively, Himachal also has a number of local fairs where apart from the sport of wrestling, musical and dance contests take place. The government's official calendar for the fairs indicates that the entire year is punctuated by events that invite widespread popular participation. The numerousness and the extent of local participation in these fairs is of course almost

altogether missing from Bihar and Haryana, although college and senior school fetes are staged almost on a professional basis with the help of hired experts from the fields of music, dance and theatre. Whereas the traditional Himachal fairs provide befitting occasions for cultural events, Bihar and Haryana have to find official excuses and occasions for holding their events.

These fairs are of course vital to a society divided by the terrain and languages—the Lavi fair at Rampur, one of the largest in the region, for example, visited by me, illustrates the trade and exchange requirements of the upper Himalayas with the rest of the state. A fair at Dhama near Shimla, where I witnessed stone pelters on two sides hurl rocks at each other in a traditional ceremonial practice is very likely a way to sublimate traditional territorial hostilities between two border villages from different riyasats of Dhama and Arki. Interestingly, at the very first instance when a participant was seen to bleed, the short-lived and ritualized hostilities came to an abrupt end with some help from the local police. Lasting no more than a few minutes of intense attack, the two sides withdrew and mingled into the general crowd attending a routine fair with its music, dance and other amusements. The lyrics of a large number of songs in the Himachal tongues of course mention the fairs as sites for romantic liaisons among boys and girls as well as chance paramours who would have never met otherwise, and may or may not consummate these encounters in a marriage.

We have too long been looking at the regional languages through the lens of Hindi or even English and our entire linguistic perception is determined by our top-down view of the relation between English and Hindi with the regional languages. Given the near direct correspondence between language and cultural production, there are of course several overlaps between Hindi and the regional languages in the Hindi heartland. Hindi media, music and various artistic genres have propped themselves with inputs from the regional languages as well as English and other western sources. Given its history of nearly 150 years, Hindi began with a slim cultural capital unlike the vernaculars, that go back to the hoary past with their rich cultural traditions and heritage. This is why a typical syllabus of a higher degree Hindi course continues

to carry a large chunk of Braj and Awadhi literatures. There is thus now a need to look at Hindi through the lenses of the many vernaculars that lie within the region. Musical production can be a useful proxy in giving us an X-ray vision of the constant give and take or appropriation in the region.

It is not difficult to see of course that there is no generalized entity called ‘regional language’ with clear or distinguishing characteristics except size, but only specific regional languages big and small and each of them has a different relation and historical association with Hindi, just as Hindi may have a different relation with each of them. The question one may ask here is—is there a good justification for presuming a privileged position for Hindi and insist on looking at the regional languages and culture from the raised heights of Hindi, or is it also possible to switch one’s position and look at Hindi from the point of view of Haryanvi, Bhojpuri or Kahloori or Sirmauri? The plethora of cultural production in the regional languages, supported by the modern technologies, lends a new meaning to the question above and it becomes easier to see that this claim is not just a theoretical diversion or rhetorical gimmick, but a question of survival and growth for the regional cultures, that are rooted in everyday life, daily entertainment and mundane neighbourly communication of the most casual sort.

Despite some modifications, the objectives of the project in Himachal have thus remained unchanged since the earlier stints in Bihar and Haryana and may be summarized as follows:

### **Overall Objectives**

1. To map the growth of regional cultures and languages through the dynamics of regional digital industries.
2. To document and assess this growth in the specific regions and make comparisons.
3. To assess the social-professional structure of the regional industry.
4. To reflect on the transformed nature of the musical experience at the local as well as global levels.

## CHAPTER II

# Methodological Pathways and Feasible Options

### **Mapping Regional Music in Hindi Belt**

As early as 1993, Peter Manuel in his now classic study *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India* mapped the entire process of the growth of the cassette technology and its cultural consequences, through fieldwork in Delhi and the neighbouring regions. After 1985, as the cassette format rather dramatically took over the music market, a whole variety of popular songs, whether traditional or otherwise came into brisk circulation within years. Towards the late 1990s however, the process depicted by Manuel in his landmark study, accelerated through the CD-DVD technologies in the new millennium, making the production and replication processes far cheaper than the cassette technology. This had enormous implications for the listener/viewer. Manuel was largely concerned with the regional media and dealt with the issue of the regional languages and their relation with Hindi somewhat indirectly. With my head full of vivid descriptions from the pioneering anthropologists, when I visited the electronics hub located at the Lajpat Rai market in old Delhi in 2010, [frequented and studied by Manuel and some other ethnomusicologists up until the late 1990s] the crammed rows of shops had thinned down and a bare skeleton of its old glory survived. Conversations with a few grim-faced retailers only gave a distant impression of the brisk trade that plied in the large

courtyards with ample space for the stall owners. Since I was 'late' by a decade, a long stretch of time for the digital technologies, in arriving at the site, the spacious though sparse arena of yesteryears felt like a ruin filled with archaeological remains, along with some living vestiges! Time, like the technologies, material apparatuses and trends in question had moved in a hurry for the Lajpat Rai market!

The new millennium saw an increasing adoption of the internet even among the less affluent sections of the society, as musical production and distribution entered a tight and fitting embrace like never before. Media scholars such as Stefan Fiore in Uttarakhand (2008, 20012, 2013) and Jayson Beaster-Jones in Madhya Pradesh (2014) continue to focus on specific cultural regions, markets and sectors. Such contributions are of seminal value as they allow access to a microscopic view of a specific region, revealing cultural textures and contours unseen otherwise. They have captured for us the dense and fast-moving developments that would go unnoticed as they turned obsolete, leaving barely a trace of the recent 'bygone' phases, at times not even the rich and well-preserved 'middens' to scrounge and unearth. Despite the varying research questions and inclinations, they also allow us to properly appreciate the regional disparities in how the same technologies and the corresponding affordances impact the professionals and the audience differently, leading to a great variety in professional practices, procedures and genres.

As for the broader aspects of the relation among the mainstream and the regional languages, the two main works of great value for the project have been Probal Dasgupta's *The Otherness of English: India's Auntie Tongue Syndrome* [1993] and Sheldon Pollock's body of work, both of which deal with the longue durée changes in languages covering a vast historical terrain that may be termed 'epochal.' Dasgupta, despite the relative slimness of his volume, dealt with a wide historical and linguistic canvas, where he tried to assess the predicament of the English language in India in relation to other Indian languages. He did this by tracing the chequered history of relation between the official languages such as Sanskrit, Persian and English successively over the ages with the coeval

vernacular languages at various points in history. Although the focus in this work remained the presence and the plight of English in India, the arguments offered throw considerable light on the relative positioning of the languages in a multilingual society at different historical stages. The regional languages, of course, found no place in the schema outlines in the brief volume.

At a much broader level, Sheldon Pollock in his magisterial and fine-grained *The language of the Gods in the World of Men* [2007] analysed in great detail, the shifting status of the vernacular tongues and Sanskrit in India and South East Asia as well as the changing relation between Latin and the European languages. Despite providing us with a broad historical backdrop, this vast canvas may have little bearing on what is happening to languages like Bhojpuri, Haryanvi or the Himachali group of tongues, which in no way threaten either Hindi or English through ‘cosmopolitan’ aspirations but only attempt to win some parallel space for themselves. This cultural feature is awaiting a close look and we need to make sense of it. Unlike Kannada’s increasing ascendancy over Sanskrit in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century CE, regional languages such as Bhojpuri or Haryanvi don’t seem to aim at supplanting Hindi or English but to simply co-exist alongside. More recently, in a workshop on ‘Hinglish’ at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi on 18–19 August 2014 [complete audio recordings available at <http://sarai.net/hinglish-workshop-18-19-august-2014/>], scholars like Francesca Orsini and Rachel Dwyer among others, dwelt on the relative positions of English and Hindi in India. There was a thorough discussion on the newly emerged phenomenon of ‘Hinglish,’ a virtual mishmash of Hindi and English, which has found a remarkable ascendancy among the urban speakers in recent decades in India. But here again the regional languages found almost no attention at all. All these broader studies with considerable sweep have enabled the researcher to develop a perspective on the somewhat different though related matter of the state of the Hindi mainstream and its relation to the regional languages and cultures in the digital era [Tripathy in Orsini, Ravi Kant ed 2022].

As for specific works on Himachal Pradesh, the volume on

Himachali languages edited by Tobden (2015) under the chief editorship of G N Devy and part of the People's Linguistic Survey of India, was very helpful in creating a base from which to venture forth into a more detailed mapping of languages and cultures. Chetan Singh's *Ecology and Peasant Life in the Western Himalaya, 1800-1950* (Studies in Social Ecology and Environmental History), [1998], an appropriately titled historical work embedded in the ecology of the region, was similarly an indispensable source of insights into the different regions of Himachal Pradesh and their inter-relationships. Popular political histories and digests like Mian Goverdhan Singh's *Himachal Pradesh: History, Culture and Economy* (1992) were useful at the initial stage, given the researcher's relatively unfamiliarity with the cultural terrain of Himachal. Channa's anthropological work on the Bhotiyas of Uttarakhand (2013) is full of insights into a lifestyle in transition, and comes close to the chief concerns of the project, though her volume deals specifically with a community rather than region, covering several aspects of the Jad Bhotiya life including gender, migration, cosmology and ecology.

Wagner's work on the Gaddis of Himachal (2013) is much closer home in the geographical-linguistic sense than many other anthropological works as it deals with a very sizeable and culturally prominent community in Himachal whose changing lifestyles happens to be the main focus of the work. The work of Hutchison and Vogel (1933) in two volumes despite the obvious datedness gave the researcher a sense of background to Himachal's more recent history in the last eight decades, lending a historical depth to the ongoing transformation of the society and polity. Since the two volumes deal with the different hill states and principalities within what is now Himachal, one gets insights into how the aspects of integration and divergence play in the state of Himachal today. Goswami's in-depth study of the annual fair at Kulu in Himachal (2014) was useful for its close focus on the intimate and intertwined relation of the polity, the religious deities and the inhabitants of the different regions that form part of the mega-event. It provided me with a broader context for the performance of traditional music and dance, and those strains

of Himachal culture that continue to make their presence felt even within the new media technologies such as the internet. A detailed account of the Kullu Dussehra fair also demonstrated how at times, the traditional and the utterly contemporary can merge almost inseparably and unrecognizably into an elaborate cultural performance and event. The cultural meanings, practices and symbols in many cases may have become feebler or vestigial in our time but have often acquired a fresh patina of cultural significance that deserves exploring. The fierce independence shown by the sub-regional entities in Himachal reflects not only in its polity but also in its cultural expressions to this day.

Since the earlier stints of research on regional cultures and languages in Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh and Haryana were dominated entirely by an ethnographic approach, and the work in Himachal carried a significant ethnographic component, it was useful to take a cue from other ethnographers and ethnomusicologists who did similar work in the neighbouring regions. Sax's work in Uttarakhand (2014) led him to reflect on the very nature of the ethnographic approach to a great depth. Although not always in agreement with him in his intensity or turbulence of feeling, I could identify with his position as an outsider to Himachal intent on studying a relatively alien cultural-linguistic terrains. Such encounters often carry with them a slipstream of inner churning and subjective turmoil that a long term or cyclical ethnographic approach may bring forth into play. This is perhaps due to the demands of incessant reflexivity required by a method that has no pre-set pathways and will always carry a strong exploratory flavour. Given the specific objectives of my fieldwork in Himachal, it did not require the dense sort of 'subjective delving' that goes with long-term anthropological work around deeper cultural symbols and value systems. A longish extract from his reflections seems worthwhile at this point for highlighting the pedagogical context and the demanding nature of methodological reflexivity—'Although fieldwork was certainly an object of constant reflection at Chicago, we were never taught how to do it. I can well remember how shocked two colleagues were when, years later during my time as a Lecturer in Christchurch,



New Zealand, they asked me to teach a course on ethnographic fieldwork in the sociology department, and I told them I had no idea about how to teach that topic. Nearly all other disciplines in the social and natural sciences devote a great deal of energy to specifying (and usually formalizing) their methods, which they then propagate in seminars, textbooks, and so on. Why is it that anthropologists do this so much less with respect to their central method, ethnographic fieldwork? ...although handbooks have been written describing how to do it, it is more a matter of intuition, gut feeling, and sheer humanity than it is of following a set of rules. ... Unlike the other disciplines, who seek through their methods, to achieve a certain kind of “objectivity” or neutrality, the fieldworker immerses her—or himself—into a particular culture so as to reach an intuitive as well as an analytical understanding of it; the fieldworker’s body and senses are among his or her most important research tools; the kind of understanding that is sought is as much a matter of embodiment as of intellectual knowledge.

...The value of reflexive ethnography lies precisely in the fact that it better informs the reader of the author’s prejudices and predispositions, and of the ways in which the data were gathered and the text constructed, thus enabling her to get closer to whatever reality is being described and analyzed. That is why I include descriptions of my personal experiences and feelings in my ethnographic accounts—not only to make a more entertaining story (though of course I hope to do that as well) but also to teach the reader something about how I conduct ethnographic research. ... Reflexivity in ethnographic writing is not just a literary technique. More importantly, it is a refinement of the ethnographic method that is justified on empirical grounds, because it more accurately represents the research process.’

Although the well-known historical works on Himachal discussed earlier provided me with a broad background, it was Chetan Singh’s writings on Himachal [1998, 2006] that appealed to me with greater immediacy and effect. The shift from Bihar to Haryana and thence to Himachal, had caused a somewhat serious shock in the Schutzian sense, in the sense that the research context and arena saw a transfer of the most profound sort, despite the

unchanging research objectives. To quote Singh (2006) 'For the study of mountain societies, a third factor—physiography—seems to be of vital importance. It adds a dimension that has influenced the evolution of ideologies of governance, religious beliefs, and social organization. The mountainous Indian State of Himachal Pradesh provides appropriate conditions for examining the historical interaction between geography, culture, and polity. In this rugged territory, large and fast-flowing rivers with their numerous tributaries have created small, semi-isolated valleys separated by high mountain ranges. These tributary valleys are accessible through the main river valley. Geographical divisions of this nature engendered the emergence not only of political territories, but also of the religious domains of different deities.' (Singh 1998) Unlike Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where the ecological highlights of the regions seemed to play a somewhat less outstanding role largely due to far their wider incidence throughout the Gangetic plains and the scholarly familiarity that necessarily follows, their utter prominence in Himachal had to be acknowledged for its relative uniqueness and taken into consideration as integral to the region.

To illustrate the point, one of the most startling experiences upon my arrival in Himachal was an almost unmanageable linguistic diversity in a relatively small population. The diversity, interestingly, is as much occasioned by the isolation of communities in a mountainous terrain as the separate political units and principalities in the state. The same diversity extended to the netherworld of religion as well as musical practices and costumes, all of which were distinguished through clear markers. In Singh's words 'An essential facet of the moral order prevalent in western Himalayan kingdoms was the complex network of hierarchically placed deities that linked the political capital to the remotest village. Despite its apparent rigidity, the hierarchy of deities was occasionally contested and even reordered. Because of the intimate bond between the village folk and their god, this reordering of the position or privileges of particular deities was probably an indicator of social transformation occurring in different villages. The ruler (along with the presiding deity) appears to have functioned as the mediator in disputes between the lesser gods in his realm.

Such situations certainly provided the Raja (ruler) the welcome opportunity of asserting his ideological supremacy.

One apparent difference between the thakurais and monarchies was that while the latter often controlled territory on both banks of a major river of the region, the former usually occupied a niche in smaller tributary valleys. Moreover, the monarchies attempted to follow scriptural prescriptions of governance, while thakurais subscribed to indigenous religious traditions particularly rich in oral myths and legends. These legends often grew out of, and related to, the people and the physical environment of the chiefdom. Like the original myths that linked society with an ancient past, its norms and values, too, were derived from folk tradition. Not unexpectedly, the socio-political order in the *thakurais* was closely entwined with the creation and rejuvenation of popular cults. In essence, the *thakurai* was successful in reaching down to the level of the village community.' Singh's point here may be seen to underline the significance of the sub-regional entities in both linguistic and cultural terms as well as their varied interrelationships. That the large population of deities were central to their specific sub-regions in a symbolic as well as substantive sense, clearly indicates the implications for the cultural variety observed in the state [Singh 2006].

By way of updating our knowledge of the traditional forms and contexts for musical performance in the Himalayan region, Fiol (2011) provides a well-mapped account of how the traditional performers have fared in the new media economy at the regional level in Uttarakhand, a state adjacent to Himachal and similar in many ways. In his own words 'Since the early 1980s, the expressive culture of mountain festivals (music, dance, dress, poetry, etc.) has been exported to recording studios in Delhi, and more recently to the regional state capital of Dehradun, to be codified, edited, packaged, and finally distributed back to the hills in the form of a commodity that ultimately benefits the plains-based company (see map in Figure 1). Few hereditary specialists from regional musician-castes (Bajgl, Baddi, Hurkiya, Jagariya) have participated in the regional music industry; the lack of financial resources and social networks in the urban plains, combined with issues of caste-

based discrimination, have largely precluded these professional musicians from participating in studio recording. In their place, increasing numbers of semi-professional singers from higher-caste backgrounds (Rajput and Brahmin) have traveled to Delhi, eager to make a name for themselves and at the same time represent their local communities (cf. Grandin 1989, 188). In order to find financial viability and regional prominence, many have found it necessary to participate in both studio recording and live stage performances. While commercial recordings are rarely profitable (and often incur significant debts on young singers), they generate cultural capital that may eventually lead to invitations to more lucrative live performances.

Uttarakhandi musicians and sound commodities circulate between studios and festivals, conjoining these two performance settings within a regionally integrated migrant economy. Although there may be little agreement about what this type of cultural interaction means, or how it should proceed, few would refute that studio production and festival performance mutually shape the corpus of music and dance within any Uttarakhandi community. Musical feedback across these settings is facilitated by relatively closed loops of consumers/listeners and producers/performers who communicate through the vernacular languages of Garhwali, Kumaoni, and Jaunsari. While Hindi film songs, transnational pop, and other Indian regional musical styles have influenced the development of Uttarakhandi git (see below), the relatively circumscribed consumer base—consisting of approximately nine million inhabitants—results in a certain degree of stylistic insularity and feed back across these performance locations.

Festivals in Uttarakhand are known by a variety of different names that offer clues to their varied social functions: ‘sacred geography (thaul), lust or curiosity for spectacle (kauthik), longing for togetherness (me/a), religious urge for communion with the divine, and innate responses to the changing rhythms of nature (ausar)’ (Purohit 2001, 365).’

Similarly, another work (2010) by Fiol also includes a detailed account of the professional musicians of Uttarakhand who have, in the recent past, lost their traditional role and the musical terrain

has been usurped by other social groups. As Fiol puts it 'Conveying information and musical styles across the villages of their birth and the rajas court, the Baddi were important to the functioning of the ritual and political economy of the central Himalayas. They were performers with unrivalled access to royalty and at the same time were relegated to the very lowest level of the caste system. They became local heroes who were granted boons by the king after successfully performing life-endangering fertility rituals, but in doing so they accrued infertility to their bodies, and were barred from a normal life of agriculturalists.' Fiol also mentions in the same article the status-raising function of the ceremonial music, a privilege lost to the community. The Turis or the Mangalamukhis of Himachal on the other hand, attached as they are to the large and small temples, have not altogether lost their prerogative, although they are now compelled to take up government jobs and other means of livelihood. It is remarkable though that a large number of them are now music teachers at different levels of education after obtaining formal degrees from colleges and universities. A college degree thus puts a stamp on their homebound training, qualifying them for college and school jobs in large numbers. The professional 'secularization' of the Turis seems remarkable at this point, as their role as the ceremonial musicians has by no means been annulled or decimated in significance, although some of the rigorous traditional practices may have become laxer of late. Despite the overlaps, musical production through the new technologies stands at a remove from the musical-dramatic performances marked for ceremonial occasions at the numerous sites in the state.

Fiol's work in Uttarakhand is somewhat close to the present study in that his narrative is largely focused on how the new media emerging from a series of technological changes has utterly transformed the music and the entertainment industry, including its regional versions. The present monograph however carries a large section on the purely sociolinguistic aspect and unlike Fiol, does not strictly follow the ethnomusicological pathway. In fact, my work sees the entertainment industry as an excellent proxy for the studying of the cultural-linguistic trajectories exhibited by the different regional languages, that have no footprints in the print

arena, may never ever do so, except perhaps through virtual print on the internet sites.

One of the categories oft-used in the studies of traditional music is 'folk', a category difficult to escape for anyone looking at regional forms of entertainment and culture. The meaning of 'folk' and 'traditional' often get conflated for reasons not entirely unjustifiable. But when the 'traditional folk' is lifted out of its native contexts and placed squarely amid the modern music industry and the new media, one is faced with a series of mediations that may require an unearthing of the accreted historical meanings. 'Folk' can times be a rather loaded term indicating deep roots in the recesses of tradition and even cultural authenticity in a somewhat purist sense. As David Henderson (2003) argues, 'In the late 1970s, Charles Keil and Richard Dorson argued in the pages of the *Journal of the Folklore Institute* over the utility of the concept of the "folk." As William Wilson had pointed out in a 1973 article, interest in and study of the folk—like other uses of the folk—has carried frequent traces of romantic nationalism, with roots especially in the work of the German scholar Johann Gottfried Herder in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Herder hoped to rediscover the national past in the folk poetry of the present, believing that each nation had its own distinct culture and that each nation had a duty to preserve and nurture its own traditions, or restore them to vigor if necessary. By amplifying the voices of the past that he heard in the folk of the present—the seemingly uncorrupted bearers of German expressive culture—he strove to provide a strong base for national culture. He was thus purifying a nation that he believed had been contaminated by foreign influences—particularly those of the French—and allowing the nation to convalesce toward a healthy and robust future.'

Solis's [2012] ethnomusicological vocabulary carries concepts like 'remodeling' or 'restoration' as compensations for the likely 'damage' done to the supposedly intact folk forms through alien intrusions and rampant mimicry of adjacent and distant cultural forms. Summarizing the conceptual dilemma, he states '...When Charles Keil asked, "Who needs 'the folk?'" (1978), Richard Dorson retorted in the next issue, "We all need the folk." Yet

Dorson acknowledged “the erosion of the idea of the folk, as the tentacles of the media and modern technology brush the remotest corners of the globe” (1978:268). This apparent erosion has been met with a wide range of restoration projects, including what Arjun Appadurai called “self-imagining as an everyday social project” (1996:4), or what Janet Wolff called “culture as representation” (1997:170; her emphasis)]. The term ‘folk’ is thus clearly not as innocuous as it may seem initially and a scholar must be aware of its nuanced semantic and historical roots even while using the term as a descriptive label.

As indicated in the preceding quote and elsewhere, some of the learned deliberations carried out on the scholarly platforms, articles and books often form part of professional discourse among the community of the artists and even the listeners. This can be a startling experience for an ethnographer in the field, putting her on the defensive, momentarily. It is interesting, indeed highly fruitful to place some of these debates alongside the more popular debates carrying enormous passion and concern. Rather understandably, the practitioners of music live out these debates at a raw existential level and express them through concrete illustrations of their own choosing and personal contexts. The concern for quality is rarely unmediated or is found centering entirely on the bare or unmediated experience of listening—purity of the tradition, the prudence in making modifications in the traditional practices selectively and finicky concern for preserving the ‘essential’ character of the genre are thus some of the vital criteria used to determine what is good or bad in the current practices and procedures. That it is mostly easier to tell the significant departures from tradition than to pin down its ‘essential’ features, is thus well understood by both the practitioner as well as an expert outsider.

### **Reflexivity: A Methodological Journey through Bihar, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh**

It needs to be emphasized again that the work on Himachal Pradesh is by no means just a replication of the research regimen or a fixed template implemented earlier in Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh and

Haryana. This is not to say that the earlier research has changed its tack or the original objectives have undergone a significant change but the very purpose of such research has acquired greater focus and sharpness. The chief reason behind such shifts is tied closely to an ethnographic approach that necessitates a running debate between questions and concerns that emerge from the ground and ones that a researcher in effect imposes on his queries and the resultant empirical material. In fact, during a period of eight years, from 2009–2018, the research questions and the methodologies employed have been through several modifications and refinement. In the process, even the fundamental philosophical concerns of the project have been through a number of amendments and refinement. In many cases, the researcher decided to absorb the local concerns into his own research schema since they seemed of great value to the people within the ambit of those cultural and linguistic regions. Notably, with some of the queries and puzzles emerging from the field during the ethnographic work, the very objectives, the core concerns reflected in the research objectives were modified on the go, so to say. Put somewhat starkly, the ethnographic stance necessitated the borrowing and adoption of some of these concerns voiced by the interviewees in the field who were largely music professionals with opinions, perspectives and stances of their own. Although the original research objectives have to be guarded jealously, a steady input from the folk experts enriches and refines them further, instead of causing distractions or deviations. The oft-touted idea of reflexivity is far from being a simple mental reflex or an intellectual principle held steadfastly, and must be handled with great care.

Such are the reasons why It is important to dwell on the idea of reflexivity and its central role in ethnographic work. The idea of reflexivity goes entirely against the idea of templated research that aims to replicate the same research model at a number of different sites. Lack of a uniform research instrument or model is often seen to compromise the comparability among the different contexts, a challenge to be faced squarely rather than to be evaded. The least one may do, by way of an answer to the challenge, is to squarely present the various methodological and strategic twists and turns



that mark the fieldwork carried out in the three different cultural-linguistic terrains.

Being exploratory and stand alone, the fieldwork in Bihar marked the beginning of a project that has now acquired an ongoing dynamic. The research objectives in the case of Bihar were extremely narrow to begin with, although the empirical material generated through the open-ended approach soon suggested the adoption of a far wider scope and vista. The limited purpose of the Bihar project was to assess the 'livelihood opportunities' offered by the Bhojpuri entertainment industry in Bihar and some parts of eastern Uttar Pradesh. What really happened during the research is that even though the 'official' brief was fulfilled faithfully, the scope of the project widened as I delved deeper into the world of Bhojpuri. Since an open-ended ethnographic approach was used for research, right from the outset, the outcomes of the fieldwork, notwithstanding their focus on livelihood issues, generated enormous material with implications for the regional cultures. This encouraged me to retain the widened scope for my next stints of research in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh.

In 2009, of course, the full impact of the digital and internet culture was not to be seen as glaringly as in the later phases. It was nevertheless astounding to see the heavy intrusion of technology at sites normally left out of the loop of innovation and latest technical skills. Once one could uncover the rather 'primitive' sonic façade of the 'folkish' Bhojpuri culture, one got a glimpse of how the latest technologies have turned smaller towns of Bihar into production hubs with enormous potential. To provide a contrasting reference, the same regions continue to employ cattle for agricultural tasks like draft and tilling in the small land holdings that discourage heavy and costly technological inputs. The technological ensembles clearly and demonstrably do not behave like a flood, swamping the entire landscape, but make their entries into certain selective enclaves, music and cinema being some of the more diffusive technologies even in setups otherwise technologically deprived. This will seem ironic to those who may feel intuitively that the essential economic activities like agriculture would be prompter in taking to newer technologies and that the 'inessential'

sectors like entertainment would await their turn in availing the affordances on offer! In the case of the Indian society, its uneven development ensures the frequent yoking of what may seem unlikely—such as conditions of illiteracy and the use of internet, innovations in the field of entertainment, while food production and processing may have to wait longer for their turns. This is of course a matter of central concern to historians of technology focusing on the diffusion of expertise and instruments with wide-ranging applications.

It needs to be emphasized that coming face to face with this rather invisible world of the hi-tech was made possible entirely because the researcher scoured around for them, hoping to find these sites otherwise unknown and unseen. Unlike the mills and the workshops with telltale chimneys, the music studios do a quiet business in crannies that require little space and minimal advertising, as they depend entirely on word-of-mouth channels for their highly specialized business. To quote an example, the hotel accommodation used by the research team in the town of Siwan in Bihar revealed the existence of a well-equipped recording studio on the second day of the stay when some of the younger research assistants strayed into other parts of the building. Fully soundproofed as it was, the studio did not even produce a telltale hum that may travel out of ill-equipped recording spaces. Otherwise keen to help with our logistics, the hotel owner had failed to mention the studio to us!

A major task during the phases of reconnaissance for the three projects was thus to locate the recording hubs where the singers, instrumentalists, song writers and technicians converged, allowing a researcher to disinter the production chains and their recent and remote histories. Such invisibility is now partly remedied due to the bold presences registered on the internet [and the omnipresent loudspeakers as anyone familiar with small town India will acknowledge] where the music videos often carry significant amounts of useful information including phone numbers and addresses and provide numerous leads and clues for fieldwork. Unlike the self-projecting retail outlets, the obscureness of the addresses of studios in Bihar as well as Himachal Pradesh seemed

quite striking since it often took some effort to locate them for visits. Studio owners tend to avoid noisy areas of course to save on some of their investments in sound insulation but that alone did not seem to explain the inconspicuous location of these enterprises with no signboards or placards, which probably aims at staying out of the sight of the tax authorities. Even the internet sources such as videos on YouTube may thus often advertise phone numbers without revealing the geographical location or the postal address.

Having familiarised with Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, the researcher felt a strong urge to extend similar research to a distant part of the heartland with a smaller population and a less diverse linguistic scenario than Bihar. For these reasons as well the general affluence of the region, Haryana seemed to fit the bill. By the time fieldwork in Haryana began, the research objectives had explicitly multiplied considerably and more explicitly to include many of the central issues emerging from work done in Bihar. Whereas the work in Bihar began with a very limited objective, the vast material obtained permitted, indeed persuaded me, to expand the objectives with wider cultural relevance than just the livelihood opportunities for the musical personnel. Even mid-way during the project in Bihar, the objectives were already getting stretched far beyond the original frame and the process continued before I was able to reformulate and delineate my final set of research objectives in a clear-cut, explicit and decisive way.

I continued research in Haryana with the ethnographic vein following a snowballing pattern that embraced the urban as well as the rural contexts. Within a short period in Rohtak, Haryana it became clear to me that a number of seminal institutions, both official and unofficial were centrally involved in the world of music through patronage and in fact provided the main succour to the profession. Whereas in Bihar, the sites that could be tapped for ethnographic interviews seemed rather diffused, Haryana offered a wide range of specific institutions that backed the music industry. These included entities that may seem unlikely to an outsider—cow shelters, dharamshalas, village communities [panchayats and ad hoc committees] undertaking joint social efforts such as construction of school or temples, colleges, universities,

government departments, maths [religious estates headed by a Mahanth] as well as the startlingly improbable sugar factories. Although a studio in Rohtak remained the chief research base, for the first time the researcher was compelled to look at these new hubs to grasp the state of affairs in Haryana. The dynamics of these hubs in contributing to the music industry varies in accordance with time and place and could be the focus of a study dedicated to the theme of patronage in Haryana. To give just one example, although the local sugar mills formerly organized sizeable music shows for the farmers queueing up at their gates for several days, with lorries laden with sugarcane, the practice has seen a notable decline in recent times. More than a few artists expressed their disappointment at losing a major source of income in the recent past.

Notably, although the state in Bihar is quite active in the cultural field, Haryana seemed way ahead perhaps due to the affluence of the state. Similarly, while in Bihar the educational institutions can, to this day, be ignored completely for research such as this, due to their relative disregard of the regional tongues, educational institutions at every level in Haryana seemed to invest a lot more in their cultural activities. Haryana also offered a traditional form of payment to the Sang artists through a traditional ceremonial system called 'chamola' wherein the artist gets a cut in the various donations received for a public cause. 'Chamola' in fact has become integral to the Sang performances that are interrupted for long periods to musically recite the names of the specific donors and the amounts received. 'Chamola' stands for a contractual practice, where the communities share a fixed percentage of the income generated with the artist in order to finance a wide range of projects.

The contrasting experiences in Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh and Haryana understandably required different methodological approaches in several details even though the same ethnographic stance continued to dominate the fieldwork. Changing and increasingly reflexive questions suited to different professionals with strikingly divergent profiles and contexts thus became the common characteristic of the project. The researcher also had

to modify and change the specific research objectives during the course of the fieldwork, according to the local concerns and the consideration and accommodation they deserved. Although the general objectives of the research thus remained steadily the same, the researcher had to explore those areas of activity that seemed germane to the specific context. To give just one example, while in Haryana the multiplicity of languages seemed to be of little import, it seemed significant in the case of Bihar, but in the context of Himachal Pradesh it became one of the central concerns. In the case of Himachal Pradesh, one indeed has to constantly keep track of how individuals and institutions are responding to its linguistic diversity that may seem advantageous in principle [for example from the tourism viewpoint as the state offers a wide bouquet of cultural features and products to the visitor] but can pose enormous challenge to the economics of the entertainment industry. While the population of Haryana is above 250 lakh, Himachal Pradesh with its population of 70 lakh, is riven by a number of local tongues that do not provide a viable market for full-time professionals, unlike Bihar and Haryana. As the following section on the findings will reveal, it is rare to find a professional singer or musician in Himachal who depends solely on their earnings from performances. The artists often prefer government jobs as they allow them more time, even winning them credit for their contribution to the local culture. This, by itself, changes the professional profiles and the professional strategies of the artists and producers who have been sustaining a flourishing industry as robust as that of Bihar and Haryana. As the next chapter will indicate, a panning coverage of several hubs of musical activity enabled the researcher to collect a wide range of empirical material as well as the broad sweep of opinions and perspectives prevalent among the different professionals that form the production-circulation chain.

A methodological task common to the three projects was to identify the personnel and the sites which must be covered in order to properly embrace the entire production chain of the entertainment industry. This turned out to be a highly involving and time-consuming task that had to be carried out at the initial

stages of the project. Glaring as it is, the diversity among the regions generally became apparent at a very early stage. Here again a very significant difference between Bihar, Haryana and Himachal is that while in Bihar the music retailer and distribution agent was rather central for the research stint in 2009, the retailer was almost altogether missing from the picture by 2017 in Himachal. The reason quite simply is that regional music is rarely sold in shops and at any rate selling music cannot be a viable source of livelihood any more. At all these sites, 2010–2012 seems to be the period when the retailers saw their businesses getting decimated and began looking for alternatives within or without the industry.

In Himachal in 2016, while the studio as a site remained significant, the selection of the interviewees depended largely on the initial observations and suggestions obtained from the field. To give an example, while in the case of Haryana and Himachal, it seemed vital to visit the educational and official government offices, in Bihar even a passing glance at these two sites more than sufficed, as the entertainment industry showed little or insignificant overlap with the education institutions, including the sizeable coaching industry. Similarly, over time as the music retailers are abandoning the profession, they were seen as a major voice in 2009 in Bihar but have either diminished in numbers since or are extremely difficult to find in 2017. In 2014 in Haryana, the researcher had a 4-hour long conversation with the last agent-retailer in Rohtak, by 2016 in Himachal it was found that the only extant [persisting till 2015 despite the odds] retailer in Shimla [Tanya Videos in Lower Bazar, Shimla] has given up his music production-sales business and shifted to the clothing trade. It is thus vital to identify the sites and individuals appropriate to the specific region and time period even as the fieldwork proceeds through the different regions of the Hindi heartland.

### **Sources of Information**

Although the bulk of this multi-phasal research project is devoted to both a largely open-ended ethnographic conversations with professionals that form part of the production chain, the internet

was extensively scoured for a wide range of empirical material. With these two forming the mainstay, additional sources such as the print media, mainly newspapers, have also been consulted. The local press and the city pages in Patna, Rohtak, and Shimla [such as Shimla Bhaskar as part of Dainik Bhaskar] and elsewhere devote considerable space to cultural events held at several institutions and news reports around them are a fixture in the local press. The coverage of regional music in the print media varies from region to region—whereas in Bihar, the coverage is minimal though on the rise, Haryana press is more accommodative, and Himachal newspapers devoted far greater space to cultural events. This on its own is indicative of the place held by popular culture within the literate universe of the news media and television. Newspapers in Haryana and Himachal also accorded considerable coverage to news around the activities of the artists unions and their demands from the government. Such validation from the media is almost absent in Bihar, where the popular artists are featured only in extreme contexts such as scandals or incidents of violence. Secondary literature has been used for methodological refinements and for forming one's own perspectives on the relevant issues as well.

### **A Note on Internet-based Research**

An important admission to be made at the very outset is that despite appearances, the data derived from the internet can often be specious and not as reliable as it may seem. Clear-cut numbers and magnitudes may lull a researcher into a sort of complacency that is really quite out of place. As things stand, unlike other industries, the entertainment industry is globally known for the poverty of reliable data, and if anything, India and other developing nations face a far more slippery slope. The value of the information, whether quantitative or qualitative, on the internet is thus acceptable perhaps only since the ethnographic material obtained in the field of music and entertainment is in general as unreliable as any other source or more, requiring frequent confirmations from multiple sources. Whatever the source, thus, there are no

dependable agencies that may be tapped for a definitive reading of a situation and approximations, rather than precise figures, are the best that one may hope for. The situation in a small-town context and an industry citadel like Mumbai is quite comparable in my experience since, apart from imprecision, one has to deal with a noted tendency for secretiveness and deliberate misleading. To give just one example, in 2010, even though a Bhojpuri film producer agreed to share with me a summary budget spreadsheet to give me a sense of a breakdown among the chief heads and to prove to me the outrageousness of the fees charged by the male stars, he nevertheless refused to divulge the title of the film, even though I could gauge the overall profit made from the project. The missing title diminished the value of the empirical material and the quantities laid out in great clarity nevertheless shrunk in their value as hard data. Although the contacts in the field do help in opening up conversations, the probing queries often put the professionals on their guard. Being mostly familiar with market research, the professionals routinely suspect the disinterested researcher to be a likely producer with a business agenda. It often helps to be a rank outsider and even more to be a foreigner unlikely to have a financial stake in the local trade. My experience in Bihar, Haryana and Himachal has taught me to accept all this as a fact of life and to eliminate likely errors through constant checking and double-checking from different sources.

An initial scanning of the websites brought out the following features and problems to be tackled through an appropriate methodological strategy and design to address them:

- A. It was decided to use the taxonomic terminology [for region, genre, for example] and labels pertaining to Himachal that have found prevalence on the internet and are also part of the studio parlance as well as common usage, indicating subregions within Himachal. Given the nature of the worldwide web, the terminology is fairly universal, not requiring either translation or conversion of the metrics used. More important, perhaps, it is near impossible to impose one's own chosen categories



and convert the data into categories of one's choice. Here again there is no precise definition for a subregion though, and one simply has to depend on a medley of linguistic, political and geographical terminology that seems more prevalent. At any rate, it proved impossible to translate the taxonomies available into categories of one's own choice, even when they would seem more befitting for the study.

- B. The volume on Himachal from the series of books on the *People's Survey of the Indian languages* lists 25 languages but the internet [just like the common public] is not sufficiently familiar with the language names. For example, a search for 'Bhot music' right from the outset showed results for 'bhoot' [or ghost in Hindi] and the irrelevance of the results magnifies as one proceeds towards further pages. Due to phonetic and semantic reasons, the search terms often end up producing completely irrelevant or misleading results. For example, a search for 'Baghati' language spoken in parts of Solan district on its very first page showed results related to Bhakti music, quite obviously due to the phonetic and orthographic semblance. Over time, however these terms may show greater prevalence on the internet.
- C. the level of precision that one may hope for in search-based queries and research is mostly likely to be rather low and perhaps even inappropriate or unusable in other contexts than music and entertainment
- D. the quantities indicated in these contexts can almost never be taken as absolutes and must be seen as indicative and useful only for comparative purposes
- E. In order to restrain the imprecision and errors to some extent, it was found useful to start with the last pages of the results to check the entries for their relevance. The results listed in response to a search often bring up irrelevant or remotely connected entries. Although this may work as a corrective in a cumulative sense over time, there is no way to find out precisely how corrective it actually is.
- F. The conclusion after all these attempts was that even though

- some of the impreciseness can be eliminated, the precision levels attained allow only a broad indicative interpretation.
- G. Some of the issues emerging due to the limited reliability of data do not affect the present research as much as they might in other contexts and are at any rate not related directly to the research objectives. To put it differently, the research findings do not include results and outcomes derivable from incomplete or unreliable parts of the data readily available.
  - H. For the reasons mentioned above, conclusions of a precise or seminal nature should not be derived from the data. Only broad observations may be made on the basis of the crude quantitative data.
  - I. limitations posed by the semantic issues on the internet discourage precise conclusions of the quantitative kind. But all is not lost. It is indeed possible to come to broad quantitative heuristic and to also derive qualitative inferences from the audience response/comments sections on the internet.
  - J. Finally, the ethnographic interviews provided me with a useful point of reference, as in some perplexing cases, I could always go back to the interviewer with a query derived from the internet and consult him/her on the veracity of a fact in question. In many instances, the internet also fills up information gaps left in the ethnographic narratives.

As mentioned earlier, the internet is an ever-growing archive of material on the subject and the researcher has had to develop his own procedures for the mining of this archive in a way that suits the objectives of the project to an optimal degree. To illustrate the point, every video, without exception, carries some minimal information about the specific musical tract in question. The MP3 format may be somewhat less informative but will invariably reveal the background to the track and some basic information. The videos on YouTube and many other sources often carry some historical information, however recent or skimpy about the producer, the studio, and the artists. At times the advertising component offers additional information. It is however the string of comments by the audience that offer the richest source of information in that they unravel a side of the story unheard

elsewhere—the audience response to specific tracks as well as the general attitude and appreciation by the audience. It is not uncommon at all to find the audience respond to each other's comments and the systematic scanning confirmed that the music audience is perhaps the strongest willed among the social media public and the sharpest in its comments and disputes. Ignoring however the excessively emotive tone and language prevalent on the internet, there was an attempt to uncover the debates that are most widespread among the audience. These debates have proved vital to the research project as it is difficult or indeed impossible to see them in all their clarity through ethnographic interactions with the individual audience. There is thus a great advantage in analysing the audience comments for some factual information such as the number of hits, but mostly to unearth the debates, quarrels and perspectives voiced by the local audience. Such an analysis has allowed the researcher to compare the perspectives emerging from earlier fieldwork, and the ethnographic conversation in Himachal to refine the conclusions and the outcomes of the project.

The quantitative data from Google follows the format provided by the search engine and some analysis will be made of the numbers around the key terms related to the Himachal music in general as well as the subregional areas selected—the categories related directly to the nature of the empirical material selected from the google search columns are as follows and not all the categories provided by Google are relevant for the present research:

1. All [items and entities of information, formats and circulation]
2. Videos, and
3. News

It is important to conclude this section by stating that the methodology used for internet continued to evolve even as the material gleaned therefrom went through a process of analysis and interpretation. Despite the attempt to customize the methods and procedures specifically for the present research, it is likely that some general methodological precepts may emerge and help me during the next phases of my fieldwork at yet another site in the Hindi heartland.

## CHAPTER III

# A Comparative Mapping of the Production-Circulation Chains in Himachal, Haryana, and Bihar–Eastern Uttar Pradesh

Although this chapter places the outcomes from the ethnographic fieldwork done in Himachal Pradesh [2016-2018] at the centre, the purpose here is to also employ the findings as a point of departure for comparisons with other parts of the Hindi belt, notably Haryana, Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. This segment of the volume may often begin with a discussion on the Himachal culturescapes and then veer towards comparisons with features and practices from other regions. The chapter will also dwell intermittently on comparisons among the subregional entities of Himachal and other larger regional units when they seem sufficiently noteworthy. Since the study was not carried out simultaneously, or even continually, in the regions mentioned, thanks to the research funding regimen, the time lags separating the studies must be underlined and duly noted. Over the years as this ongoing project on the mapping of the regional music and entertainment industries proceeded, the sites for ethnographic work also underwent a profound change. To illustrate the point, whereas in the year 2009, it was possible to focus almost entirely on the music producers [at least for pilot studies] as the professional and social hubs for professionals drawn from the entire production chain of the entertainment

industry, the situation has been changing precipitously since 2012 and by the year 2018 it was no longer possible to confine oneself to the music companies or producers alone for meaningful research. This may seem like a mere methodological detail with some practical consequences but in effect reflects the profound changes and realigning of the production chains on the ground. With the relevant technologies in continual flux right since the 1990s and with no stable lulls in between, the musical scenarios seemed to shift even as the research proceeded to its next phases. An ethnographer working in the field over the years soon begins to see that his chosen field is forever in a state of transition with few pauses, necessitating travel in both spatial and temporal senses.

To illustrate the point in further detail, while in 2009 in Bihar the A&R [Artists & Repertoire] representatives of the music companies functioned as a firm pillar in the music industry, by 2018 they were all but extinct. The global term 'A&R' in its vernacularized version as 'endera' [the meaning of which was incomprehensible to me for a whole day before I got clued in] was widely interspersed in a large number of conversations in 2009 in Bihar and UP [Uttar Pradesh, chiefly Banaras] but had gone entirely out of use by 2014 in Haryana. At an earlier stage, the A&R reps from the bigger music companies lay at the very core of the network and the key to the company's talent scouting efforts. However, even as early as 2008 in Bihar, the A&R agent's dominant role in the cassette phase [1987-2000] had transformed radically. As Murarijee, a senior professional from Patna put it in 2009, 'in the cassette era and even till somewhat later, an agent [read A&R agent] used to be the "eyes and ears" of a company. An agent was often more knowledgeable and discerning than a singer. He kept track of both—the various musical forms and talent on the ground, as well as the market trends. But this role has lately changed into that of a commission agent whose job is to entice singers to the company's doorstep. Over time, companies have stopped investing in the debutantes. It has become the other way. It is the singers who have now become the chief investors in the business. The company's role is confined to gathering the profits resulting from sales over time, apart from the initial process of recording'. Also,

the music company's refusal to share the revenues through a transparent and routinized process left the artists frustrated and the A&Rs were not able to help, further contributing to a loss of their status and substantive functions.

During the initial weeks of my fieldwork in Patna, Ara, Buxar, Sasaram, Sewan and Chhapra in Bihar in 2008-2009, it was quite common to hear the singers and musicians vent their frustration with the music companies and their A&R agents. Often unprovoked, this was the common refrain across all the sites covered in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, compelling me to look deeper into the conduct and practices followed by bigger entities such as T-Series but also middling companies like Wave, Angle, Neelam, Sargam which often dealt with bouquets of diverse regions like Bhojpuri, Rajasthani, Garhwali with their own customary practices. But by 2014, when I began fieldwork in Haryana, the music companies, big or small, were no longer taken as a significant source of income in Haryana or Himachal in 2017, except for the bigger stars marked for their star value. The average artist found himself sidelined in the music company's production chain that should presumably place him at the centre. Even at the outset of the fieldwork in Bihar in 2008, Ramji Gupta, a studio owner in Patna had admitted more explicitly than many others that 'Many more artists [these days] make their livelihoods through music. The central figure of course remains the singer who alone creates occasions for earnings for a wide range of musicians. Once a singer becomes a hit, he is able to create a steady source of income for many musicians around him, who also make additional income from other sources... The chief income of the singers and artists is not the CD industry by itself but the many shows and concerts commissioned by individuals and institutions.'

By 2016-2018 in Himachal, the once familiar figure or the term 'A&R' did not occur in a single conversation. The lesson to be drawn is, one has to therefore adapt to the ever-shifting contexts in order to grasp the accelerating dynamic of the music industry and the newly emergent challenges and opportunities faced by both the performer and the audience. It is for these reasons that

the methodological strategies and the choice of work sites have undergone a serious change since 2009 when the initial work on Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh was carried out. Already by 2014, the researcher found that the professionals to be spoken to in Haryana were dispersed into numerous hubs but at times quite simply into a tangle of social-professional networks rather than concentrated hives where one may direct one's research energy without much distraction. It deserves reiterating that the shifts in methodology were not driven entirely through cumulative rethinking or refinement over time but also because the changing entertainment scenario dictated the changes in approach. The advantage of continual reflexivity thus lay in the profound discovery that the methodology used drew progressively closer to the ground realities, forming a greater symmetry between the arenas of ethnographic efforts and the structural dynamic of the entertainment industry. What follows here is a comprehensive list of sources and sites that were engaged with during the period of 2009-2017 in Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh in that order. As clarified above, not every site mentioned here received equal attention and indeed, almost each of these on their own seem to deserve dedicated research attention. This is clearly an area of further research, especially for studies focusing on a specific site or domain in a given region with greater intensity. The significance of each site was, and continues to be, determined by the ethnographic interactions and findings from the specific region and context. The following sites/areas listed here reflect the shifting focus of research in the field and the work desk bringing out the processual and logistical aspect of the fieldwork, although to keep up a smooth flow of analysis and discussion, the empirical material presented here may show considerable overlaps:

1. Studios
2. Traditional Artists and their practices – communities/settlements and individuals
3. Modern artists and their practices
4. The state and its agencies – government departments

5. Schools, universities and colleges
6. Fairs
7. The internet – focusing on the regional/sub-regional

As has been repeatedly stated, due to relative unfamiliarity with Himachal Pradesh, the researcher ensured that none of the likely sources of information were left entirely uncovered during the initial recce. That, however, does not imply that the items on the list have the same status for both the quality and quantity of information received and their relative significance in the musical production chain. Whereas some of the sites yielded the same or similar observations, selecting a wide variety of information sources proved to be of crucial importance as it enabled the researcher to ensure the verity and reliability of statements and claims made by specific individuals as well as the significant items of information.

As indicated earlier, a need was felt in the case of Himachal to cast a wider net across the broader networks of artists, producers and promoters. To reiterate the point and to illustrate it with some vividness, one must look at the exponential growth of the vast and ever inclusive canopy of the internet that brings together numerous agencies, even though it often only reveals the surface features of the global phenomenon, frequently masking the local details. There is thus a need to look at the faces and the minds pulling the strings from behind—the personnel that drive the uploading decisions through a somewhat elaborate interactive process involving professional networks. Some of these individuals and agents wield their influence directly, while in other cases the influence may be relatively indirect, though nearly as significant. A good example are the music departments at the colleges and the universities in Himachal which appear to be related to the industry only indirectly and tenuously but are in fact the newly emerged nurseries where the future talents are groomed and fashioned to give a direction to the growth dynamic in the local industry. As an aside one may note that the academic slant to the folk forms has often resulted in the ‘classicizing’ of the folk rather unduly in many cases. But the academy-based professionals may see this stress



as a ‘civilizing’ and cleansing corrective to the open commercial market that according to them ‘vulgarizes’ and hybridizes the local cultures. These are however grave judgmental matters and an area of research requiring separate attention and normative discussions of a highly involved kind, taking us to the very centre of musical pedagogy. It is indeed ironic that on the one hand, one has to be sensitive to the long history of unceasing give and take between the folk and the classical/semiclassical, the wide margins of the grey are in between and on the other hand find oneself fussing over the ‘undesirable’ classical intrusions into the raw folk! One can only wind up here with the brief query—what is the difference between the market led hybridization process and the deliberate policy of classicizing of the folk forms and how do they impact the course of musical production? This path of inquiry is of course riddled with normative twists and turns, involving perspectival and judgmental matters.

This section will introduce and discuss in detail the several sites chosen for fieldwork and also dwell on the empirical material generated thus far. The material will of course be analysed through comparative references, though the broader issues emerging from the fieldwork will be presented and discussed largely in the next chapter. As indicated by the title, this section will time and again have specific comparisons with practices and norms prevalent in Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Himachal through the prism of the listed sites and the corresponding vantage points.

### **1. Studios and Professionals**

One of the earliest and probably the most urgent tasks in all the three projects was to locate the different professional hubs for the artists—music companies, retailers and studios in the region through which one may formulate a tentative pathway of the industry and get a good idea of what kind of professionals and agencies one may have to interact with. Although in the cassette-CD era [broadly 1987–2012 with regional variations], it may have been possible to map the entire universe of the music industry simply by hovering around the retail outlets and shops [at times

also music production companies] such as the widely known Lajpat Rai Market in Old Delhi, very soon it was no longer so. During the earliest stint in Bihar in 2008–2009, the retailers still seemed to have their tentacles rather visibly reaching both ways in the production and reception chain—backwards towards the artists, the music companies and the recording studios, as well as forward towards the customer and the patron. Even the singers tended to visit the music shops frequently for gossip, feedbacks on their sales figures, thus dividing their socializing time between the shop, the music company and at times the recording studio. This was veritably a site where the artist frequently ran into her listener, motivated and involved enough to make a purchase.

With the near extinction of the retail networks, and the decline of the music companies, the studios often turned into social and professional hubs. To quote an experience from 2016, once when I sat through the recordings of three songs on an afternoon at Surandra Negi's studio at Shoghi near Shimla, the sound proprietor/recordist/designer Negi informed me that the songs would be uploaded the very next day in the artist's absence. The two striking points here are the promptness of delivery and the brevity of the production chain, but also the singer's full trust in the recordist. What has not changed through the various technological phases is thus, the artist-producer's utter dependence on the sound recordist for quality. During the session quoted above, despite the frequent retakes suggested by the recordist, Negi often approved a take with a qualification—he would recurrently say 'I will take care of this flaw later, you continue with the next lines.' A good sound recordist was thus already seen increasingly as a mentor, if not a full-fledged teacher or guide, unlike earlier [in Bihar in 2009] when the trio of A&R Agents, composers and arrangers played the same role jointly, while the recordist was seen as a mere technician. Unlike a teacher however, a mentor-recordist in 2016 was regarded not just as a guide but as someone capable of helping the singer in utterly practical and specific ways, such as enhancing the technical quality of the performance to levels far superior to the artist's actual ability. This is of course not unique to Himachal and can be observed in the company of any successful studio

owner in Bihar and Haryana as well. In Haryana in 2014, Varma, the owner-recordist at 'Harmony Studio' in Rohtak, was observed to be suggesting changes in the melodic structure, thus playing the role of an impromptu composer. Similarly, the artist in Shoghi seemed to depend on Negi for the vital decisions to select, record and upload specific songs. In case of a disapproval, the artists did not even bother to argue and moved on to an alternate composition from his inventory. On both these occasions in Haryana and Himachal, the sound recordists indicated that they had very little regard for the innate ability of most of the singers who approached them as clients. Although the recordists would not admit it, one could infer that just about anyone can walk into a studio and have her song recorded and uploaded for a fee. In fact, a recordist in Rohtak even boasted that he could tweak and transform the most tuneless rendering into a tolerably good performance through his recording-arranging-editing skills. With no A&R agent or a music company to screen or select a candidate, the studios, with their dependence on the hourly rental received from the clients, seemed unlikely to discourage a singer from entering the music market. But an observer can easily tell when the recordist gets impatient with lack of skill and talent in the singer, even when he tries to flatter his customer with reassurances and encouragement.

Way back in 2010, in Siwan, Bihar, it was observed that a singer present in the session attended by me, willingly allowed the recordist to make drastic changes in the melody and the rhythm and was quite grateful for the changes. A number of rather conspicuous absences in the Shoghi studio also deserve a mention—whereas in Bihar in 2009-10, the director and the arranger were an essential presence, that took care of the musical details and the embellishments necessary for a finished product, both Haryana and Himachal setups seemed to have no such requirement. An arranger was traditionally a professional with a good knowledge of musical instruments and orchestration who took the composer's bare melody [refrains and stanzas] and expanded it into full-bodied music. Perhaps his absence from the current production chain is explained by the widespread use of the synthesizer and rather infrequent use of live musicians and real instruments. The

absence of the arranger and the instrumentalists may of course be seen as a decline or compromise in quality, but it also unclutters the precious studio spaces, allowing for a direct rapport between the performer and the composer, not to mention the economy in the rental space and expense and the managerial bother caused by the personnel. Good instrumentalists are rare to come by and also unaffordable when an artist is personally financing a recording project, although the stage shows must necessarily have an array of instruments to engage a demanding audience.

One of the earliest interviews in Shimla was with Mr Dhananjay, who runs a recording studio 'Mukund Recording Studio' in Totu, a suburb of Shimla. Dhananjay's entire family is closely connected to the world of music and he continues in his father's footsteps. His father Dr Keshav Sharma, now in his late 70s, was, at some point in Delhi, a disciple of the renowned Sitar player Ravi Shankar. Dhananjay's elder brother Dr Mrityunjay is presently a professor of music at the Himachal Pradesh University at the Summerhill campus in Shimla and the recordist holds an MA degree in music from the same department. According to him, there may be 8–9 recording studios in Himachal Pradesh at centres like Rampur, Rohru, Kangra, Kullu and Dharamshala. But Dhananjay could produce no definite number for the studios. Surendra Negi, Dhananjay informs, runs a studio in Shoghi, another suburb of Shimla and Jiyalal Thakur runs a popular recording facility in Solan called Kaylar Studio, although he also works as a driver at a local university. Negi is perhaps the best-known recordist in Himachal Pradesh, partly for his technical and musical skills but also because over time he has moved into a wider range of work. Starting out in his youth with a studio at Rekongpeo in the Kinnaur region, also his native place, he spent several years in Rampur-Bushehr before making Shogi, Shimla his main base. He thus has singers coming to avail of his services from great distances. Dhananjay summarised the nature and range of the musical material he deals with—folk songs, gazals, bhajans and modern pop. His clientele accordingly comes from different parts of Himachal.

Dhananjay readily admitted that the linguistic diversity does

become a major issue and different regions have varying star followings. By way of examples, he mentioned Kuldip Sharma from Thiyog who dominates the upper Himachal whereas Karnail Rana made the lower Himachal areas, such as Kangra, his mainstay. There was a time, according to Dhananjay, when the folk artists acquired their fame entirely on the basis of radio broadcasts followed across a wide region—Gita Bharadwaj and Kritika Tanwar from Mandi are the two names that occur to him readily. He also confirms that the retail trade in music has now come to a definitive end.

By way of regional distribution, according to Dhananjay, Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti form a distinct identity whereas Sirmaur, Kangra, Mandi, Solan, Bilaspur are the other significant hubs. He claims that among these, Solan, Mandi and Bilaspur are heavily influenced by the Punjabi forms and styles, whereas Sirmaur tends to conform to the traditional folk, and bhajans for some reason are more popular in Kangra. Dhananjay is all praise for artists from Sirmaur who have not deviated much from the traditional pattern. Chamba, another region is praised by Dhananjay for its melodic richness. When asked what he means by 'traditional', Dhananjay illustrates it through the instance of 'Nati', the most popular form all over Himachal, despite the different styles followed in various sub-regions. In its original form, he claims, Nati did not include any melodic element and was based entirely on different and characteristic rhythmic conventions in the various subregions. This opinion matched with what the traditional folk artists from Badidhar, Arki as well as Rajesh Bhati, a Mangalamukhi [a caste of ceremonial musicians attached to temples] but also a modern music professor from Shimla University stated in their conversations. It is not uncommon these days however to have songs and the use of instruments associated with singing, such as flutes and guitars. Dhananjay attributes this shift entirely to the internet, claiming that exposure to global music is largely responsible for the new changes in the Nati and other forms. These changes are most evident during the college fests, where the use of modern instruments has become the norm. Adoption of melodic content in a purely rhythmic genre is interesting from another viewpoint—in both Bihar and Haryana, the interviewees often

felt strongly about the intrusions from the faster beats, which they often regarded as the chief 'bane' of the modernized lyrical forms. But in the now modernized Nati, we observe exactly the opposite and more, in that, a purely rhythmic tradition has had to not simply make way for the component of melodies but the rhythms themselves have become much faster to suit the modern taste. The gentle and patient sway of the Nati dance has been turned into a frenzied and short-lived lyrical performance suitable to an urban discotheque. The change in the form has been so drastic that it doesn't require a purist to make the extreme claim that modern 'Nati' is no longer Nati at all! Despite the changes in pace, the Nati dance style is easily recognizable to an outsider for the unique gestures and movements based on half beats followed almost instinctively by local men, women and children. Outsiders keen to join the melee often fail to handle the complex rhythmic patterns and fumble over the steps.

An altogether different kind of transformation of the traditional norms was witnessed by me in Rohtak, Haryana—soon after having watched a segment from an 11-day performance of Sang, I also saw an hour-long Sang performance at 'Ratnawali,' an annual cultural festival in Kurukshetra held every year on 2 November, the Haryana Foundation Day. The college fest schedule allowed only for a highly synoptic version of a genre that is expected to continue for several days during the nights. Such changes are of course determined by the changing routines and norms of modern life. In Kurukshetra during the annual fest, the traditional musicians were present for the entire duration of two days in their distinct costumes and get up, providing figures of reverence. They strutted about in somewhat stagey and exaggerated versions of their traditional costumes, looking pleased at the attention received from the educated, the youth and the urban lot. The shows by the traditional artists were marked as such in the festival schedule and were held separately from the other shows that displayed clear signs of hybridity. Such issues of purity and loyalty to the tradition will come up repeatedly in the discussion and the concluding sections of the final version of the report will dwell on this matter at length. 'Traditional versus the modern' is an ongoing debate and

is far being a black and white affair—it is highly layered with artists holding opinions that suggest a wide range of readings of their own tradition. Notably, even the modern and hybridizing artists show immense reverence for the ‘traditional’ and often readily admit helplessness in following their modern ways, professedly because of the pressure from the audience. Interestingly, during the entire stint of fieldwork in the three states of Bihar, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, the researcher did not come across a single artist who does not revere or respect the traditional, or thought of its modern versions as superior or upgraded in any sense of the term. Invariably, the artists end up putting the blame on the modern audience for showing preference for the modern at the cost of the traditional.

When asked about the economics of the live or stage shows, Dhananjay brought up an event management company ‘New Light and Sound’ based in Lower Bazar, Shimla. The owners who founded probably the first ever recording studio in Himachal in the 1980s, now run a company that supplies all the essential and peripheral equipment, sets up the stage and even accepts catering contracts. This is quite indicative of the sort of trajectory the music business has followed in the past three decades. The event management companies seem to go hand in hand with the prevalence of live concerts and artists now have the option to avail their services for promotion and general management. It is not clear however exactly why a performer should engage or even work in partnership with an event manager, dividing his earnings in the process, unless he sees a major benefit in it such as access to a wider clientele. An event manager however, when contracted by a client, would definitely be in a position to hire a singer’s services for a fee as part of a broader package including decorations, design and logistics for the event.

According to Dhananjay, throughout Himachal there are 10–12 fulltime singers and the rest do it only part time; a number significantly smaller than both Haryana and Bihar-eastern U P, where the number would go into hundreds, if not thousands. Similarly, all over Shimla there are no more than 4–5 professional bands that use a combination of traditional instruments like

Dholki and Shehani but also employ guitars, flutes, keyboards and pads. Typically, these bands have 5–15 members and no singer has his own fixed or captive band. The singers tend to change their bands from time to time and do not get to rehearse enough with a fixed group; something that affects the quality of the performance. According to Dhananjay, there are 8–9 music directors who charge averagely Rs 10,000 for a recording, with an overall cost of Rs 25,000. There is a dearth of good song writers and the quality of the lyrics has suffered a great deal in Himachal, says Dhananjay. The rest of the musicians earn up to Rs 3,000 per recording shift. It is routinely the singer who makes an investment and takes decisions such as choosing a studio and recordist, claims Dhananjay. The studios charge around Rs 15,000 for eight songs and Dhananjay himself charges Rs 300 per hour for the recordings. The music directors generally come from college or university backgrounds with a degree in music, and are often trained in classical Hindustani music. While summarising the year 2016, Dhananjay says that his clients consisted of around 2 folk artists, 15 new clients and the rest 50 were his steady customers.

How a certain region may throw up unique sources of income and how they get drawn into the production chain, became particularly evident when Dhananjay revealed that he currently derives a substantial income from the numerous private schools in and around Shimla. It turns out that these schools have lately been preparing CDs and videos that carry records of their annual functions, in order to upload. The custom has been to record the songs sung by professional artists in studios and to use them as playback material for the students. These albums provide the schools attractive material for their publicity kits and the schools are willing to spend substantial amounts on them. Dhananjay is often given the contract to organize the musicians, the singer and the choreographer for the entire job, including recording the video of the students when they perform to the recorded tunes on the choreographer's instructions. The promotional videos for schools clearly indicate a niche market in Shimla and other Himachal towns, which have had numerous prestigious boarding schools for children since colonial times.



Dhananjay also mentions that the studios may be numerous at a given point of time, but the attrition rates are equally high. He gives the example of the town of Kullu that had a number of studios till some time ago but most of them have shut down. This reminded the researcher of Thiyog, a town around 35 kms from Shimla known for its cultural talents and frequency of cultural events, which was reputed for having a string of studios with hectic recording activity. However, when the researcher tried to contact the studio owners, it was found that they had all shut down and the last owner had shifted to Rampur. This seemed to contrast with both Bihar and Haryana, where the studio business is more stable and up to date technologically. One major difference between the studios in the pre-digital phase and now may be that while earlier, the studios were almost invariably business hubs, combining the commissioning of singers, production and recording as well as wholesale distribution, the studios since the introduction of CDs, have turned into centres of recording expertise and equipment, even though they continue to be social hubs for the artist networks, bringing the singer, composer, instrumentalist and the lyricist in a close embrace. There is a good possibility that, with the increasing portability of the recording equipment, a recordist may turn into an itinerant, following the live events from place to place. During a phone conversation about appointments with Dhananjay, he once mentioned being busy throughout the week with recording jobs at the university and some Doordarshan programmes in the town auditoria. This technological logic accompanied by changes in the market structure may, in some of the aspects, apply equally to the three regions/states in question.

Dhananjay's accounts also brought forth another major difference between Bihar, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh—in Himachal, unlike Bihar and Haryana, it is rare to find an artist who depends solely on his earnings from music. Most of the singers and instrumentalists mentioned seemed to hold permanent government jobs and quite a few among them did not depend heavily on income from their musical performances. Their chief concern seemed to be some level of fame and recognition among the audience. Although presence on the internet often led to

invitations from various groups, colleges, festival organizers, government departments, fair authorities and even villages, the monetary aspect did not seem as vital in Himachal as in the case of Bihar and Haryana, where the singers were often found to be bargaining forcefully with private sponsors for higher fees. There is however one exception to this rule—the Himachal newspapers frequently carry news about artists appealing to the government for higher fees and even complain that they do not enjoy parity with the artists from other states invited by the Himachal government for their fairs and festivals. This seemed to have, according to a music teacher at the local college, as much to do with money as the slight implied by the lesser fee. In the month of February 2017 however, the Himachal government did announce a raise in the emoluments for the different grades of artists from the state. In Haryana and Bihar, it is rarer for an artist to voice complaints against the government, mainly because their main source of income lies elsewhere, even though they value their official grading by the department of culture for some tangible reasons, such as ranking in the market. The fees received by the artists are also important in that they determine the ranking of the artists who get rather rigidly slotted in some kind of a local hierarchy. These hierarchies, invariably disputed and challenged, were determined largely by the circulation on the internet, government awards, and other public honours won by the artists who often affix a standard rate or charge going with their names. The situation changed drastically for the artists from Haryana and Bihar during the pandemic years 2020-2021, which saw a sustained campaign in the states for subsidies to the impoverished artists, that would help them survive the crisis.

The studios have narrowed their basic functions in the internet era and gone are the days when they acted as producers and distributors apart from providing the recording facilities. The practice of active seeking of fresh talent by studio representatives has come to an end entirely. In 2009, the studios in Patna seemed to double as producers, marketers and wholesale distributors but by 2014 in both Bihar and Haryana, the practice has petered out. This has been accompanied by a process of decentralization

of production and distribution through the cassette and the CD era—the story began in the late 1980s with large companies like T-Series and Magnasound, a monopoly that fragmented in the late 1990s and mid-rung companies like Wave, Angle, Neelum, and Sonotec took over the regional music markets, producing CDs in languages as varied as Bhojpuri, Rajasthani and Kumaoni.

A question that may nag a researcher steeped in economic anthropology is—would it be appropriate to describe the musical arena in Himachal Pradesh as an ‘industry,’ if the economic motivation of its core group, namely the singers and other artists are not aligned with the motives commonly associated with an industry? It is difficult to give an unambiguous answer to this question. When one looks at the musical terrain from the viewpoint of the studio, the circulation of music seems to follow the industrial logic but when seen from the individual artist’s it seems to fit the traditional mould of the hoary *jajmani* system where patronage was routinized and secured over generations. But the similarity with the system of feudal patronage ends there. Quite significantly, it is to be remembered that the artist makes an investment in his own talent and may be compared to an entrepreneur, with the difference that his real or immediate target may be fame, to be seen largely as social capital more than money (Tripathy 2017). In this aspect, Bihar, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh seem to differ rather drastically. Whereas in Bihar, apart from those who stray into music periodically, a significant body of artists appeared to be dependent on their earnings from music with far less support from other sources if any. Bihar also differed from Haryana in that the artists had to actively seek clients and patrons and there was no routine or regimen of patronage to approach, leaving the task of seeking work entirely at the mercy of the entrepreneurial and marketing skill of the artists. In Haryana, a large number of artists came from the Mirasi community and were firmly entrenched in the inherited network of clients such as the cow shelters, maths with significant landholdings, and the village panchayat to name a few among the age-old institutions long associated with music performances and patronage. Additionally, they had found new institutions, such as government departments and educational

institutions, to accord them patronage as well. Haryana seemed somewhat unique in that its traditional caste of performers, the Mirasis have been able to adapt to the modern world to a far greater extent than the Mangalamukhis of Himachal Pradesh. The reason perhaps lies as much in their doggedness to continue as in the range of skills these two sections specialize in. Whereas the Mirasis are known for both their singing skills as well as their mastery over the musical instruments, the Mangalamukhi in Himachal traditionally handled the musical instruments and were rarely known for their singing skills any more than the other castes in the region. Mirasis are also not connected with ceremonial performances and freely follow their 'secular' pursuits through the 'Sang-Ragini' narratives that bind musical and theatrical elements into a compact narrative whole but may also be performed separately during briefer shows.

In Himachal, the artist has to face two major issues that are interrelated—first, the smallness of the market and second, the number of languages and genres he can handle with ease. This is an issue that will raise its head time and again in this monograph as it is of central concern to us. By way of a concluding remark for this section, one may point out that the significance of market size and economic viability is not confined to the present phase. Even during the transition between the gramophones to cassette to CD technologies, the economic viability of smaller languages went through a series of upgrades. What was not feasible during the several decades of the gramophone era suddenly became quite profitable in the cassette era and in turn what could not be done efficaciously during the cassette era became achievable during the CD era with reduced costs and expenses. In the process, the market and the audience became less and less exclusive, a demographic transformation with profound implications for matters related to quality and audience taste. Following the technological rationale, a number of smaller languages are consequently now able to find a presence on the internet. As the technologies get cheaper and more affordable, we may see 'new' languages and cultures come into being even if they are not supported by fulltime professionals. In fact, at this stage one has to stop and wonder if the fulltime professional is an essential requirement for the industry at all. One

has to however remember that to aver that the smaller languages now have a greater opportunity to register their presence is not the same thing as claiming that all languages will necessarily find their place under the sun. The element of numbers must be accompanied by both a willingness or obligation to support the artists, as well as the financial capacity of the likely patrons, sponsors and audiences.

The chief issue around revenue earnings during the internet era is how to charge the customer or user on a website. This is a problem shared by the entire global industry and cannot perhaps be solved through localized business models. Web portals like Netflix have already evolved partly or transitionally successful business models for films, that require constant upgrading. But the realm of music is still in a flux—we do not know who will find himself in a winning position and for how long between the website owner and the musician as proprietor—entrepreneur. The following news report throws considerable light on the predicament of the artist in our times. Coming from a very divergent context, the report titled ‘Chance the Rapper is turning down ‘\$10m offers’ to stay independent’ nevertheless can give us some clues as what is in the offing:

‘The *New York Post* reports that the Chicago MC has turned down offers worth up to \$10 million, after he beat Drake and Kanye West to win the Grammy Award for Best Rap Album.’

An insider allegedly told the *Post*: “Every label is still trying to get him. He’s making too much on his own... He was turning down \$5 million advances before, and now it’s like \$10 million.”

In an interview with *Vanity Fair* he explained that he made his money from “touring and selling merchandise... and I honestly believe if you put effort into something and you execute properly, you don’t necessarily have to go through the traditional ways”. (<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/chance-the-rapper-record-deal-tour-dates-tickets-grammy-awards-best-rap-album-a7586991.html>)

In this sense, the Himachal musician, like musicians from many parts of the world, stand on a new threshold, where all their earnings may come from live concerts with no labels attached unless you regard the artist herself as a branded label. The websites

may enter the market as the producers of the cassette and CD not unlike the producers and retailers of the olden days, with the artists receiving an exceedingly small share of the earnings. What the websites may bring to the artist is fame that may in turn help them contract customers for live shows, the mainstay of their earnings. The frequency of the live concert contracts and the size of the audiences thus become the most crucial commercial considerations in the present phase.

## **2. Traditional Artists and their Practices: Communities and Individuals**

Although the ethnographic interviews with nearly all the professionals invariably included some discussion on the traditional forms and communities marking the region. A daylong site visit to Badidhar, a village around 60 kms from Shimla in 2017 was particularly fruitful as the researcher was able to speak to six artists as a group and individually, representing three different generations. The community is known as Mangalamukhi around Shimla but as Turis elsewhere, such as nearby Solan. Despite the different names, the groups intermarry freely and the difference in terminology only indicates the now familiar cultural-social diversity that is typical of Himachal Pradesh. While the term ‘Mangalamukhi’ meaning literally ‘auspicious-mouthed,’ is a highly euphemistic indication of their ceremonial status, the Mirasis of Haryana in contrast are seen as belonging to the bottom of the local social hierarchy with much ambiguity regarding their religious allegiance and with no ceremonial halo at all. It is thus not uncommon to find Hindu and Muslim names and surnames within the same family of Mirasis, across generations, a feature that would puzzle an outsider. Unlike Mangalamukhis, who often own considerable land, Mirasis were completely dependent on their musical skills for their livelihood. Since the term ‘Mangalamukhi’ clearly indicates the symbolic significance of the caste, the family members at Badidhar felt compelled to explain in some detail exactly how central they are to the chief religious occasion in the village—an annual fair at the temple of Shiva situated on

top of the Badidhar peak in the rainy month of July. The entire procedure begins within the confines of a sacred area annexed to the Mangalamukhi household and continues for eight days in July, during which the presence and performances by the young and the old from the family is regarded as indispensable. During the eight days, the villagers witness the tales from Mahabharata war epic as it unfolds day after day.

Although on its own, the annual Badidhar fair may not seem to have a significant economic value as part of the modern industrial economy, if one looks at the eight-day event as a part of the larger economics of fairs in Himachal Pradesh, their significance, in terms of diffusion and livelihood becomes apparent. A visit to the Badidhar temple and descriptions of the huge traffic jams during the festival by Dhaniram, a Mangalamukhi employed in the Himachal government, seemed indicative of the importance accorded to the event and its magnitude. I met visitors to this remote temple, from a faraway place like Rampur, which is around 120 kms away, easily requiring a 5-hour travel each way. Later in this chapter there will be an attempt to map the various fairs held all over the state and to get a sense of the magnitude of their contribution to the local economy in Himachal. The cultural significance of these fairs is very much intact. Unlike in Bihar and Haryana, where the village fairs have largely lost their sheen and functional significance except for the famous cattle fair at Sonpur, Bihar.

Although modern Mangalamukhi rarely depend on musical performance for their livelihood, the youngest member in the family, an eight-year-old child for example may be seen trying his hand at the drums and according to Roshanlal Bhati, the eldest member of the clan, gets trained informally even before the formal lessons begin. When asked about the women in the family, the men claimed that women are equally adept at music though notably have no ritual status and cannot be employed in the service of the gods. What seemed remarkable here is that the family's pride lies in its mastery over half beats and the variety of beat patterns in general, which are again picked up by the children early in life. These are skills which, according to Bhati, a modern musician, especially a fully formed adult, will find difficult to

imbibe. A good example of the significance of special beats is its highly prized use during the Mahabharata performance—the musicians assign different rhythmic patterns to the five different Pandava brothers and the distinctions are maintained consistently throughout the performance over days. What appears as given is that the audience too is sufficiently trained in the beats to identify the specific character and make sense of the narrative flow. Clearly, in a theatrical performance, it is vital for the audience to identify the characters active at a given moment, even when they have been long familiar with the entirety of the story. With the complex rhythmic grammar at work, an outsider will have a great difficulty in following the general drift of the performance. The striking rapport and complicity between the performer and the local population illustrates how the same performance may not mean anything to an outsider, though it may of course carry for them some unintended dramatic impact. The continued inheritance of the basic skills may be the reason that a large number of Mangalamukhis are employed as music teachers in schools and colleges and as empanelled or salaried artists in the government departments, particularly the department of language and culture and the public relations department with representatives in all the districts of Himachal Pradesh.

Rajesh Kumar Bhati, the youngest member of the family is also a music teacher at the department of music, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla. While his uncle Roshanlal is a singer and a player of harmonium, tabla and dhol, Rajesh specializes in a wide range of drums. Trained in classical music at the university, he has done his doctorate in music and with both his feet in two different worlds, he is in a good position to see the dissimilarity between the classical, the traditional folk, and the newer pop versions of the same. During a discussion with the family members, it became very clear that despite their adaptation to the modern industry and their pragmatic orientation, the traditional artists are very critical of the changes in the folk practices introduced by the modern artists. Roshanlal gave the example of how the famous singer Kuldip Sharma has introduced wind instruments and strings in the Nati form that traditionally depended solely on the drums,



dispossessing the traditional percussionists in the process. The senior artists were very aware of the linkages between the classical ragas and the folk forms and Roshanlal, aged 73, claimed that as a child he was made to practice a number of ragas. He also mentioned that their families were patronized by the chieftains of Dhama and Arki riyasats [principalities] and they continue to own significant amounts of land. Compared to the city-based artists, the Mangalamukhis have fewer opportunities to perform, apart from the ceremonial occasions where their presence is regarded as essential. But those Mangalamukhis who have found employment in the towns often empanel themselves at the All India Radio and the government departments as high-level trained artists and are paid higher salaries and fees than ones who have not undergone formal training. Rajesh Bhati is something of an exception as a doctorate and a music teacher at the university, with tabla as his area of expertise. Haryana offers a good comparison, where the Mirasi artists, especially the instrumentalists are often employed by the public relations and culture departments, and are able to make earnings outside their salaried jobs as well. During a visit to the public relations office in Rohtak, Haryana the artists were constantly found on the phone, soliciting likely clients and patrons and assignments outside official work. The ensuing section on the government departments carries a more detailed and structured information on how the government ends up supporting the local languages and regional genres through proxy, by providing jobs and basic sustenance.

Given the population size of Haryana, it would appear that the number of Mirasi artists dependent solely on musical vocation for their livelihood, is the highest for any caste or community among the three regions in focus. It was found that the Mirasis have their own internal ranking system for the artists apart from the ranking pattern set by the All India Radio [AIR] and the government departments. This ranking of course depends on the quality in general but also on the tradition of gurus and other allegiances, termed as 'Bedeband' in Haryana. 'Beda,' a bracelet made of threads is formally given to a disciple by a guru to denote allegiance to a specific style, in the manner of the gharana of classical Hindustani

music. The singers among the artists are ranked at the top followed by the various other instruments and degrees of proficiency. During a visit to Hisar, I was impressed by the properties of a senior singer who owned three different houses earmarked for his three sons and two cars—all this, without owning any agricultural land at all and with no agricultural income. In this the Mirasis are probably unique. Unlike both Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, the castes associated with musical performance in Bihar such as doms, nats and Bhagats are in too depressed a condition and even though the well-known Bihari forms Birha and chaita are associated with the Yadavs, there is no direct or visible link between caste and musical expertise anymore. There is good evidence of smaller communities of niche performers skilled at highly specific jobs however, such as the playing of a specific instrument or earmarked ballads and other ceremonial narratives. In fact, in Bihar, different castes and subcastes were traditionally associated with specific musical-theatrical-narrative forms, some of which remained confined to smaller subregions and communities. In the context of Bihar, it seemed more useful to find out which castes and communities are NOT active or are nominally so, as professionals in the entertainment arena.

During a visit to Buxar in Bihar, where a gathering of artists was met with to discuss their local professional issues, it was found that nearly all the castes, apart from Bhumihars, Kurmis and Rajputs, found representation. In the course of the discussion however, it became clear that there is some amount of caste-based tension among the artists, similar to the tensions prevalent in the Bihari society at large. The doms, bhagats and nats, who made up the original performers and singers, have been largely replaced by the higher caste groups and dispossessed of their traditional sources of livelihood. Among the top Bhojpuri singing stars in Bihar, Manoj Tiwari is a Brahmin, Devi is a Kayastha, Kalpana, an outsider to the region is an Assamese, and Khesari Yadav is eponymously a Yadav. It is thus difficult to see a clear-cut caste profile associated with musical performance, although the relative absence of the three castes mentioned earlier is quite telling. Among all the castes, a very small group with the surname or appellation 'Vyas'

however continues with musical activities in numbers that are not significant, given the large number of artists from other castes. The name 'Vyas' is very evocative of course and refers to the Vyas of the Mahabharata, but the status of the group at present does not match the high degree of reverence commonly showed for the author/authors of Mahabharata. It was also observed that broadly speaking, the upper castes prefer the role of the lead singer and avoid the role of accompanists, even if they play instruments in their own shows.

Such diffuseness of castes and authorship relations seemed prevalent throughout Bihar during the fieldwork carried out in 2009-2010 and updated since, making it difficult to delineate the caste profile of the folk arts with sufficient clarity. Given that in Bihar and eastern UP, we face a very large and socially diverse population with a wide range of artistic forms and genres, the almost unmanageable variety in comparison to Haryana and Himachal is somewhat understandable. Perhaps, a caste-oriented survey of the arts that begins with specific forms rather than regions, in order to delineate the caste-folk form linkages with greater focus and precision, may provide remedy for the general diffuseness observed in an undifferentiated culturescapes. For example, one may take the Birha form and seek its prevalence in the different social segments. Or on the other hand, one may pick on the leather working 'Chamar' caste and define their cultural inventory in a specific locale. But these can only remain suggestions for further research in a context where both the caste characteristics and the arts are being transformed rapidly.

### **3. Modern Artists and their Practices**

To take a sample profile of an artist from Buxar, Bihar, Gitadevi, a senior artist from the nat caste, one of the lowest segments in Bihar society, who continues to be largely nomadic, was found in 2009 to have produced above 150 albums over the last two decades and had to consult her assistant to arrive at an approximate number. She had already achieved a high status where the music companies paid her hefty amounts for every single track and unlike the

relative novices, did not have to invest in her own productions. The interview with Gitadevi was notably conducted in her three-storeyed house in Buxar built entirely from her income from music as she came from an almost destitute background. Gitadevi is quite representative of artists in Bihar, who have little to fall back on apart from their musical talents if they wish to continue in this field. In Haryana on the other hand, it was relatively more common to find artists with a basic income from a salaried job and agriculture. Keshav, an employee of the public relations office in Rohtak, received a salary of Rs 7,000 from the government but supplemented it with his with his 'outside' income from his numerous assignments in the state and western Uttar Pradesh, which shares the musical tradition of sang-Ragini with Haryana. Although Keshav did complain about his paltry salary, he stated his overall income to be close to Rs 30,000 per month. Keshav has built a new house in Rohtak and lives in a neighbourhood populated by Mirasis and other lower castes. The neighbourhood seemed well-served by the municipal facilities and did not carry the look of a slum, though it cannot, by any means, be described as 'posh.' These two typical profiles may be contrasted with that of an artist from Himachal as it would help in comparing the different predicaments of artists in the three states.

Ajay Varma, a singer from Rajgarh, Sirmaur in Himachal illustrated what may be termed a case of 'layered' identity. A sports [physical education is the official term] teacher at the Government Secondary School, Bharog, Ajay is a veteran of sorts in the music industry. In his mid 40s now, he had been active for the past 16 years [in 2017 when the conversation took place]. His first CD 'Ma Kripa Karo' was produced in 2008 and he now has 8–10 video albums to his credit. The reason the term 'layered identity' may seem applicable to him, is because Varma is able to professionally handle the languages of three regions—Shimla, Sirmaur and Kullu and has recorded and performed in all these. He has acted in a movie 'Padhi likhi ladki [educated girl]' as the lead and his next film 'Kalyugi Mahabharata [Mahabharata of Kalyug]' is almost ready for release. He claims to be an expert in the hyphenated fields of direction/acting and choreography, skills he has acquired

over the years. His early work was in the cassette format and he claims that his album 'Meri janera basera' was a big hit and earned his producers Tanya Videos [Lower Bazar, Shimla] several lakhs of rupees. As mentioned earlier, conversation with Varma took place at Surendra Negi's studio in Shoghi after his recording session. Varma took no time in admitting that he earns very little from his musical output and that his permanent government job is his mainstay.

During the recording session, Varma surprised the researcher with another layer of his identity when he began to record a song in the local tongue with the following words when translated in Hindi:

*'Hati, uth jag ab kamzor mat rah* [Hati, wake up and do not remain weak]  
*Tujhe apne haq ki ladai ladni hai* [you must fight for your rights']

A long discussion that followed after this started with a simple query—who is a Hati? Varma explained that Hatis are a community residing in the Shilai-Rajgarh region of Sirmaur which borders on Uttarkhand and is contiguous with a region called Jaunsar-Bavar in Uttarakhand. While the domiciles of Jaunsar-Bavar are known for their traditional custom of polyandry and recognized by the state as a tribe, the kindred communities on the Himachal side are agitating for a tribal status as well, as it brings several benefits and reservations in jobs. It thus turned out that Varma was in the process of recording a highly political song with great relevance. Only recently, the MP of Sirmaur, Virendra Kashyap, led a delegation to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a demand for recognition as a tribe. This news item from a prominent national daily *The Hindu* with the heading 'Sirmaur Hatti Community meets PM Modi' reports:

'The demand for providing the Scheduled Tribe status to the residents of extremely backward trans-Giri villages in Sirmaur district of Himachal Pradesh is picking up. The area residents had even met the prime minister recently and reportedly convinced him for allotting them the ST status. The vast area of Sirmaur beyond the Giri River and bordering the neighbouring Jaunsar Babar area of Uttarakhand has remained backward and not seen any concept of development or progress, decades after the

Independence, feel the majority residents here. The residents belong to the “Haati” community and are spread over 127 panchayats. Whereas the bordering areas of Uttarakhand were declared tribal way back in 1967, the weak political leadership in Himachal could not lobby for a similar status, blamed the Haati people who are living in tougher terrains and difficult conditions.

However, the people are hopeful as they were given a patient hearing by the prime minister and the union tribal development minister. The community has a population of around 2.5 lakh in the trans-Giri area and fulfills all eligibility conditions laid down by the Lokur Committee for declaring the area a schedule tribe area, said the residents. Sitting Lok Sabha MP Virender Kashyap, who has been raising the matter repeatedly in Parliament, said the Union government would agree with their demand and help in integrating them with the mainstream development. The Sirmaur Yuva Vikas Manch, comprising of Haati youth, has even threatened an agitation if their demand is not met now. Similar demands are also coming from the far-flung Dodra Kwar area of anterior Shimla district, Malana in Kullu district and the Bara Bhagal area of Kangra district. These areas are also almost cut-off from the mainland, geographically and even culturally? [<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-newdelhi/Sirmaur-residents-demand-tribal-status-for-trans-Giri-villages/article17200500.ece>].

Although Varma identified with the movement, the conversation after the recording session made it clear that he saw it as an opportunity to win admirers and followers among what may seem a rather small community—that of 250000 thousand in the Trans Giri region. Although Varma belongs to this community and claimed that even the Hati language is unique, he failed to name the language when asked to. After some discussion, he decided that the local tongue may be called Hati, taking after the geographical nomenclature [the local tongue in this case is more commonly known as Jaunsari from Uttarakhand]. But this quixotic linguistic trait will be discussed later in some detail along with similar encounters.

Among the three regions compared through these sketchy profiles, it is possible to see how the Bhojpuri artist remains largely at the mercy of the market, increasingly through live shows but also through the sale of cassettes and CDs in an earlier period. This

is somewhat ironic since Bihar-eastern U P form some of the least industrialized region in the country with the added disadvantage for the artists in terms of loss of traditional patronage. The village communities in this underdeveloped region have largely failed to support their artists adequately for a variety of reasons. The traditional *jajmani* relations are now largely extinct in the region, unlike in both Haryana and Himachal where the vestigial structures still play a vital role, however inadequate, in sustaining their artists to some extent. In Haryana and Himachal, even when the markets are smaller in size, the traditional and more elaborate forms of modern patronage provide them with some critical support and status. It is therefore useful to compare the different sources of income for an artist, whether in the traditional mould or lineage as well as those performers who enter the musical realm through choice and initiative. The true test for a source of income, whether traditional or modern, is how the individual artist regards it—as a source of income to depend on, or supplementary income, since the actual figures vary according to their place in the local hierarchy of performers. Very often it is a varying combination of both, that defines the relatively precarious plight of a profession that can fetch substantial bonus on a given day and then go dry for long periods.

#### **4. The State and its Agencies: Linguistic Diversity and Responses to it**

It would be useful to present a vivid picture of the extent of linguistic variety in Himachal, a state far less populous than Bihar and Haryana, through a series of ethnographic encounters at three different sites in the state. While interviewing one of the major musical talents of Himachal as well as a highly qualified and knowledgeable music professor in a local college in Shimla [from Rajiv Gandhi College, Chaura Maidan, Shimla] it was found that he could not recount the name of his subregional tongue though he suspected that it did have a specific identity and name. Failing to recall the name, he [identity not revealed here] had to call his father and was told that the tongue in question is called ‘Sadhauchi’

spoken in the neighbourhoods of Kotgarh, the area where the famous Stoke family planted the first apple orchards in Himachal Pradesh. He was aware of the appellation but had forgotten it and was grateful to the researcher for having refreshed his memory.

The second experience over the linguistic diversity of Himachal was had at the Himachal Pradesh University, Summerhill, Shimla while talking to a group of undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Music Department. When asked to name their languages, a group of eight boys and girls instantly replied 'Pahari' as if it was the common language spoken by most if not all of them. When I tried to suggest that it is a very loose description and that I wanted a more precise nomenclature, they began to name their specific tongues. This was indeed quite intriguing especially as this incident occurred right at the outset of the fieldwork and was very helpful in bringing to the researcher a fundamental issue in the region. When I mentioned this incident to the teachers in the department, they laughed it off and admitted that the younger generations are losing touch with their local languages and are fast taking to Hindi. The students on their part were mystified by my questioning and wondered why such a nuanced answer was required at all, the fact being that the label 'Pahari' is what the outsiders have imposed on Himachal as a blanket category. 'Pahari', meaning the 'hill people' or languages is as vague as one can get, given that it is, at the most, a geographical description of sorts.

The third encounter involved the artist Ajay Varma whose musical career has been analysed in the earlier section. Despite his insistence on the uniqueness of the trans-Giri [Giri being the name of a stream defining the topography of the region] region in the Sirmaur district, Varma took a long time before deciding to settle on the term 'Hati' as the right label for his language. Even in this case, the fact is that Hati is used to describe a community and not even a region, although Varma's rechristening of the local tongue might just turn out to be correct on deeper inquiry. Being a native of Rajgarh in the trans-Giri area, Varma did show some embarrassment over the gap in his knowledge, unlike the university students discussed above. A former university professor of history



from the Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla mentioned in a conversation, that the social in-groups among the students in the university campus is formed at as micro a level as the Tehsil as they share common language, idioms and local concerns. It is often only at such a level of commonality that the students speak to each other in their native tongues, with Hindi being the more common medium of conversation on the campus. The linguistic variety thus has profound implications for the cultural diversity in the entire region and the challenging levels of diversity evoke not just informal social responses but also a systematic institutional response at the level of governance. Thus, this separate section on the state government and its language and culture related activities and policies.

During the research stint in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh in 2009, it did not seem very useful to visit government offices as a significant site for musical activity. The reason is the commercial sector in Bihar stands out as too overwhelming a phenomenon on its own and dominates every other source and site of production and patronage. Also, the entertainment industry in Bihar, both in cinema and music, is patronized entirely by the vernacular and often the middle-lower castes and class and the state intervention in the entertainment arena seems minuscule compared to the purely commercial sector. The Bihar languages have spread their tentacles at a number of migratory hubs all over the country and are spread far beyond the regional frontiers among the migrant clientele. With a much lighter presence beyond the frontiers, Haryana and Himachal would seem incomparable to Bihar in this regard. Due to the presence of the migrants in nearly all parts of the country, Bihari films and music are no longer unfamiliar in the distant parts of the country, with large hubs of migrant colonies with a significant stake in the local economy. Enclaves of Biharis in Kolkata, Tinsukia in Assam, Delhi, and Mumbai illustrate the point here. Andheri [East] in Mumbai is where the Bhojpuri films have their production base and a sizeable number of non-Bhojpuri professionals find employment through this industry. Bihari music industry however has had a different trajectory—it started in the cassette era with Delhi as the base but by the time

the CD-CVD format got consolidated, the Bihari music industry went through a rapid process of decentralization, finding havens in the capital Patna and several smaller towns like Siwan, Buxar and Muzaffarpur. Being close to Delhi and with a ready market in Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryanvi music industry took somewhat longer to decentralize and its production bases are strewn along the towns between Delhi and Punjab.

At a very early stage of fieldwork in Haryana, it became apparent that in contrast to Bihar, in Haryana, the government offices and educational institutions may be playing a vital role in the entertainment industry. It is by now customary for the central as well as the state governments in India to engage local artists who are seen as adept at disseminating its developmental messages around the various schemes and facilities available to the general public, in the remote reaches of the states. However in Haryana, the artists did not seem to depend on the government agencies for their livelihoods to the same extent and in the same manner as the artists in Himachal did. A visit to the public relation department at Rohtak and conversation with Mr Varma, the PR Officer at the M.D. University, Rohtak revealed that the unspoken anxiety of the Haryana governments and the bureaucrats is to ensure that Haryana stands out as a distinct cultural entity when compared with Punjab and Rajasthan, its neighbours with greater resources and widespread cultural influence all over the Hindi speaking world, as well as the Mumbai-based Hindi film industry. A wealthy state like Haryana is able to address such anxieties through investments in its officially listed cultural forms and artists.

In Himachal the researcher came face to face with a level of linguistic diversity that seemed overwhelming. Bihar did offer a serious level of linguistic variety but unlike Jharkhand and some states in the Northeast India, the languages stand fairly close to each other, allowing a great degree of mutual comprehension. In Himachal, the impression was that, despite the relative closeness of several tongues, mutual comprehension is a far greater problem, at times resulting not so much from the differences in vocabularies but the phonetic variants, that may leave the listener bewildered. In Haryana on the other hand, an outsider will rarely register

even the phonetic differences and mutual incomprehension is unheard of. What may be a difference of degrees turns into a quantum jump in the case of the upper Himalayan regions such as Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti where the prevalent language belongs to an altogether different Tibetic language family. Even if one confines oneself to the Indo-European fold, the linguistic diversity in Himachal is something the common man is fully aware of and the governments have, over time, evolved certain strategies to tackle. A series of visits to the department of language and culture as well as the department of public relations in the state capital, Shimla, yielded considerable material to assess the linguistic and cultural strategies and policies followed by the state governments over time.

It was enlightening to meet B.L. Sharma with the curious designation of 'Cultural Organizer,' though it is fairly indicative of his basic functions. Sharma is responsible for a series of cultural shows and events organized in all the districts of Himachal and he maintains a calendar with a schedule for the entire year. He shared this calendar and his experiences and views with the researcher. Sharma feels that the Himachali music emphasizes the rhythmic aspect quite heavily and people in Himachal are very sensitive to rhythms. Mandi and Karsog on the other hand are the two places he names, which are known for their conspicuous melodic bias. As a cultural organizer, Sharma has fairly strong views on the issue 'purity of tradition.' He spoke of the various song and dance competitions organized at the district headquarters where the criteria for the winners go as follows:

- a. Propriety of Costume
- b. Propriety of Jewellery
- c. Propriety of Instruments
- d. Propriety of Song dance

'Propriety' in the case of Sharma, it seemed, stood for strict adherence to the well-identified traditional practices and usages that are fairly well-known and canonized. For each of the criteria, the judges keenly look out for admixtures and hybrids, discouraging any borrowing among the districts and of course

punishing the breaches with low marks in cases when a borrowing is made from outside Himachal. The example used by him was—if a song from Chamba includes some elements from Kullu, Sharma expels those performers from the show during the screening itself. This kind of purism may be practiced by a government official but is understandably difficult to follow in the commercial circuit. In fact, the official and other shows and events have allowed audiences from the districts to appreciate each other's forms and in many cases, there have been demands in Kullu for Nati from Shimla and vice versa. According to Sharma 'Nati' has a number of styles depending on the sub-region, such as Shimla, Sirmaur, Kullu and Kinnaur. It would seem that in a manner analogous to linguistic variety, even a widespread musical form may have several standardized versions marking the regions distinctly. These styles differ slightly but significantly and these differences are systematically maintained and enforced. Sharma gave a list of folk forms prevalent in some of the districts which are as follows:

1. Kangra – jamakhada, dhamakada
2. Mandi – Luddi
3. Una – pahadigidda
4. Chamba – gaddi, churahi, ghurai, dandaraas, dhoda
5. Solan – pudwan [gidda]

This is by no means a comprehensive list but gives an idea of the broad range of events organized by the department of language and culture. What is of great interest here is how the local audience in different parts of Himachal shows interest in slightly alien forms and the government officials encourage such exposure. In the process, the audiences also get exposure to the neighbouring languages. How such familiarization can be a foil for linguistic and cultural diversity is something that can be gauged only over a long stretch of time. Suffice to say here that linguistic diversity is not a one way or an inexorable process and its pitfalls may be mitigated through other sundry cultural processes and policies.

One clear evidence of the state's fulsome acknowledgement of linguistic diversity is the designation of the district language officer [DLO], who reports directly to the district commissioner's office, an

administrative position inherited from the colonial era and unique to Himachal Pradesh and some states in the Northeast of India. A long conversation with the DLO of Shimla Trilok Suryavanshi was held on 9 December 2016. The DLO's responsibilities include miscellaneous activities such as upkeep of old temples, organizing poetry meets, fairs organized by the government, and collecting reports from all the government departments on their work done in Hindi language or medium. But the government also encourages the publication of books in the local languages by offering to purchase self-published books worth Rs 15,000. When a work is adjudged to be of good quality, the department of language and culture even publishes the selected books. According to Suryavanshi, among all the Himachal languages Kangri [from Kangra] is the most developed and prolific as far as the print medium is concerned. It would be interesting to see if this applies to the electronic media as well.

The DLO's routine functions clearly indicate that although these officials are located all over the state, their chief function is to enforce and supervise the use of Hindi more than anything else. On the other hand, as indicated earlier there is also an officially acknowledged attempt to maintain the distinctness of the subregional cultures. Such ambivalence is not unusual at all and only reflects the basic cultural-linguistic predicament of a politically delineated entity with strict boundaries. A separate section in the annual report is devoted to the districts and it mentions that out of the 12 districts of Himachal, 11 have their own DLOs with the exception of a thinly populated Lahaul-Spiti where the work is overseen by the DLO of Kullu.

An account of his professional duties and other activities by Bhuvan Sharma, employed by the public relations department at the Shimla headquarters enabled the researcher to get a clear picture of the official activities as well as the typical career of a fulltime artist. Though Bhuvan was trained as a dancer in Lucknow and holds a degree, he now wears a number of hats at the departmental office. He is part of the larger group of Theatre Artists that has been given a separate area in the office premises. He has responsibilities as an actor, director, stage master, harmonium

master as well as choreographer. Although these are not exactly officially recognized designations, the labels carry professional weight within the organization and entitle him to a certain salary slot. Reflecting on his career, Bhuvan mentions that coming from a Brahmin family, his uncle disapproved his plans to become a dancer. His grandfather was the chief priest of the Patiala chieftaincy and his father Maheshwaranand was an astrologer as well as an accomplished table player. Bhuvan had his early training under the renowned Birju Maharaj's guidance and came back to Himachal where one of his debut works was a cassette 'Dharare Geet [hill songs]'. He subsequently recorded for two more cassettes and remembers the 1980s as a time when every other artist got his cassette produced at the studio of Parshuram Tomar in Totu. He also started a private group called 'Brijeshwar kala Manch and has also been running a dance school in Totu for the past 18 years. Bhuvan mentions the following dance forms prevalent in the different subregions:

1. Karyala – Shimla
2. Dhaja – Kangra
3. Bhagat – Chamba
4. Baithana - Mandi

The above are the different styles of the Nati form prevalent in large parts of Himachal. They follow different rhythmic patterns, guarding their distinctness jealously, despite carrying the common Nati label, which is indicative of the tremendous variety of practices in a relatively small state and region. That different terminologies are used for the same form only accentuates the perceived diversity.

But Bhuvan's core activities at work are clearly defined and have been laid out as official requirements. Members of the official theatre group in the department are required to organize 12–15 shows all over Himachal and outside Himachal as well, when invited. There are other government theatre groups at centres like Kullu and Dharamshala, where the members of the theatre troupes have similar responsibilities. Additionally, the troupe members are also required to attend official functions to keep the audience

occupied before the dignitaries deliver their speeches. Bhuvan mentions that the department currently [2016] has altogether 45 cultural groups registered, selected through a screening process. A news report from 21 February 2017 [Dainik Bhaskar, Shimla] reports on one such event held at the Kalibadi auditorium in Shimla. The selected groups are paid Rs 70,00 for each show and the norm is to allot three shows at a time. That the emolument is successful in motivating cultural troupes is evident from the news report—in Shimla alone, 21 cultural troupes with 250 artists participated. Similar screenings are held periodically also at Mandi, and Dharamshala in a routinized talent hunt by the state.

Finally, it is important to note a considerable overlap in the nature of activities between the department of culture and languages and the public relations department, with the difference that the public relations setup is geared to publicise the government's policies, campaigns and various initiatives through the traditional forms, whereas the department of languages and culture takes a much more disinterested position and devotes itself to the traditional forms from the various regions within Himachal and also presents the cultural wealth of Himachal to the outside world through shows held outside the state.

## **5. Educational Institutions**

Walking into the corridors of the music department at Himachal Pradesh University, Summerhill, Shimla, the first thing that struck me was a wooden board on the wall that displayed the names of PhD awardees over the years. The numbers were impressive indeed and according to the then head of the department, they had produced above 50 PhDs by 2016. The department had 16 students in august 2016 in its MA class and 15 registered for MPhil, which makes the department quite sizeable given the researcher initial perception of job opportunities in the field of music. The number of instructors-teachers is however rather modest—altogether 6 with 2 lecturers, 2 professors, 1 guest faculty and 4 tabla players. The former Head also informed me that each faculty member can guide up to 8 PhD students and no more. According to a

senior teacher in the department, up to 80–90 per cent musicians operating in Himachal are former students of the university and its affiliated colleges. While most of these find employment in schools and colleges, some of them have also joined the industry as entrepreneurs. The same teacher also mentioned the names of Dr Madan Jhalata, Bunny Chand as well as Puran Shiva who are based in Mumbai. Without mentioning names or numbers, he also said that a number of the students graduating from the department run their own orchestra groups. It appeared from these two and other conversations that the steadiest source of employment for music graduates are the government and private schools as well as the numerous colleges in the state that offer music at the Masters level. This was confirmed by the former head of the department who said that music is introduced in the school curriculum at the age of six and that all the old colleges in Himachal towns offer music as a subject. Shimla for example has two dedicated music colleges, apart from the various departments that provide music education. Despite being ballpark, these figures indicate a high level of demand of music professionals in Himachal. Although not directly related to the industry, the magnitude of musical activity does indeed indicate a strong support from the educational institutions. This was confirmed at the music department of the Rajiv Gandhi Government College, founded in 1986.

The music department at the Rajiv Gandhi Government College, Shimla has four faculty members and up to 30 students in its undergraduate course. During the two long conversations with a music teacher at the college, he spoke about his own background as well as the specific cultural features of the state of Himachal. According to him, Himachal Pradesh may be seen to be constituted of two economic regions—first, the upper hills known for their horticultural wealth and cash crops and second, regions closer to the plains that are not as affluent as the fruit growers at the upper reaches. Similarly, he sees the state as divided into four cultural regions that are as follows:

1. Hill districts—Shimla, Kullu
2. Kangra, Una, Bilaspur—these regions are culturally closer to Punjab



3. Kinnaur-Lahau-Ispiti
4. Sirmaur—this region is culturally closer to Uttarakhand

The music professor claimed that traditionally, the people from the upper hills and lower Himachal had a somewhat adversarial relation and even antipathy, which extended to their cultural forms. This antipathy also found expression in the state's politics with the lower Himachal favouring the Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP] and the upper Himachal largely supporting the Congress. But this according to him is now changing and Nati is now welcomed by audiences in several other parts besides Shimla, Sirmaur, Solan and Kullu, subregions where it was traditionally prevalent. This process has been accelerated by the prolonged literacy campaign over the decades since the 1970s, that used music to propagate their message, a sustained campaign that also resulting in high literacy rates by the 1990s. The literacy rates in Himachal have already crossed 80 per cent, which is considered very high for the Hindi speaking regions. It would thus seem that Hindi has begun to function as *lingua franca*, making communication among the Himachal subregions easier than before.

A number of experts, including a music professor, the studio owner Surendra Negi as well Amit Dutt, a filmmaker based in Himachal, mentioned a genre of music in English being recorded and circulated on the internet and through live concerts. Often such melange of the local and the global carry a local flavour despite the mixed English wording. There are also groups that perform in the Rock genre with local flavour, that are finding audiences among the urban youth in the bigger towns in Himachal Pradesh.

The website <http://www.himachalwonders.in/shimla-based-rock-band-soul-portrait/> describes one of them thus – ‘The Band Soul Portrait was initially created by Hitesh, Bhavtosh and Ashwani in 2012 and after a few months, more people joined Anirudh, Khushal and Karan in this Rock Band. The band primarily focuses on hunting for the most pleasing melodies and sounds. As a rock Band they play different types of music on stage. Now they have released Music Video Zindagi—an entire video shot in Shimla, Himachal and directed by Deepika Tomar, DOP Suraj Singh Thakur. Edit and Production by Manwar Rana (Cocktail Films)’. Similarly,

Hill Post, on 26 April 2013, in a report [<http://hillpost.in/2013/04/shimla-based-rock-band-deathknell-to-launch-its-official-video-on-may-3/71640/>] mentioned that 'Deathknell released its first music album titled 'Still to Decide' in October 2012, and come May 2013, they will have their first music video released. The video will be officially released on Friday, May 3 at 7 pm on YouTube. You can show your support on their Facebook event page.' This brief mention of the western music bands is meant to emphasize that with greater literacy and the resulting urbanism, Himachal is now witnessing the creation of new segment of audiences that can freely shift from the traditional to the modern rock.

The presence of music at the college departments singularly aims to lend support to classical Indian music but the college festivals and events are often attended by western music groups. The purpose behind this discussion was to present the English-subregional - Hindi as a continuum for a highly literate population. It is also important to mention here that neither in Haryana nor in Bihar does one find evidence of a significant niche of demand for western or English pop, although both Bhojpuri and Haryanvi show an enduring impact of songs from the west. Use of western instruments however is more common than the borrowing of melodies or lyrics.

## **6. Fairs and Jatras: Tourism and Trade – Aspects of the Local Economy and its Cultural Products**

A single entry from the Annual Report published by the department of culture for the year 2014–15 indicates that it was instrumental in organizing 17 state level fairs and 38 district level fairs; an impressive score by any standards. The calendar for the fairs indicates that the entire year is punctuated with events that invite widespread popular participation rather than just a gathering of the local public. The Shimla based Hindi papers report these fairs with a frequency that cannot be missed by an outsider. Compared to Bihar and Haryana, the state indeed seemed to be active in the cultural field on an almost hectic scale. It is to be remembered that the figures quoted above only mention the government backed

fairs and do not include local fairs organized in villages or larger fairs around temples which together add up to an astounding level of cultural activity in the state.

The video recordings for many of these fairs from recent years is of course available on the internet in several versions but the real significance of these events lies in their live format attended by hundreds of thousands of the local populace as well as the tourists. Tourists from distant destinations often schedule their vacations in Himachal following the dates for the specific occasion they are aiming at. Although the largest fairs are often the target, even the smallest of fairs in recent times receive a sizeable body of tourists as both pilgrims and sightseers favour their colourful customs and local ceremonies. The tourism officials and professionals in Himachal are fully aware of this and offer special packages for these occasions.

One of the traditional ways for the mountain communities to sustain contact with the outside world was through jatras [meaning 'travel' literally] involving travel by the local deities to close and distant places. A number of jatras, meeting points and festivals were devised as an essential part of the annual ceremonial calendar to ensure that communities remained in contact with each other. The deities, or their symbolic representation, were carried by men at times for several days, through difficult terrains at times, to unbelievably distant locations. This had to be done in the olden times on foot and the carriers had to maintain strict ritual discipline throughout. At Badidhar, a musician took the researcher along to the temple site where an annual fair is held in October every year. Standing atop the mountain peak, Roshanlal, a local Mangalamukhi veteran, described the exact route and the sequence followed by the village deities on their way to the top where the temple is located. Roshanlal did not forget to mention the mess created by the traffic on the days of the fair, pointing out a large ground meant for traffic, claimed by him to be highly inadequate. He says he prefers to walk rather than drive to the fair and risk getting his car stuck on top of the mountain.

A detailed report [Shimla Bhaskar, 27 Februray 2017 p 1] on one of the larger fairs in the state, the Mandi Shivratri Mela

and its proceedings is titled '1832 instrumentalists build a new record with their divine sounds' [1831 *bajantariyon ne deva dhwani se banaya naya kirtiman*]. The heading clearly indicates the centrality of music for the religious and other fairs. The point here is that in Himachal distinct rhythmic patterns are adhered to by different subregions and even within the subregion, a strict protocol is followed for the different gods and occasions. The same instrumentalists, especially the percussionists, even play at specified beats for every character or god. As mentioned earlier, in the Mahabharat spectacle at Badidhar, each of the Pandava characters were traditionally assigned a different pattern of beats which the audience identified with the character. As reported, the Mandi fair also had smaller displays from various subregions. It seems in 2016, 1806 instrumentalists had participated and the annual assembly of the musicians is likely to go up further next year. The instruments included dhol, karnal, shahnai, and narsingha. State Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh, who was the chief guest on the occasion, gave a speech on the occasion and promised to pay an honorarium to all the artists. He further warned that if there are no traditional *bajantari* [instrumentalists] for the gods, the tradition of 'devs' [deities] itself will perish. The speech by the chief minister brings out clearly how important the traditional forms and instruments are to the state, and how far the state is willing to ensure their welfare. The chief minister also announced a 10 per cent hike in the endowments for the gods [temples of gods].

There are 20 state level fairs or festivals recognized by the Government at present in Himachal Pradesh. They have an educational, social as well as religious character. These serve the needs of social integration not only for economic sustenance but also for cultural survival. Traders from far and near join these festivals to display articles like clothes, wool, pashmina, furs, leather, hides and skins, pottery, metal ware, jewelry, ornaments, fruits, vegetables and many other local products coming from the homes and fields of the rural localities. Unlike Bihar and Haryana, where the local deities have been eclipsed by the chief gods to a far greater extent, Himachali villages continue to worship their local deities and it is difficult to see these numerous local traditions

perish any time soon. How important the fairs have been for the community as well as the government, the bureaucrats and the politicians, becomes apparent from a news report on Rohru in Shimla district—a report on 16 March 2017 in Shimla Bhaskar produces a list of all the important officials, community leaders present at a 50-strong meeting and announces a separate meeting that the local member of the state assembly is to attend with the entire set of participants. The engagement with the fairs at the institutional and governmental level is indeed impressive. Bihar and Haryana have far fewer occasions like this to offer and the elaborate institutional mechanisms are of course altogether missing.

The following list, compiled from a number of tourism websites gives a good indication of the vital role of the fairs in Himachal—in a region segregated by difficult terrain, the fairs provided an opportunity for occasional intermingling for a variety of purposes, ranging between downright trade and exchange to collective celebration. In the changing times, the fairs have acquired another significant role in that they make up an integral part of the tourist industry in Himachal. The prominent fairs have been listed here primarily to indicate the variety of occasions and excuses for organizing a fair.

### **Prominent Fairs in Himachal Pradesh: The Variety of Purpose**

**Baisakhi:** This fair is held all over the state. People carry village deity with music procession from one place to another. In the upper Himachal, people perform ‘Mala Dance’ where they hold hands to form a large circle. This is also a time for contests where participants show their archery and wrestling skills.

**Minjar Fair (Chamba):** Held in the month of August on the second Sunday of the month, this is a weeklong fair and relates to the maize crop. During the fair Minjar (maize flowers) festival is celebrated at ‘Chowgan’ [polo grounds] in Chamba town. Offerings are made to Varuna, the god of rain. The fair is conventionally attributed to Raja Sahil Verman, who ruled the state in the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

**Naina Devi Fair:** This fair is held in the month of August, at Naina Devi Temple, in district Bilaspur and is attended by pilgrims and tourists from near and afar.

**Kullu Dushehra:** From the tourism viewpoint the Kullu Dussera fair is now easily the most central event in Himachal. Kullu Dussera fair receives performing artists from all over Himachal and even elsewhere. It is meant to mirror the dance and music forms of the entire region. The fair receives generous state patronage and is well-arranged.

**Lavi Fair:** Lavi fair is held in the month of October or November at Rampur Bushehr. Being a trade fair by way of origin, it was traditionally the meeting point for Tibetan traders and the Kinnaur populace who carried out brisk business involving the exchange of vital goods for both the economies. The chief trade items were horses, mules, pashminas, colts, yaks, chilgoza, namdas, pattis, woolens, raw semi-finished wool and other dry fruits produced in the state. Supposed to be several centuries old, the fair receives patronage from the state throughout the month-long period. While the daytime is spent in trade and related business, the nights are spent watching and participating in dances and songs.

**Chrewal:** Celebrated during the middle of August, the fair continues for one month. The farmers do not yoke oxen during this month. In Kullu, this festival is known as Badranjo, and in Chamba as Pathroru.

**Renuka Fair:** Renuka fair is celebrated in November for six days in district Sirmaur, and starts 10 days after the Diwali festival. The fair commemorates the annual meeting of the sage Parshuram and his mother Renuka. Parshuram is believed to be the sixth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Rural traders sell their produce of walnuts, dried and undried ginger. Folk dances, magic show, Kariyala play, thoda dance, wrestling bouts, fireworks, police and home guard's band displays, developmental exhibitions by the government, cinema shows and bhajan-kirtan [devotional songs] are the main attractions of the week long fair.

**Shivratri Fair:** This fair is held in the month of February on Shivratri day in Mandi and with Shiva being the chief deity of Himachal Pradesh, the fair is a major occasion for temples throughout Himachal Pradesh. On this occasion people bring hundreds of Gods and Goddesses in their *Raths* [chariots] traveling from several directions, through a variety of routes. Devotees carry the deities on their shoulders, chanting religious songs. The deities then converge at the temple of Bhut Nath in Mandi town.

**Holi Fair:** held in the month of March in many places every year but the Holi Mela of Sujampur in district Hamirpur is very famous. In this weeklong fair, various games, songs, dances, folk dramas and skits are performed by local artists.

**Chintpurni Fair:** locally known as Mata-Da-Mela (fair of mother goddess), it is held in the village Chintpurni near Bharwain, a hill station on Hoshiarpur-Kangra road in Una district. On the 8<sup>th</sup> day during Navratras the offering of Karahi (sweet halwa prasada) and Chhattar are made by the devotees.

**The Nalwari Fair:** Held in the month of March every year, this fair is somewhat unique, in that it was conceived by W. Goldstein, a superintendent of Shimla Hill States in 1889. The British official was motivated by a shortage of the good breed cattle, especially bullocks and it has now become a major trade fair.

**Sissu Fair:** Sissu is celebrated all over the Himalayas where there are Buddhist hubs. Its main attraction is the masked dance and it is always staged inside the monastery, on the attached courtyard. The fair is celebrated on different dates at different places. At Sissur Gompa it is held in June, at Gemur Gompa in July and at Mani Gompa of Gondhla in August.

**Lohri:** In some areas, it is also known as *Maghi* or *Saza* and is celebrated in mid-January, continuing for 8 days. The festival is known for its nightlong music and dance.

**Bharmaur Jatra Fair:** It is held in district Chamba in the month of August.

**Chhitrari Jatra Fair:** This one-day fair is held in district Chamba in the month of September.

**Sui Fair:** It is held in Chamba town in the month of April and is unique in that it is exclusively for women. Women gather at the temple of Naina Devi and worship the Devi. Naina was the queen of Raja Sahil Verma and legend has it that she had sacrificed herself to bring water to Chamba town.

**Tara Devi Fair:** Durga Devi's temple of Taradevi is located on the ridge of mountain about 8 km. away from Shimla town. The fair is held here on Durga Ashtami, attracting tourists and pilgrims to the worship of a mother goddess known for her tantric association.

**Jwalamukhi Fair:** The Jwalamukhi fair is held twice a year during Navratras for worship of Durga goddess and is the most important fair in the Kangra valley. People come with red silken flags (dhwaja) to greet the Mother Goddess. The fair is attributed to the worship of that Eternal Flame coming out of the earth spontaneously and perpetually.

**Dal Fair:** It is held on the bank of lake Dal, in the month of August in district Kangra at Dharamshala.

**Dungri Fair:** It is held in district Kullu at Manali in the month of May.

**Sarshi Jatra Fair:** In district Kullu, at place Naggar in the month of May.

**Banjar Fair:** In district Kullu in the month of May and June.

**Markanda Fair:** held in district Bilaspur at Markanda in the month of April.

**Solan Fair:** Solan fair is held in the last week of June for three days. This fair was celebrated in the honour of the goddess 'Shulini' after whom the town is named and whose temple is situated in the nearby village named Solan Gaon. It attracts traders, sweet sellers, general merchants and other shopkeepers who do a brisk business. The highlights of this fair are dancing, singing and wrestling.



**Sari Fair:** It is held in district Solan at town Arki in the month of July. This fair is famous for bull fighting.

**Buffalo Fair:** In district Shimla at village Kufri near Mashobra in the month of September.

**Sipi Fair:** In district Shimla near Mashobra in the month of May.

**Jatar Rohru Fair:** held in district Shimla at Rohru town in the month of April.

**Rampuri Jatar:** In district Shimla at village Rampuri near Jubbal town in the month of July.

**Thalog Fair:** This fair is held in the honour of Devta Rahatna whose temples are located at Thalog and Jabna. It is held at the end of Baishkha, at a site 13 km. away from Chamba. The game of archery, the numerous sweet stalls and Jhula are the main attractions like other fairs.

**Trilokpur Fair:** In district Sirmaur at village Trilokpur near Nahan town, in the month of September.

**Phul Yatra Fair:** Phul Yatra fair is held in Pangi at Killar in 'Asoj' every year. It marks the start of a closing season in this snow bound valley.

**Sayar Fair:** It is a famous fair observed in the month of September at a number of places such as Bakloh in Kangra, Karsog in Mandi, and Subathu in Shimla.

This list is useful for three reasons—the spread of the dates that cover a large part of the year, the physical spread of the sites encouraging movement in a large region, and the variety of pretexts ranging between the religious to the commercial that mark the fairs in the Himachal region. To conclude this section, the above account of the economy and culture of fairs in Himachal must be supplemented with the observation that increasingly the smallest of the village fairs are now part of the wider industry and economy. Artists from all over the state regularly visit these fairs and are invited by the local fair committees that are responsible

for the fair logistics. The fairs are seen as special opportunities for the musicians to display their skills through live shows which earn them patrons for various other occasions throughout the year. These large gatherings also provide a level ground where both the traditional and the modern artists are able to perform. At times the same artist may do a traditional as well as modern performance.

Very much like Bihar and Haryana the weddings continue to draw artists as they grow in size and grandeur over time. On several occasions the traditional artists play a ceremonial role but the main show is taken over by modern pop music with Himachal overtones and in local language, apart from Hindi or Punjabi. One such instance was the Holi festival in 2016 when the shopkeepers from Boileuganj, where I resided, called a troupe of professional musicians and singers from the nearby town of Solan, spending a few lakhs of rupees on the occasion. Although the smaller occasions like weddings involve relatively smaller amounts of money they may add up to large figures during the wedding seasons.

While doing fieldwork in Buxar, Bihar an artist admitted that he earns substantial amounts of money from the birthday parties of small children as even the relatively modestly well-off parents have begun to spend substantial amounts of money on these occasions. Earlier as the custom of celebrating birthdays was adopted by the Indians from smaller towns, these occasions were entirely private and family based but now show a tendency to get professionalized. Event companies are often hired by the parents these days to organize games, music and magic shows for the children. It is now a standard practice to rent spaces in marriage halls for birthday and other celebrations that are contracted out to event management professionals.

## **7. The Internet as Source of Information on the Regional Cultures**

This section begins with a brief scanning of the quantitative aspects of musical production and reception in parts of Himachal which often yield relatively coherent and clear-cut figures and allow us to derive some tentative inferences. The YouTube features also

enables us to interpret the content through the comments section that throws considerable light on the audience profile, their specific views, biases and their implicit or explicit perspectives on the state of the music industry and its passing trends. A longer section in this chapter will present an analysis of information gleaned from the listener comments on the popular songs and renditions. The section on comments will aim at the generic category of 'Himachal music' and select videos for the number of hits as a measure of popularity at a given moment [16 May 2018].

### **Factual Gleanings from the internet**

In order to appreciate the impact of the internet technology on the diffusion of music, certain gross figures though only indicative, may be quite pertinent. A simple search for 'Himachal music videos' produced 4,37,000 results on Google on 21 August 2015, when the proposal for the present research project was being written and the same search brought forth a figure of about 8,93,000 results on 1 March 2017 as a mid-term report was being written. The most recent search on 8 May 2018 on Google brought forth around 12,70,000 results. It must be understood that these figures are indicative as there must be a number of alien or unrelated items included or valid items excluded due to misleading verbiage or nomenclature. So it may be a good idea to see these figures only as suggestive of the quantum involved. Similarly the search for Bhojpuri music produced around 13,50,000 results, and a search for Haryanavi music threw up 8,31,000 results on the same date [3 March 2017]. These figures allow us to make some tentative comparisons and should not be taken as absolute scores. This exercise helps us in getting a very rough idea of both, the comparative growth and the rate of growth of the regional industries, the purpose being to have a broad idea. The present section will attempt to examine the presence of the overall Himachal music as well as the subregional industries within Himachal Pradesh. This can be a tough call as the linguistic map of the state does not neatly correspond to the political map indicating the various districts. For this reason we cannot possibly comprehensively use the category of the district for

comparison nor the regional tongues, but a combination of both. The researcher therefore selected those prominent subregions of Himachal where the linguistic region and the political units happen to coincide. Also, since the purpose here is to take up a few specific case studies rather than ‘all’ the languages listed by the linguistic surveys, it may be more useful to give closer attention to some well-known entities. In the light of all these observations, the following subregions and linguistic entities, featured commonly on YouTube labels and comments section have been selected for internet research:

1. Kangri
2. Kahloori or Bilaspuri
3. Kinnauri
4. Kulvi
5. Chambyali
6. Mandyali
7. Gaddi [spoken by traditional nomads belonging to more than one district]

The data will include readily available information on the following heads:

1. All the entries including videos, news, images following the Google categorization for the displays
2. Number of videos shown by the search result
3. Number of news items
4. Maximum views for the top song

Notably, the semantics of search terms can be a serious obstacle in extracting exact information and blunderous results are not uncommon. Take one case for example—while searching for music from Mandi district, it was found that right from the outset, entries for ‘Mehendi music’ [a popular musical genre for weddings in north India] turned up on display in large numbers instead of ‘Mandi music,’ completely overshadowing the music from Mandi region. This is not at all uncommon—in several instances, following the logic of global search, a variety of terms and proper names resembling the word ‘Mandi’ phonetically or orthographically, may turn up rather prominently on Google search. This problem

can be solved partly by getting to the last page of the results and moving backwards instead of opening pages in the ascending series where the errors are likely to be minimal. This is however hardly a fool proof remedy but simply a partial eliminator of erratic data at its best. Therefore, the best of quantitative data can only have an indicative status and one has to look at the broader picture that emerges from the findings, instead of choosing specific figures and arriving at strong conclusions on their basis. It is not advisable to make the assumption here that the quantum of such errors will be of the same magnitude for all the categories of Himachal music thus nullifying errors in a comparative context, since some search terms may elicit greater number of errors than the rest. All this however should not prove altogether crippling and one should be able to come to tentative conclusions at a higher level of generalization, avoiding micro-level conclusions on the basis of some basic quantitative information culled from the internet. The following table represents skeletally, the state of the music industry in Himachal on the basis of categories used by Google. The purpose here is to present a graphic view that summarises the most basic features of the industry.

While the story of growth is reflected uniformly in all the categories and the sub-regional languages, the 'news' content stands out as anomalous for reasons hard to detect. The only explanation may be that the cultural news in Himachal is covered largely in Hindi and by local newspaper editions and thus the news items may not show up on Google search with the same level of readiness and availability. Also, television news on Himachal often does not feature on YouTube or any other unique repository. When compared, the sub-regional languages do not indicate equal or similar growth, although each of them has seen a significant hike in the number of hits received by the top albums.

### **Analysis of Listener Comments on the YouTube Videos**

This section will attempt to analyse the listener comments available on song videos from all over Himachal Pradesh rather than follow the region wise distribution. Since the choice of songs for this analysis is based on the number of viewers and hits and clicks,

the comments in many cases produce a nearly unending thread that ramify into conversations and exchanges among the listeners. Notably, the data available in the comments section of the videos is of greater import than the gross ‘counts’ listed in Table I as clearly, the act of commenting shows a greater level of engagement and involvement than just ‘clicks,’ which may likely result from an inadvertent act or inattentive action. The comments may also indicate whether the entire or at least a stanza of the song has been heard with some attention and however hastily made, a comment has followed some focused thought over the matter. Comments such as ‘lovely...’ and other expletives have been ignored in the favour of more substantive observations. What follows here are a number of analytical observations on the songs and albums listed here, to be followed by an enumeration of generalized concerns and views of the listeners applicable to the Himachali languages. YouTube allows the facility of comment viewing through the following two options:

1. Top comments
2. Newest first

Since the comments are ranked on the YouTube on the basis of the number of responses within the listeners community, the comments included here are taken from the top pages [first and second mostly] with the substantiveness of the comments being the next main criterion. We have in the following pages information about specific generic Himachali hit videos and a series of comments to be analyzed for their content and purpose:

1. Selected comments on ‘Bindu Neelu Do Sakhiyan’—a Himachali Folk Video Songs by Karnail Rana,’ Bindu Neelu Do Sakhiyan—Himachali Folk Video Songs Karnail Rana, 3,393,585 views, 8.7K1.8K SHARE [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAZ5-RIFVUc>]
  - a. Good Himachali song...proud to be a Himachali
  - b. What does ‘Bindu Neelu’ mean?
  - c. I miss homeeee [sic]
  - d. I think this is the first Himachali song to cross 1 million

- e. Nice song well compose but issh actor ko smjhao ki bhai guitar hai hath mein ..tabla nhi.. [...but explain to the actor that he is holding a guitar in his hand and not a tabla [percussion instrument]]

The readers' responses to the song here range between an outburst of nostalgia to a critical comment on an obviously inept use of the guitar. Several comments express pride in the Himachali culture and this turns out to be the most common theme in the long string. It is also clear from the comments that the sub-regional divide in most instances is overcome by what seems a pan-Himachal community, although a pride in 'Kangra' culture is also expressed with some frequency. The fact that the number of hits crossed one million would indicate that the video has a pan-Himachal following and that the audience has some awareness of it.

2. Selected comments on 'Himachali nonstop video songs, Latest Himachali Pahari Song 2016' [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26f-rYJQfX4>]240,409 views, 35287SHARE, Rani Priya, Published on 4 April 2016
  - a. Over all it was very beautiful but a little bit need of correction while making video. Too much shaking of camera and big distance between participants and camera so that dancing steps are not clearly visible in whole video. Beside this you did good job. Thank you very much.
  - b. From kalpa himachal....
  - c. from yoram varsulker, Israel, 6 months ago – 'Ioveli' [sic]
  - d. wow, ... nice classic ... himachali ... dance ...!
  - e. Can you send the link of the songs? Or maybe the tracks itself?

Even though the information content in the video seemed sparse, the comments indicate that the song may have its provenance in the Kalpa, Kinnaur region and that the dance style is also in the Kinnaur mode. The 'Nati' form of dance seen in this video receives some technical feedback in the first comment, indicating how demanding the public is wont to be, about the presentation

of the spectacle and the sounds. This would also suggest that the audience of regional music has become less tolerant of technical shoddiness than before.

3. Selected comments on 'New Himachali Pahari Song 2017... Song: Sheela Tere Aashiq' Direct Song Link: <http://musichunterz.in/albview.php?al...> Album: Fir Wahi Ehsaas—Feelings Once Again Starring: Rajeev Sharma | Mamta Thakur | Honey Negi | Dony Chauhan | Ajay Dancer Singer: Rajeev Sharma Direct Artist Link: <http://musichunterz.in/artview.php?ar...> Director: Raj Sharma Music: Surender Negi Lyrics: Laiq Ram Rafiq Producer: Raju Sajjan
  - a. Music HunterZ, 8 months ago, 'Thanks And Plz Keep Sharing'
  - b. Picture editing bahut achi hai [the video is well-edited]
  - c. super se b uprrrr [beyond superb]
  - d. Pahari best ever sirmouri rampuri mix up keep it up buddy. [best ever mix of Rampuri and Sirmauri music]
  - e. Amazing slow dance & nice song...sereeeeeeee

The first comment, coming as it is from the producer of the album, reveals how a producer maintains a dialogue with his audience inducing them to form a part of his promotional drive. Clearly, in the context of small budget regional videos, a producer is generally not in a position to expend resources on publicity. At any rate, there is no better publicity in the world of music than a word-of-mouth recommendation, based on personal judgment. Just how integral the feedback from the audience has become is properly reflected in the second comment that praises the 'editing' of the video, just as the comment on the earlier song related to the camera movement. The third comment has been selected for its 'Hinglish' witticism; an evolving linguistic trend now increasingly followed among the bilingual [Hindi + English] audience. The fourth comment throws light on the likely provenance of the song and the melody, a matter that will come up again in the following pages. The last comment is noticeable from a very interesting reason—while the Himachali dance styles are generally rather slow, increasing in tempo as we descend towards the plains, the invasive



influence of Punjabi Bhangra and the so-called disco dance music has accelerated the tempos of the dances. In this instance thus, the slowness stands for the unhybridized purity of the Himachali style, which stands to be praised.

4. Selected Comments on Pahari Songs ( Aasha Raniye Nantiye), 489,985 views, 484 likes—158 dislikes, Published on 3 June 2011, Uploaded By - ( Mr. Praveen Jogta )
  - a. Wow... my great himachal...what is the meaning of 'Nantiye' in this songs, friends..? (Alas, there are some freaks disliking this video)
  - b. I LOVE .. JOUNSARI SONG ..
  - c. Nice song good voice what sound is low that's [sic] why good
  - d. Simori Natti [it's Sirmauri Nati]
  - e. Monetize kiya ya nahi videos ?? [did you manage to monetize the video?]

The five comments selected here bring up the themes of provenance, technical flaws, the economics of music production and a point of information, namely the meaning of the word 'nantiye' found in the lyrics of the song. There is a clear disagreement over the provenance, a common occurrence and one often impossible to resolve. Interestingly, those who did not like the song receive the label 'freaks'—an extreme and abrupt labelling of the fellow viewer-listener, and a very distinctive trait of musical and esthetic judgment in general. I have often found extremely strong language being used in comments and exchanges on the YouTube and music sites in general. In fact, such language and the promptness of abusive responses is very striking compared to political discussions for instance where violent language takes some time and a few rounds of exchanges to escalate. Indeed, this global trait comes highly muted in the case of Himachal where the anonymity of the audience is somewhat limited, with comments often including phone numbers. The last comment of course raises the vital question faced by the professional and the industry—how to monetize the video, a question that remains unanswered to this

day even for the expert.

5. Selected comments on 'Paani Peena Ho—One of the Oldest Folk Song of Himachal,' 649,568 views, 2.4K209 SHARE, published on 22 January 2010, SUBSCRIBE 2.3K, one of the sweetest and oldest Folk song of Himachal, "Paani Peena Ho" by Sanjeev Dixit, 272 Comments.
  - a. Live in nyc but couldn't forget my roots...ranaji
  - b. Very nice song. Bahut yaad aa rahi hai [feel a strong longing for home] my home town Bathri (Dalhousie). proud to be an Himachali.....
  - c. This is my 2<sup>nd</sup> comment on this song. 1<sup>st</sup> one was year ago.....I am from Hamirpur H.p. , really like this song actually this song really take to near to mother tongue ,,yes specially you living out of HP these songs got so much to you ... really missing to semi hills ..yes missing my place ,, only one understands this who feeling same . It's tuff to be live away from your mom and dad, just living. missing Mom Dad
  - d. Yes we are luck to be born in Himachal to have such a heritage. I left India 57 years ago to the West but the childhood memories are brought back by such songs. Long live Himachal

Nearly all the comments here reflect intense nostalgia with a great deal of heart-tugging immediacy. Indeed, listening to music arouses the longing for home in a manner that few other things do. This has some highly prosaic consequences—it explains for example why the music and cinema of Bihar at least in the early phases were sustained mainly by the community of migrants spread in different parts of India. Familiar words, themes and tunes are often in heavy demand among those who leave home, whether temporarily or for good. The last comment is striking in that even after 57 years a supposedly old man reacts to the song with the same immediacy as the younger lot. The first comment on the other hand locates one's roots in the words and sounds of the music.

6. Selected comments on Laman || Kaali ghagri || Official song || Folk Himachal, 1,399,542 views, 455 SHARE, “KaaliGhagri”  
Lyrics : Traditional Band : Laman Vocals : Abhishek Bisht  
Chorus : Abhishek Bisht | Shishir Chauhan | Pankaj Badra  
Featuring: Renu Bhatia | Pankaj Badra Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/LAMAN05/> e-mail : [lamanband@yahoo.com](mailto:lamanband@yahoo.com)  
Contact : 9816064105 / 98334 53172 Flute : Shriram Sampath Harmonica : Shubhank Sharma Guitar : Abhilash Programming and Sound Design : Brinci | Shishir Mixing & Mastering : Bhaskar Sarma Production : Snow Leopard Production Director : Rajeev Thakur Assistant Director/ Editor : Manwar Rana
- a. This music reminds me of my village. I am from the mountains as well, way up north in Pakistan. I heard that there were a great deal of people that, unfortunately, migrated from the area that I come from. With that curiosity in mind, I stumbled across a couple of songs—this one being one of them. I also loved Panipeena oh. Anyway, I was sort of surprised that I understood 90 per cent of the lyrics—I speak Hindko. Though,
  - b. hello folks..... I am really blown at the moment after watching this...what a touching song...missing everybody back home...i just love listening to pahari songs but frankly videos of those songs used to put me off...n everything about this song is so perfect..singing..editing..acting..music...wow.....keep it up guys...eagerly waiting for your new song...cheers
  - c. You guyzzzz are too good....! No band can compare you...! win our hearts...! I'm eagerly waiting for your next composed track. Suggestion: I'm not the one who can give you the suggestion but I want to say that please take our old songs and make them composed
  - d. Beautiful Song, though this is pretty old cong [song] but the the way the videow [video] has been Conceptulized its AMAZING, I have grown up listening to this sonf back home in Himchal. TheVidiow along with the song made me immotional.

- e. Beautiful Punjabi Pahari Song from Himachal Pardesh, love from Pakistani punjab

By now it must be clear to anyone that most of the commenters do not know the English language and make unlikely spelling and grammatical mistakes, making their comments almost unfathomable to a native English speaker. While examining the comments on YouTube, I rarely came across the use of Hindi. This only confirms that English is a handy global language, a 'cosmopolitan' medium and whether correct or incorrect matters very little as long as the meanings come across within the community. In general, thus, those who are devoted to regional music are rarely ones who are part of the English speaker's community/segment. The comments from Pakistan of course indicate the diffusion of musical cultures across the past and present boundaries as well as the commonalities in language. A Hindko speaker from western Pakistan comments on the lexical similarities between the Himachal tongue and his own language. Notably, these overlaps and similarities allow the smaller language to cross barriers difficult to span through daily conversation or the print media.

6. GADDIYALI NATI NONSTOP Singer: Sunil Rana Hiyunri Chorus:Ajay Bharmouri & Rajinder Rana Hiyunri Music :ParamjeetPammiFlute:Akhil Kumar Dholak: Ram Bharose Ghadthal:Sunil Kumar Producer: Dolly Rana Hiyunri In association with Trigarth studio & Ransingha (our culture is our brand)867,759 views, 967 SHARE [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frpq2ssTbk>]
- a. Indu Kushal Dhiman kya ghati ya gane ko nice bolte ho kabhi rock music bhi sun liye karo[ how can you call such lousy music good? Listen to some rock music...]
- b. Indu Kushal Dhimanji Jo apne Coulter or bessbhusa ko bhul jaye use bolte h gh.....yawestn musics bhi sunte h liken apne gano m Jo mja h wo knhinhi....[he who forgets his own culture or costume is called an ass. Listen to western music but it won't bring the same joy as our own songs.]

- c. Bohut pyara song hai dance krne me mjaa ata hai Pls upload with video [lovely song, it's fun dancing with t. please upload it as video film]
- d. Thanks for preserving the gaddi culture. Sunil Ranaji your each song is an awesome on
- e. Question - "खैरा" का क्या मतलब है। [what does 'khaira' mean?] answer - रलियाकामे [raliyakame]

The first comment is obviously a reaction to the praise of the song, allegedly influenced by western rock. It is interesting that when the audience is disappointed by a song, he should target a fellow audience rather than the performer himself. Such are the micro-debates that are common to the music sites in most instances. In this case however, the claim is that the very integrity of Himachal music is at stake due largely to external influences. Nati, the most prevalent form of Himachali music was originally a dance form based on half beats on a relatively slow tempo but has now evolved into a song-and-dance form with a wide melodic range and tempo. In a sense then, with the very core of Nati being compromised, it becomes difficult to see how a debate on its authenticity can be held at all. In fact, the rude exchange over here has a context culturally too complex to unravel beyond a point. The next comment that declares it to be a part of 'Gaddi' culture only confounds the issue further, though clearly the traditional Gaddi repertoire of songs must have included this number.

7. Song: Dhoban Album: Chaile Baage Da Mor Singer: Varsa Katoch Music Director: Various Music Label : T-Series 1,958,482 views, 1.1K SHARE, 384 Comments
  - a. one of the best himachali songs... Koi Eda Himachali ni hona tine je suneya ni hona e gana[there's no Himachali who hasn't heard this song]
  - b. I am maharashtrian but this and all himachali songs touch to heart. this song is my favorite song
  - c. Sometime your husband can be right
  - d. Sudarshan Sharma hahahahaha bro always men's are right
  - e. Very traditional

This song is based on a folktale told all over the region, which is why the first comment claims that no Himachali is likely not to have heard the song. There is, in fact, a significant body of songs that are sung in different versions with slightly changed verbiage, all across the state and even beyond. The song clearly found a resonance with someone from Maharashtra as evident in the second comment. In fact, it is startling how often a complete outsider may stray into the regional fold and leave her footprints there in the shape of comments. In the case of Himachal, one likely reason may be tourism—visitors do often encounter local musical forms, especially when they visit the Himachali fairs. But on the whole, it is difficult to trace exactly how these outsiders end up opening up a regional video. The process cannot be entirely random in all the cases. But this is something to be investigated if one must find some vital clues to global circulation and diffusion of music.

8. SINGER- ADITYA THAKUR GUITARIST- SIDHARTH VERMA FLUTIST- LAABH SINGH MUSIC BY- ADITYA THAKUR & SIDHARTH VERMA ACTORS- ADITYA THAKUR, SIDHARTH VERMA, DIVYA VERMA DOP-MOHAN CHAUHAN CAMERAMAN- MOHAN CHAUHAN & SIDHARTH VERMA VIDEO EDITOR- SIDHARTH VERMA RECORDED AT- MUKUND STUDIO TIVRA- Himachali folk mashup||KANGRI-CHAMBYALI||, 1,356,750 views, 17KSHARE
- a. Ye kangri songs nahi hain ye chamba k folk songs hain jo ki kaafi purine hain raja maharajo k tymke [this is not a song from Kangra but from Chamba which is also very old, dating to the times of kings and royalties]
  - b. Yrr kya hogya h himachal k logo ko.... Himachal ke bi tukdekr doge tum to.... Kuch bi ho just enjoy the song... Ye himachali song h... Kya Kangri kya chamvyali kya mandyali krte rehte ho.. Hum himachali h yrr... Jai himachal [what's wrong with the Himachali people who are dividing Himachal into pieces talking of Kangra, Chamba and Mandi. We are Himachali. Viva Himachal.]

- c. Bhai Ye Bharmouri gaddi song hai [it is a Bharamauri Gaddi song]
- d. Bhai most importantly ye himachali songs hain.[most important, it is a Himachali song]
- e. Dude its mentioned on the title itself, its a Kangri and chambiyali songs. appreciate the hard work of artists.

The series of comments here are notable for their intense feelings on both sides - that of the common Himachali identity and the pride felt for one's own sub-region. The last comment in a sense points out the fruitlessness of such debates since the artist openly admits the dual provenance of the song. What remains undisputed is that the song is a traditional one, being carried down the generations. The dramatic entry made by a Himachali patriot is indeed striking! He takes a higher ground to preach to the rest, the lesson of wider patriotic allegiance to the state. The reprimand issued by the mediator succeeded in calming down the disputing parties, bringing the string of responses to an end. This series could also be seen to place the issue of cultural property right at the centrestage.

9. Album: Kangna A Love Story, Song : O Gadani Muiye Meriyan Bheda liyan Jo , Singer: Pammi Thakur, Indu Bala Bhaderwahi Music: Bulley Shah Producer / Director : Rishi Sharma , Copyright: New Series ( Rishi Sharma ) Cont. 9736663555 <https://www.facebook.com/RISHISHARMAB...><https://www.facebook.com/RishiSharmaP...>  
1,585,166 views, likes 3.6K, don't like 986
  - a. voices of both the singers are appealing but weak lyrics and non gaddi faces hardly attracts the audience...good luck..
  - b. Heart touching Song Local Dress me rahte to jyada Acha lagta
  - c. दोस्तो...Champcash के रूप में आपके पास एक बहुत ही बेस्ट Business मिला है आप इसकी Importance को समझो तब ही कोई love kangri song i am song always listen kangri Decision लो [friends, champcash offers you a great business

opportunity, if you can see it. I always listen to Kangri songs.]

- d. Pummithakurjiaapsirf slow songs hi Gaya kro definitely superdupr hit hongei [Pummy Thakur, please sing only slow songs. they will definitely become great hits] really love your song rama ho rama
- e. Voice are good but gal nibani [the voice is good but the song didn't work out.]

What we have here is a mishmash of a wide variety of comments of uneven significance ranging between the banal to extremely telling. There are some that focus on the authenticity and the cultural ambience of the song, bringing into account not just costume and tempo of the piece but also the physical appearance of the face on the screen, who supposedly does not look like a Gaddi. A commenter seems to presume that he knows what the audience wants and assures the singer that a slower tempo will win him great popularity. As pointed out earlier, the tempo of the Himachal songs is often an issue with the audience since traditionally Himachali songs followed a slower tempo, a feature now disturbed by the external influences including Panjabi music and the western pop. The third comment has been featured here just to demonstrate how random and promiscuous the expressions on the comments platform can be—we have here an instance of a marketer promoting a company supposedly called ‘Champcash’, which seems to be a financial company from its name.

10. Bhariya Banduka, Artist Karnail Rana, Album Ik Joda Soote Da-Mohana-4, Licensed by Tseries Music (on behalf of Nagma Music); TSeries Publishing, 137 Comments

Chhaile bhage da mor ( Karnail rana ) Himachali kangra  
669,861 views, 1.6K likes, 346 don't like [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwGLRwBZQFg>]

- a. Yehgana to hamare dogri song se bada milta julta hai... bhai kahin yeh DOGRI song to nahi? [this song resembles strongly resembles a Dogri song. Is it a Dogri song after all?]
- b. Bhai Kangra bhi Dogra Region me hai ya han ki boli



lokgeet aur riti riwaaz common hain..Karnail Rana ke lokgeet Udhampur wali belt me bahut popular hain ..[Kangra comes within the Dogri region and their customs are quite alike. Karnail Rana is very popular in the Udhampur region of Jammu and Kashmir]

- c. I love this song because this was one of my father's favourite song And I have lost my father last year
- d. mother still sings this one
- e. ohh so sad nd where you from ?

These comments raise some inter-regional issues, as well as matters of deep sentiment and attachment. The first comment claims that the song resembles one in Dogri, a language spoken around Jammu in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. By way of response, another listener explains how the Kangra and the Dogri region are culturally close to each other implying that resemblances do not necessarily mean that a song has been lifted from another language. The interesting information here is that Karnail Rana, a highly popular singer from the Kangra area has a significant following as far as Udhampur in J&K. Earlier, while discussing the relatively small size of audiences compared to Bihar and Haryana, one of the mitigating features mentioned was how music may have following not simply among a populace that speaks the same language but also among those who speak a 'similar' language, as is often the case with Bhojpuri in Bihar. The last three comments of course seem to focus on the evocative aspects of the song but there is also an attempt at courtship or friendship in the comments—a girl who lost her father recently is offered sympathy by a complete stranger who also initiates an introduction of sorts through the comments platform. This is not very unusual as occasionally the commenters leave their phone numbers along with their comments.

In all the segments of the present chapter, there was an attempt to contextualize, analyze and interpret the information obtained from a variety of sources on a wide range of themes related to the regional cultures and languages. The chapter gave due attention to both the commonalities and the uniquenesses of the regions in question,

While this chapter aggregated materials for each head, discussing results obtained from each of the sources included, the next chapter will bring all the diverse material together in order to advance the discussion further. There is of course a qualitative difference between the information and viewpoints obtained through ethnographic conversations and the comments made on the internet. The long interviews with the music personnel in the field often led to well-considered statements and contextualized information that fitted into the flow of the interactive sessions. The material culled from the internet is evidently far more raw and not always a reaction to other listeners in any kind of interactive context. This may be a mixed bag of advantages and drawbacks—the casualness of the comments made in a passing moment on the internet may be compensated by its spontaneity and may be more revealing. On the other hand, it may have little significance beyond a transitory sign of presence, attention or attendance. It is only over time that an analyst may learn how to attribute weightage to the empirical material collated in some order of preference and prominence. This becomes especially important at a stage when material gleaned from a variety of sources is brought together for an analysis that yokes them to derive broader empirical conclusions, that in turn may be refined into insights of the theoretical kind. These are the challenges faced squarely in the next chapter devoted to discussion and conclusions, as well as the lacunae in research that deserve attention.

## CHAPTER IV

# Conclusion and Reflections: Themes for Discussion

The concluding chapter of this monograph carries two main segments which in turn are divided into discussions on a number of themes emerging from the study. The first segment focuses on the issues arising directly and visibly from the empirical material and its analysis laid down in the earlier chapters. These combine the most salient generalizations surfacing from the field as well as the comparative analysis based on a juxtaposition of the varied material from different sites. The second segment on the other hand will dwell on themes and concerns that may seem broader and even sweeping, even though they hover unavoidably over the conceptual horizon of this study. They relate to matters including both regional cultures as well as the languages. This reflective segment will have discussions on the state of music in our time and the stance of the musician and the audience in a technologically driven era. The diffusion of the wide range of musical forms in different languages seems to ask for more specific studies around the genres and forms that would allow us to generalize and speculate on the fate of these tongues as well as their changing relation with Hindi and English in a non-linear way. Although the tales of the languages and their musical circulation are inseparably fused in tangles of plots and subplots, one has to, for analytical reasons, look at them in so far as possible from suitably different viewpoints. In a somewhat cyclical fashion, the tale of regional cultures in its present transition may begin in its different versions

with language and end up in music, as also the other way round.

Finally, there will be an attempt to comment on the changing nature of our musical experience itself in how we relate to and connect with the musical sound. We thus begin with a brief recapitulation and then bring in themes that may carry our discussion beyond the earlier chapters by way of summing up the study. It would be useful to pick on the most glaring themes emerging from the study before moving on to the subtler but no less significant themes that loom ahead of us.

### **Section I** **Technologies and Regional Cultures:** **Some Conceptual Reflections**

The ongoing project on the regional cultures in the last several years has dealt with a time span that may be classified roughly into three different phases, best marked by the core technologies employed for production, marketing and circulation, leading to a widespread diffusion and accessibility of cultural products.

They are as follows:

1. The cassette phase [1985–1999]
2. The Compact Disc phase [2000–2012]
3. The internet/pen drive/cloud phase [2012 onwards]

Although the global music industry broadly follows a similar pattern, the years mentioned along with the phases, apply more precisely to the Indian market, which technologically tends to lag by a few years. The lag is not surprising at all and instead it is startling to see how promptly these technologies, including gramophone, descended into the Indian markets after their induction in developed countries. The phasal division of period is of more than chronological import, of course. In what is clearly a quick succession, the three technologies incrementally opened up a series of opportunities for both the creator of cultural products and the consumer, not to mention a number of professionals integral to the production chain. A useful way to look at the incremental scales is to compare the costs of production, circulation and the

end product through the different phases. Even within the time period, from 1985 to 2012, the economics of entertainment and its varied templates underwent sea change. So much so that within the period of early youth to the age of 55, a typical producer saw a market first skyrocket and then arrive at a point of demise around 2010! A very good example of this was provided by Bittuji in Rohtak [interviewed in 2014] who entered the profession in his mid-20s as a retailer and agent but by 2012, at the age of 54, was compelled to abandon the diminishing trade for better career alternatives. Quite in the manner of a growing adolescent, he was still struggling over his options in 2014, unable to give me any idea of his future plans. Similarly, Harvinder in Shimla, a veteran who ran a production company 'Tanya Videos' in Lower Bazar, has had to shift to the clothing business in the same locality in 2015, turning a highly eventful retail hub into an obscure clothing store with little focus on inventory. As anyone familiar with the retail milieu would know, it is not easy for a trader to switch trades and enter unfamiliar territories, with no established networks to back her enterprise. In the case of Rohtak music market, an entire row of shops was seen to have switched from music to electrical hardware, selling items like heaters and geysers. Bittuji, the most prominent figure in the music market however found the switch laughable or even contemptible and decided to consider various options before plunging into a new market, although he had been waiting for a solution to occur right since 2012, when he clearly foresaw the demise of the music market. The reason, as he put it, was quite simply that he grew up as a raw youth in the music industry and saw its different phases and aspects of its production chains, familiarizing himself with every phase of expansion of the trade in Delhi as well as Haryana. A man with a reputation to keep, his career virtually compacts the rapidly moving developments in the music technologies and markets in its three phases listed earlier, leaving him somewhat bewildered at the age of 54. Although Bittuji expanded his business through a series of technological phases, he was unable to handle the latest transition that left him with virtually nothing to sell. No one wanted his CDs or thumb drives with songs on them anymore! Therefore, probably the most

linear part of this succession of phases is reflected in the aspect of portability in that over time as the new technologies unfolded, a listener could move from one place to another without the physical or material vehicle [a cassette, a CD or a thumb drive] carrying music on it, as he could access his choice songs directly from the internet. Wherever, and whenever, at least in theory!

### **The meaning of cultural growth**

There are two senses in which one may talk about the growth of the regional cultures. First in a gross quantitative or numerical sense, namely in the sense that the repertoire of the local culture may have increased manifold! But is this really true in an absolute sense or can one assume that without the new technologies, the gross quantity of cultural products would have necessarily remained less in weightage or number of hours devoted to creating or listening to music? Such an assumption would seem patently absurd. The obvious argument against the proposition would be that while the digital platform has adopted certain traditional forms and borrowed others from far and near, there is no inventory readily available to enable us to assess the neglected or extinct cultural forms and genres. In fact, a stronger version of this questioning and argument may even include the sweeping claim that the digital media has been responsible for shrinking the repertoire of traditional music through a process of selection based entirely on perceived demand in the market. Clearly, this is not a dispute we can settle except through a comprehensive database of 'all' the cultural forms, which is again an absurd lead and a virtual dead end for research. Even further, someone may persist and claim that the digital media has led to a 'distortion' of cultural forms. If that is not severe enough a reproach, it may be argued that the modern technologies have curbed the inherent diversity of the folk forms, steamrolling them into predictable or unforeseen hybrids. It was important to explicitly emphasize the various lines of argument around the issue of growth even though the present research project does not aim at or hope to resolve these debates despite acknowledging the value and place of conversations around the

'quality' and value of cultural products in the daily lives of the creators and consumers of music. It is however relatively easier to avoid the glibness that often goes with the phrase 'cultural growth'!

What may however be modestly and sensibly claimed instead is that as the digital form gets firmly entrenched, the two ends of the industrial process, that of the creator and the consumer are now better and more directly linked, with opportunities for far more frequent interaction and financial transactions, and have far greater access to each other than they ever did. The smaller universe of such interactions has also expanded from an almost infinitesimal scale to a global one, capable of bringing together, at least in theory, one corner of the globe and the other. This is probably the only sense that the phrase 'cultural growth' would make in the context of the music industry, even though the semantics employed thus seems highly dubious and slippery. It is useful to think of 'growth', an ambiguous term [more a catchall term] as quite simply synonymous with 'circulation-diffusion', the concept duo, if by 'circulation' one were to mean deliberate and strategized marketing practices and targets, and diffusion embraced the unintended or spontaneous dissemination that is characteristic of the field of music and language. Some of the terminological blurring is caused by the element of replication—for example, one may very justifiably ask if a million copies of the same song and its re-mixes is to be judged as a greater quantity, or the release of ten different songs with 10,000 copies each? It would seem that it depends on the viewpoint that may shift between the audiences to artists, sponsors, producers or promoters.

In brief, as the traditional cultural forms along with the new borrowings entered the realm of business and industry, the realm of entertainment underwent a qualitative change, in that it became possible to speak of a culture/entertainment industry. So much so that even the live shows and live concerts, including ones held within the family courtyard, could be seen as a component of the modern industry rather than a traditional and informal practice. In fact, it will become evident later on, that in the light of recent changes, live concerts of a wide variety and scale have increasingly occupied the most prominent place in the industry—this happened

with the extinction of the cassette and the CD industry. Business through the internet has not attained maturity yet and the live shows continue to remain the main source of income for the artists and promoters. The number of hits on the internet does not translate easily into cash payments in the same way as a contractual payment for a live show, either through tickets or impulse gifts of cash made during the performance. This is what really lies at the core of the digitalization process, something we need to admit unequivocally to fully appreciate the seminal changes in the realm of the musical experience itself.

### **The mainstream, the regional and the sub-regional**

Although the terms ‘mainstream’, the ‘regional’ and the ‘sub-regional’ are essential to any discourse, given their prevalence in everyday conversation and even academic discussions, it is advisable not to lend to them unnecessary philosophical weight, as these terms are not absolutes. To illustrate, to claim an area to form a region can never be based on unassailable arguments and invariably there will be some dispute or the other to deal with. Thus, these terms have been used as handy tools to delineate locations and their relative distance from each other as well as their prominence in the prevalent mediascapes and ‘mindscapes.’ What is of real import is the issue of ‘scaling’ of a specific context in focus at a given moment. This geometric term is useful in that it allows the participants in a discussion to see exactly how far a map is minimized or magnified in dimensions and what level of micro or macro scale the discussion is aiming at—for example one may be at a certain moment simply looking at the cultural products of a few villages in Himachal without overt references to the larger cultural ecology of the region and at another moment one may be addressing the wholeness of Himachal culture in relation to the larger entity called ‘the Hindi speaking parts of India.’ It may be useful to think, as an analogy, of the experience of consulting a Google map where, with a few clicks of the mouse, one may move along the narrow lanes of a city or may switch to a far greater area after a few clicks or touch-taps, zooming in and out to indicate



the geo-cultural scale in question. The notions of mainstream, the regional and the sub-regional are thus in reality simply part of a larger continuum [with breaches in between?] that one breaks down into smaller parts for entirely practical reasons rather than any profound philosophical motive. Any assumption that such shifting of contexts is 'fractal' or iterative in nature would be highly premature with no backing from empirical material obtained from the ground.

The present research project covers what may be called cultural territories that connect the local to the global. Or, in another kind of terminology, the regional to the mainstream as part of a cultural continuum, that may also carry within it, breaches or discontinuities of varied significance. Although we may find some correspondence between the political division and boundary lines, the cultural regions mostly do not conform to the political maps except perhaps the traditional and the politically obsolete ones taken from the pre-independence era of India or even earlier. On the other hand, a phrase like 'cultural mainstream' or 'regional culture' can only be taken as handy but indispensable concepts if a discussion on cultural diffusion has to take place. This is why there is no real need to lend undue philosophical weightiness or precision to what in reality are useful labels rather than serious concepts employed for their distinctive semantic flavour. What remains of great importance however, is to see graphically and empirically, the tensions within the mainstream itself or within the realm of the regional or the subregional. To illustrate the point, although for all practical purposes, the 'mainstream' in our context means the 'Hindi mainstream', the fact is Hindi has its own quarrels and alliances with other major Indian languages, leave aside mega cultures such as global Hollywood. To further illustrate the point in the regional context, when we speak of Bhojpuri culture, we must also take a close look at its relation with other neighbouring tongues such as Maithili, Awadhi or Magahi. In brief, it does not make sense to speak of the regional as a hard cultural monolith but a fluid ensemble of sub-regional entities. This is equally important in the case of Himachal Pradesh where a much smaller population than Bihar or Haryana has been traditionally divided by a number

of local tongues with rich and rather distinct cultural traditions. There is a good basis to claim that the sub-regional conflicts among the regional languages could often be sharper than their resistance to Hindi mainstream. Probably the best and the final test for claiming a geographical-cultural entity is the perception of the people from the region and whether they see themselves or are seen by others as a separate and identifiable entity to various extents.

Throughout this monograph, the terms 'culture' and 'entertainment' have been used interchangeably mainly since unless specified, the term 'culture' has been used predominantly in its descriptive sense rather than as a judgemental label and also since the terrain in focus is the culture industry in its empirical concreteness. Similarly, often 'language' and 'culture' have been used to delineate each other except when there is a need to emphasize a lack of overlap or overt connection in the context of a given region or demographic entity. After all, when we talk of a region, language, geography and cultural traits together come into play and occasional shifts from one kind of terminology to another is unavoidable in practice. This should not be seen as a categorical error except when a discussion is moving at a theoretical-analytical rather than a descriptive level.

A series of research projects on the regional entertainment industries carried out by the present researcher since 2009 in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, and in Haryana during 2014, have repeatedly provided sufficiently convincing evidence of a spectacular growth of these industries in the past four decades. Such growth has often been associated with a series of new technologies like the cassettes, compact discs [CDs] and the internet, that climaxed with the rise of the digital format in recent years in both replicable forms of music as well as the numerous live narrative forms and concerts. In the process, even the relatively bare bones live shows, using minimal technologies, now come transformed into concerts and presentations armed with the latest gadgets for amplification and fidelity and are thus capable of embracing large audiences. An ethnographic interview in Buxar, Bihar in 2010 was interrupted by a casual visitor who came to see me but who ended

up asking the interviewee singer to perform at his son's birthday party at home for a fixed fee [Rs 3000 for a 3-hour entertainment of a roomful of children in 2009] that seemed quite respectable to me as well as the singer. These changes consequently are not confined to the realm of replicable music alone and have seriously transformed a wide range of professional practices among the community of performers as well as the audiences, not to mention the several other linkages in the production chain that span the distance between the creator and the consumer of entertainment. In one instance in Siwan, Bihar my small team of researchers was pleasantly surprised to find that the floor above ours at the hotel was occupied by a recording studio, enabling me to conduct my first interview in Siwan, literally at the doorstep. The recordist-cum singer Santosh Singh, a Rajput by caste, permitted us to attend a few recording sessions in his studio which, in 2009, cost Rs 26 lakhs to install along with the soundproofing. Siwan, a relatively small town in Bihar thus suddenly acquired the status of a regional hub where artists from as far away sites as Kolkata came for their recordings. One should not forget to mention thus, that all this has led to an ease of access that has had an enormous impact on the musical experience of the common viewer and listener in some seminal and profound ways, transforming the very relationship between the music and its listeners and the stories and the audience. These changes are of course universal but the purpose of the present project is to map out the pathways through which such cultural growth has taken place in specific regional contexts. Earlier ethnographic work and field surveys provided adequate evidence of local variations and disparateness, often lending unique traits and character to the regions and sub regions selected for study. The current work on the sub-regions of Himachal Pradesh is thus part of an ongoing research focusing on the Hindi-speaking areas of India to provide us with comparative insights into the dynamics of the regional cultures as well as their changing relation to what may be termed as the 'mainstream' or Hindi-English body of popular culture in India.

The growth of the regional culture industries has concomitantly meant the growth of the regional languages, although such growth

varies from region to region and may often conceal tales of shrinkage and even decimation in the case of smaller languages. To take the example of Bhojpuri, a study dedicated to the extinct or near extinct forms of music may ironically end up with a larger inventory than the extant genres, belying the narratives of unqualified growth.

Before Himachal, earlier studies in Bihar, eastern U P and Haryana had already opened up a dynamic world of relationships among the regional languages, apart from their relation to mainstream languages like Hindi and English. Such correlations of course reflect the relations among the communities of speakers and audiences and the constant shifts in their power dynamics, their channels and modes of communication as well as the elements of reciprocal mimicry and borrowing. This dense cultural and linguistic process does not follow a linear path in the sense that the new technologies may favour certain languages and dialects and their inherent logic may rather actively discourage or even constrain some other languages. A good example is that of Bhojpuri in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, which is fast acquiring the status of an umbrella language, defining the identity of a region to the outsiders. Bhojpuri achieved this status by rather overwhelmingly dominating neighbouring tongues like Magahi and Vajjika, which have thus far registered a far thinner presence on the digital platform than the number of speakers in those languages would suggest. On the other hand, the dialects in the state of Himachal Pradesh in many cases have thus far not been successful in mustering a critical mass of audiences and consumers to remain sustainable in the future, and are therefore faced with an uncertain fate in the coming days. The mitigating role in the case of Himachal is however played by the governments that have been particularly sensitive to the linguistic diversity that fragments the citizenry as much as the entertainment market. Traditional institutions such as the numerous well-organized fairs at different localities in the state have also enabled the local artists and practices to thrive. Even the singular example of the month-long annual Lavi fair in Rampur Bushahr or the 10 day Dussehra mega-

event in Kullu known as major hubs for entertainment, apart from their commercial or religious significance, would suffice to make the point here. These hubs enable the audiences to listen and watch performances in other neighbouring tongues and create a sense of familiarity unseen earlier. How far such familiarization may go and what consequences it may have for the state of languages and cultural forms in Himachal, remains a matter of speculation.

The broad proposition thus, that the new digital cultures have lent a tremendous boost to the regional cultures, does not imply a simplistically democratic division of resources and inputs or equal levels of empowerment for all. As claimed earlier, the case of Himachal Pradesh may demonstrate the very opposite—the frequent difficulty faced by the local populace in comprehending the neighbouring tongues in a highly differentiated linguistic terrain of Himachal Pradesh has encouraged, indeed made Hindi indispensable as a handy means of handling the cumbrous linguistic variety and as a readily available alternative even in remote villages and towns. During visits to villages around Jathiyadevi in Shimla, a common complaint among the elders was that the children do not speak their own dialect even within the household. Thakur from a village Shilibagi near Jathiya Devi, a settlement just below the Shimla-Nalagarh highway quoted a number of native words that the younger lot do not understand or use anymore—such a loss of vocabulary is of course not uncommon at all. Echoes of such complaints were heard in Haryana in 2014 during interactions with postgraduate students from the Media department of the M D University, Rohtak where, unlike Himachal Pradesh, the educated youth continue to use their own language, Haryanvi. Despite Haryanvi being their preferred language of informal conversation across the state, the students readily admitted that theirs is an urbanized version of the tongue, even though they seemed to break into Hindi only on formal occasions such as classrooms and larger meetings. As students of the media, the youth seemed aware of this loss and voiced their anguish over the extinction of a large part of their ancestral vocabularies, inflections and idioms during a Q&A session following a presentation by the researcher at the

department of media studies, MD University, Rohtak. In Himachal, a local informant [a former head of the department of history at the Himachal University, Shimla and expert on Himachal history and ecology] claimed the informal social groupings may form even at the Tehsil [sub-district] level enabling campus-based youngsters to use a common tongue, something that becomes difficult when friends hailing from afar must switch to Hindi. In the Bhojpuri speaking areas of Bihar on the other hand, speaking in Bhojpuri is often seen as a mark of rusticity and even those who feel more at home in Bhojpuri tend to prefer Hindi while interacting with the outsider within the Bhojpuri fold. This is however changing rapidly as the rustic tongues acquire or evolve an urban register and permit wider usage with less or no shame.

The regional languages in different areas thus tend to be reduced to 'domestic languages' and are often confined to the household to various degrees. How a speaker regards his own regional language in relation to Hindi or English thus becomes a very good benchmark for assessing the power relations between the languages in different contexts. What seems common to a wide range of speakers of regional languages however is their insistence on retaining their own language partly or largely for the intimate purpose of entertainment. It is useful to point out here that the best way to gauge the linguistic situation may be look at the four following contexts:

- a. Home and neighbourhood
- b. Street and commerce
- c. Formal, educational and political communication contexts
- d. Presence and accessibility of the language in the media

Such specific marking of social contexts is useful in carrying out an ethnographic work such as this with its strong sociolinguistic overtones and focus. Observations made after considering the somewhat discrete contexts may also allow us to detect the nuances of the emotive aspect of languages in that one may better grasp the feelings of shame or pride, or a sense of endorsement or denial of the cultural values of one's own tongue.

**Degrees of cultural preference / dependence on regional language**

Use of regional languages can often be a potent marker of class, caste and status, depending on the degree of dependence, acceptance and comfort with the regional language. To provide a somewhat cliched or stereotypical example from Bihar, while a middle class Bhojpuri speaker may feel inhibited by a sense of shame while breaking into his mother tongue, a typical Maithili speaking person, however highly educated, may not have any problem in showing overt preference for her language at all. The reason is Maithili has a rich literary tradition predating Hindi by several centuries, thus denoting a higher cultural status than Bhojpuri despite the much smaller demographics. A certain sense of shame is however not the only inhibiting factor and there is the practical question of whether the other person comprehends your language at all or does so insufficiently. It is however undeniable that for large populations almost everywhere in the heartland, the mainstream is unable to monopolize their entertainment spaces and most often enough place is left for the regional tongue and its cultural forms. Instead, very often, even as the mainstream is acknowledged as such, the larger linguistic-cultural spaces are occupied by the local tongues and genres. This is often achieved at little cost to the mainstream languages such as Hindi or even English that continue more or less unaffected in their own trajectories with sufficient support from classes that employ them with ease and require no additional inputs from the regional tongues. The demography of the regional languages thus lies between two extremes—those who may be profiled as people with little preference for a local tongue and are quite content within the Hindi-English universe and those who undeniably depend on or prefer utmost use of their regional language. This may be due to lack of education or access but it may very well be due to a greater feeling of familiarity and intimacy with the local language. All these examples have been cited here to demonstrate that the relation of the regional communities with Hindi varies a great deal and these differences are vital for the study of the local cultures.

The purpose here is to also emphasize the discrete separation of these channels of communication through class-caste-community divisions where the degree and severity of such separation may indicate the width of the cultural gulfs in a society. This in turn may provide a measure of the disjointedness of the cultural life in a wider linguistic unit such as the Hindi 'heartland' or even the nation. This proposition would of course apply only to larger segments of the nation that are seen as linguistically integrated, a good example being the broad and loose category 'Hindi speaking states.'

Even as we map the topography of cultural growth in the different regions, what remains unclear however is exactly what such a growth means and precisely where it is leading us by way of cultural orientation and realignment. These questions involve both the languages as vehicles of expression and the traditional and recently evolved cultural content reflecting the new life attitudes, values, practices and broader cultural intents and purposes. In this sense, the present project attempts to yoke together the empirical task of cultural mapping with deeper philosophical reflections on the overall meaning of the cultural growth and its specific components. The case of the regional languages in the Hindi speaking areas is somewhat unique in that the smallest of them happen to be chronologically much older than Hindi, some of them such as Braj, Maithili and Awadhi are endowed with rich and well-documented literary histories taking us as far back as 13<sup>th</sup> Century. On the other hand, a language like Bhojpuri, in all its varieties, can also boast of an enormous following, with around 150 million speakers in two of the most populous states UP and Bihar and a huge migratory presence in several other states and even continents. What will happen to these regional languages is thus not a question answerable by pointing out at the course followed by Hindi in the last 150 years or so. Whereas Hindi as a language and a body of literary works was propped up through a prolonged phase of the freedom struggle, often at the cost of Urdu and other regional languages, tongues like Bhojpuri and Magahi seem to depend entirely on the entertainment markets for their continued expansion. The question whether these regional



languages may at some point overflow their entertainment arenas and flood other areas of social and professional life, is not easy to answer. What may be said somewhat speculatively is that Hindi continues to be a growing language that is influenced as much by English as the local tongues and this process may continue in its varied forms in the future, transforming and renewing the Hindi of the future. What may happen to the regional languages in the process is difficult to foresee although an attempt will be made to examine different trends on the basis of empirical material obtained from different regions. What could be said with relative certainty at this point is that the regional languages in the Hindi heartland are definitely not following the same course or pattern of growth, a fact that more than vindicates research projects such as the present one. What one may posit as a near certainty is that the most critical moment in the career of these languages may be their likely entry [or not] in the realms of formal education, even when confined to the primary level.

## **Section II**

### **Reflections on the State of Musical Production and Consumption**

#### **Digital ‘immortality’ and archiving as default**

Probably the most remarkable aspect of a digital product is it is forever, enjoying as it does a status of near immortality. This is not simply in contrast with the era of purely oral cultures but also the relatively brief analog phase in technologies of replication where the preservation of the physical objects such as films and tapes posed severe constraints. But does that make the very idea of cultural extinction extinct or non-applicable? Far from it, in fact! It may in fact be claimed that the digital era has seen both in equal measure—cultural growth in its dramatic though limited sense, as well as obsolescence and extinction in their direst sense.

Evidence from all the regions covered thus far, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh strongly suggest that the digital technology is selective in bestowing ‘immortality’ on

the regional cultures and has a clear preference for the larger populations, larger bodies of speakers and markets, as well as the most salient forms and genres, and is quite emphatically biased in the favour of cultural majoritarianism. To instantiate the point, it is quite tenable to argue that while Bhojpuri has acquired tremendous clout through substantial digital empowerment in recent years, some of it has been at the expense of other neighbouring regional languages such as Magahi, Awadhi or Maithili although it is difficult to see its negative impact on the Hindi market. Even within the universe of Bhojpuri, not all the genres characteristic of the regions in question have received equal or simultaneous attention and some of them may not have attracted any attention at all. Ironically thus, it is in the era of digital immortality that the theme of 'cultural loss' begins to play an unprecedented role, quite simply because the hiatuses of cultural legacy become more visible than before. The growth of the digital technologies thus has had a highly uneven impact on the languages and cultures and the emergent pattern is a patchwork or a mosaic rather than a uniformly shaped highway. This is why generalizations on this subject have to be made cautiously after examining the specific case of a region, a language, a culture or even a specific cultural genre.

That the digital technologies of CDs and the internet have played a powerful role in the growth and consolidation of the many traditional forms and their audiences, transforming the comparatively 'ephemeral' or 'perishable' musical product of the moment seen and heard in live shows, must now be seen as a commonplace. The musical product of course can now be documented, stored, replicated and used repeatedly to the point of becoming immortal. That the ease of replicability of the musical experience in turn has fundamentally changed the relation between the audiences and the musical product often gets overlooked. Regional languages like Bhojpuri, Haryanvi or Kahlloori from Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh have a notable tendency in common in that they have thus far almost completely ignore the print media and their growth is driven entirely by the audio-visual media, which has, in the past four decades become increasingly affordable

and economical, even for relatively smaller markets. The regional languages of course include tongues like Bhojpuri that is spoken by up to 150 million people, whereas Haryanvi is in use among a smaller population of over 25 million, and Kahloori, the language prevalent in the Bilaspur district of Himachal Pradesh may be spoken by no more than .25-.3 million people. The difference made by the scale of the market available is quite glaring—with its massive following, Bhojpuri finds it possible to sustain a thriving movie market producing up to 50 films per year, Haryanvi with a smaller market is unable to support a sizeable movie market but sustains a vigorous video market, whereas Kahloori is compelled to share its market with other Himachal tongues such as Kangri as well as Punjabi and Haryanvi prevalent at its adjoining borders with the two neighbouring states. This project aimed at mapping the dynamics seen among the regional cultures-languages thus has broader cultural, politico-social and aesthetic implications that need to be underlined.

### **ATM or any time music**

As I leave behind the third phase [Bihar – Haryana – Himachal] of work on the regional cultures and languages, I increasingly and unstopably face questions related to the broader phenomenon of music and the listening practices as such. I wish to raise the question of the fundamental change caused by the modern technologies in the manner we listen to music and the rate at which ‘fresh’ music is produced globally in our times. This applies to not simply regional but any variety of music almost all over the world, though it may have impacted the regional cultures somewhat differently. Unlike earlier we now have music available at will or what I half facetiously call ‘any time music [ATM]’. Of course, we are all free to break into a song at will as we do in our bathrooms but it would be a long stretch to term it as culture or art. On the other hand, when you hear music audibly or through ear plugs at work and leisure, wherever and whenever you wish, it turns music into the air we breathe ceaselessly. The same cannot be said of the visual medium—imagine the disaster to follow if you

were to watch a TV while driving! Music has thus permeated all kinds of human contexts, individually or socially, and has become, at least in theory, an ever-present companion. Given that the toughest of surgeries may be aided by music even impels me to look at life situations in purely musical terms—as situations and contexts when music may be welcomed or permitted and ones that discourage or rule out musical intrusions, a distinction with downright legal implications. But even this distinction tends to blur when we consider the use of highly efficient ear plugs and microphones that create a highly localized musical igloo or a sonic cave where the individual listener is able to segregate himself entirely, even though he can see others brush closely past him. Such sensory ‘firewalling’ is of course selective and depends on the listener’s preference. Such flagrant accessibility may be contrasted with what I term ‘occasional music’ that is performed and heard not at will but when an occasion of wider relevance and bearing occurs such as ceremonies and festivals.

The wanton accessibility of music is of course a double-edged matter as it seems to relate to the issues of quality, of endless mining of varied sources, traditional and modern, near and distant to provide an unceasing supply for a customer growing hungrier by the day. It would, at a more intimate level, seem that by plugging our ears we internalize our music, making it part of our physiologies and metabolism like never before. This is bathroom singing come around a full circle where the music seems to emerge from within even if the voices and the instruments may have been ventriloquized or borrowed. I was struck by the variety of musical sources not just readily available but eagerly availed when two young engineers in Rohtak, Haryana, arguably an extremely narrow cultural niche or even a cranny, told me that they planned to record songs heavily influenced by Romanian gypsy music. It was stunning to see how the anonymous voices disperse all over the globe in what may seem a random fashion and with no clear logic except spontaneous liking for a musical piece chanced upon. That such unlikely encounters have tangible consequences on a large scale became clear in a Rohtak studio during the chance encounter.

**From ATM to a phenomenology of humming and drumming:  
the human body as technology**

All the accounts from my fieldwork thus far are narratives sourced from artists, producers and purveyors of music, all of whom form part of the music trade. But clearly, the artists, the sound recordist and the traders started their lives primarily as listeners before they began to make their music. Such merger between the performer and the audience seems to me the fundamental matrix from which all kinds of differentiations and professional roles emerge. As a good example, I have in mind, a common rustic form of singing in rural Bihar among women, which is now close to extinction. Women in Bihar often sang the high-pitched *Jatsaree* while grinding maize and other grains in stone mills. The mill consisted of two circular masses of stone placed on top of each other and a handle for rotating the upper piece over the stationary one, often shared by two women. *Jatsaree* lyrics mostly comprised the mundane cribs of the hausfrau against her mother and sister-in-law in a joint family and indeed the whole bothersome world at a symbolic level. But this was a grinding catharsis without an audience, even if we decide to classify the genre as an art form to be preserved. Of course, you may adopt the posture of a pious aesthete and sit down as an audience to listen to what may seem the most functional kind of singing, a practice rare among the village folk. When freed of the milling context though, *Jatsaree* could transform into an art form sans functionality! Similarly, many of us may not be willing to admit it, but some of our most gratifying music is produced by our own starry selves in the privacy of the bathroom with no one else within listening distance. The two instinctive acts of humming melodies and drumming rhythms casually or inadvertently bring out in an individual, his performative as well as the audience self, often allowing no distinction at all. Why I use these two acts as seminal instances of the musical demand-supply bracket requires some explanation. The reason I refer to them as the 'primal musical predicament' is because they seem to recreate the larger musical universe at a minuscule or atomic level, taking

an individual beyond the private spaces and acts and leaving him connected with the world of public music.

By way of illustration, I will discuss two films that drive home the point—Woody Allen’s ‘To Rome with Love [2012]’ and a Swiss documentary ‘Heimatklänge [2007]’ or ‘Echoes of Home.’ In Allen’s film, a retired musician from New York visiting Rome, overhears a mortician from Rome sing an operatic piece in his bath and is mightily impressed. But when the mortician is taken for a trial run to the studio, he fares miserably, facing outright rejection from the studio bosses. The Manhattan musician is a man determined, however. He fixes up a shower on the stage and makes the mortician perform to great critical acclaim till the day when the mortician decides he has had enough and wants to go back to his trade. The merger of the private and the public in this case seems complete. The shower of course offers the lathering singer in his bath towel all the prerequisites of an artist—an ease of singing, the perfectly dampened acoustic conditions and the élan of the stage performer in his moment of echolalia.

In ‘Heimatklänge’ by Stefan Schwieter on the other hand, you see three artists from Switzerland take wordless yodelling to great heights of beauty, unimaginable by someone not exposed to it before. Replete with alpine visuals, the mountains provide a ‘sonic stage,’ as a reviewer of the film put it, to the nonverbal music, supposedly bringing out the spirit of Switzerland in its most primordial sense possible [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLc4o2N\_DC8 2007]. The purpose behind a discussion on the primal and seminal acts of humming of melodies and drumming or tapping of rhythms is to underscore both the cultural and biological rootedness of music, not just in its aspects of gross or muscular viscosity but its grounding in the human brain, nerves and the axons. How many amongst us have repeated, composed or remixed original or old and new melodies by humming them or even mentally imagining them and how such musical acts relate to our states of mind, is not a question we can take lightly anymore. How many of us have cloud-read rhythms in natural or mechanical sounds or one’s own bodily movements! At times, even obsessively! How the world of sound created by nature, by our urban environment, by us at home

and within our skulls and minds, interweave as different layers of our musical selves is indeed a complex tale!

Lest there be some confusion, let us admit that when we talk of music, we are talking of human music and not dog music, cat music, giraffe music or something even pre-mammalian. No wonder then that you can now order special MP3 music ‘Through a Dog’s Ear: Music to Calm Your Canine Companion, Volume 1’ from Amazon for 8.91 \$ that is suited to your Tommy’s ears and will cure his restiveness [<http://www.amazon.com/DVD-For-Dogs-While-Gone/dp/B000UZS9JY>]*—*the Amazon page gives you many options on a ‘DVD for dogs’ pages precluding the need for the dictatorial imposition of human music on your pet spaniel or the extra-sensitive ears of the neighbourhood mongrels.

### **Music, music everywhere: the wages of plenitude!**

The major objective of my fieldwork has been to investigate how music, and in turn the various technologies, have empowered regional cultures and languages in the Hindi heartland in overt ways. But I had to admit repeatedly that all these small and big cultural victories reaffirm the triumph of the primal and the potentially omnipresent hum in its covert viscosity. While discussing music, we habitually take an externalized view and locate music in concerts, cassettes and MP3, forgetting the music within—no one can stop you from humming under the breath even if you feel inhibited breaking into a whistle or a song inappropriately when the context is not exactly asking for it. With far less technological inputs, the only way an individual could experience what I earlier termed ATM is by simultaneously performing and audiencing one’s own creations. While it is hypothetically possible to do so, this is hardly anyone’s idea of entertainment or art. But by ‘wearing’ the musical apparatus it does indeed become possible to emanate music through one’s own body and to also enjoy it as a listener. The ‘Walkman’ of the 1980s was after all a mix of many stances and predicaments—a listener chasing down music, the music chasing its listener, and a music ensconced within the skull of the audience through a non-surgical procedure.

Musical technologies have brought our humming to a greater level of power and entertainment of course, making it possible to hear and enjoy music at will anywhere anytime. In brief, what you now get is music at will anytime, all the time, and everywhere, making you the sovereign master of your musical universe. Whether such enfranchisement and technological prowess enhance cultural taste, is another story. I also feel that this is a fundamental shift in our relationship with music—we have shifted in a hurry within a century from dedicated listening to distracted listening, from what I call intermittent ‘musical events’ to a musical continuum that seems almost uninterrupted. The fact that an earplug allows us almost remove ourselves from the current social context is a fairly obvious technological feat. What makes music mysterious is the additional fact that musical events often see our social selves coagulate in a mass self in ways that conscious language rarely attains. Add to this the ability of music to reach the deepest recesses of ourselves, where our prehuman and indeed pre-mammalian instincts get roiled and churn up over the surface selves.

But it is probably on the other extreme that the real power of music reveals itself in its charming, seductive or menacing nakedness, depending on your perception—the visual or print media do not easily lend themselves to distracted watching or reading, but you can listen to music and drive a car on a dangerous mountain road. As some of my friends in college claimed, they are unable to concentrate on their studies without the aid of music, despite the complete silence in the hostel rooms at night. There are surgeons who need music to calm themselves and the patient—there are even medical studies claiming that patients on music manage with smaller doses of the anaesthetic. It is thus not surprising that as I move deeper into my own research mission around the regional cultures and languages in the Hindi heartland, I feel vindicated thus far in regarding regional music as a supremely worthy proxy and indicator.

This is the real context for the growth of the regional cultures that define the local identities and also expose themselves simultaneously to global borrowing and consumption, sharing or



letting go of bits and fragments of their 'essential' selves. The irony is, there may be no conflict between the two purposes, just as there is no real conflict between Hindi and the numerous regional tongues. You rarely, if at all, hear confrontational language among the users of the regional languages in a relation of give and take that marks a fundamental trait of our linguistic predicament in India. By way of speculation, the outcomes of my research projects persuade me to posit that the assertiveness of the regional languages/cultures may, in the coming years and decades, transform the very shape of Hindi in both its written and spoken versions. Hindi has thus far maintained a division of labour between English and the regional tongues that is far too compartmentalized—Hindi draws its semantic succor and integrity largely from the regional languages, confining its conceptual borrowings and renderings to English. This growth pattern of Hindi indicates a cultural and epistemic bias that is likely to be challenged increasingly in the coming days. The relation among the trio—the regional languages—Hindi [or Tamil, Telugu, Bangla, Marathi]—English is thus a complex one, making it difficult to decide exactly at what moment they collude or contradict. That they are often found holding hands, is a lot easier to tell than whether they are in effect in a state of handshake or an arm wrestle. As I move on towards my next round of the serial project in other parts of the Hindi belt, these are the elements and factors that will provide me with a backlight—insights gained from Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana, with Himachal Pradesh as the latest research destination.



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