

*Research Article*

## Female Desire, Symbolic Expression, and Psychoanalytic Imagery in Bhawaiya Folk Songs of the Koch–Rajbanshi Community

**Deepjyoti Medhi**

Research Scholar, Central University of South Bihar, Lecturer in English,  
Morigaon Polytechnic, Assam, India;  
deepmedhi5678@gmail.com

**Prof. Vipin Kumar Singh**

Professor & Head, Department of English and Foreign Languages,  
Central University of South Bihar, India;  
vipinsingh@cusb.ac.in

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**Abstract:** Human sexual instincts were built into the body 315,000 years ago. Instincts served as the foundation for sexual changes, ranging from the basic need to reproduce to the intermittent desire to masturbate, and they evolved significantly as culture and tradition changed. Culture impacted human sexual behaviour more swiftly than instincts. In this context, tribal folk songs have arisen as a fascinating subject of study. In patriarchal societies where open discussion of female desire was prohibited, songs served as a type of coded speech, allowing women to communicate longing, bodily experience, and even sexual frustration in metaphorical or collective language. This article examines how the Koch-Rajbanshi tribe and Rajbanshi society depict female sexuality and desire in their folk songs. Bhawaiya songs from the Rajbanshi community in Bengal and Assam will be included. This study will also discuss how folk songs use metaphors and code words to ease sensual yearning and sexual tension. The erotic lyrics of folk songs will be explored using psychoanalytic theory, with a focus on how they express, conceal, or sublimate female sexual desire. This method, based on Freudian and post-Freudian philosophy, investigates cultural taboos, symbolic language, and unconscious impulses concerning sex and gender roles. It will also look at how indigenous women utilize folk songs to express their sexual agency and desire in fresh and liberating ways.

**Keywords:** sexuality; desire; tribal folk songs; psychoanalysis

## Introduction

This paper explores how Bhawaiya folk songs of the Koch-Rajbanshi community encode female desire, sexual frustration, and emotional longing through symbolism and metaphor, functioning as cultural expressions. Bhawaiya, a plaintive, soul-stirring folk tradition rooted in the rivers, wetlands, and rural plains of northern Bengal and lower Assam, has long served as a canvas for expressing the unspoken emotional world of the Koch-Rajbanshi community. Although often dismissed externally as romantic or melancholic love songs sung by drivers, herders, or boatmen, Bhawaiya resonates on a far deeper register: it channels the private, often silenced lives of women – their longing, their frustration, and their inner landscapes of desire. Metaphor and symbolism – drawn from the natural environment, the rivers, forests, the bend of the *ditora* melody – become crucial tools in this poetic expression. Such symbolic spaces allow women's suppressed emotions – grief, desire, frustration – to surface in coded but powerful ways, giving voice to what they cannot say openly. Furthermore, Bhawaiya's evolution over centuries from rustic work-songs of mahouts, buffalo-herders, and cart-drivers to expressive folk ballads of love, separation, and desire reflects how these songs carved out a cultural domain for emotional honesty and female subjectivity in a rigid social order. In villages where public expression of female desire would be taboo, Bhawaiya provided a social space, albeit metaphorical, where such longings could be sung, shared, and felt communally, even if only in song. In many tribal societies, **romantic and erotic longing** is defined as emotional or physical attraction, affection, and intimate desire expressed through culturally sanctioned aesthetic forms such as song, chant, dance, and musical performance. Because direct verbal expressions of romantic or erotic interest may be socially restricted, music becomes an important **symbolic medium** through which such desire is communicated, negotiated, and understood.

In primitive society, music had a special role to play. In the earlier stages of our society, when the language was not sufficiently developed, man relied more on his vocal tunes for his communication with the supernatural powers whom he had to supplicate for food and drinks, for a cure from illness, for protection against enemies, and for so many other daily necessities of life. Music has been playing a vital role as a medium of communication. Music is the highest form of art, as it plays with emotion and sensation, according to Kant. He acknowledged the expressive content of music, particularly its ability to convey emotions. The earliest music in man's life was associated with psychological, sociological, religious, symbolic, and linguistic elements. The subliminal mind's suppressed and buried desires are expressed through music, which reaches into the unexplored depths of the brain. Elizabeth Grosz, citing Charles Darwin, examines music as a sensual, intense, pleasurable, and emotive way to evoke passion: "It is the erotic, indeed, vibratory force that sexualizes the body and produces 'a kind of immediate bodily satisfaction.'" (Grosz 77)

Among various forms of music, folk music has occupied an intermediary position between primitive (tribal) music and the cultivated Indian classical music. It has gradually become the music of social groups that are part of intermediary and higher

cultures but are not themselves musically literate. Folk music is traditionally rural and communal, passed down orally within small social groups such as families or communities, rather than through formal notation. It serves as more than entertainment: it documents history, ritual, genuine emotions, and commemorates events and dance.

The German term "folk music" was first used only to refer to songs sung by peasants. Experts from various fields have now altered the meaning in different ways. Charles Wirck defines "folk" as "a group of people, a primitive kind of post-tribal social organization, the lower class or common people of an area" in his Dictionary of Anthropology. Folk music, according to Cecil Sharp in 1907, is the impromptu music of the untainted and uneducated, produced by their instinct alone. At its 1954 summit in Sao Paulo, Brazil, the International Folk Music Council defined folk music as the result of a musical tradition that has developed through oral transmission, following Sharp's ideas. Folk music has continuity with both the past and the present. Sharps's definition of folk music has now been widely accepted. According to him, folk music reflects communal rather than personal feelings and tastes. The music of these ordinary people is always genuine, "As instinct is their only guide and the desire for self-expression, their only motive." In folk music, the individual invents while the community selects. According to Ralph Vaughan Williams, the folk songs grow straight out of the needs of the people, and the people find a fit and perfect form for satisfying those needs.

Folk songs need to be taught, sung, and remembered from one generation to the next. Folk songs must, in one way or another, reflect the culture and artistic sensibilities of everyone who hears and uses them. It will be forgotten and eventually die if it is not practiced and recognized by the community to which it belongs. It may be modified over time to suit the requirements and preferences of those who perform or listen to it if it is not recognized and practiced. Despite their age, most folk tunes have evolved. A folk community is a collection of people with similar social, economic, ethnic, and professional backgrounds and beliefs. To common grounds are added common goals, interests, and values, which evolve a common psychology. The community supplies its themes and its subject matter. From its community, a body of folk song derives its natural history, its anthropology, its mythology, and its subtle implications. Folk music speaks to many facets of a community's human existence. Therefore, a shared language—whether expressed through speech, instruments, dancing, art, or another medium—must be necessary. Folk song music is typically composed by amateur, untrained musicians and players with little to no theoretical training. Folk culture does have a past, and they permit its music, compositions, and repertory to evolve into new forms. For a folk song to continue to exist, it must be played and approved.

Music arose in society because of the need for expression and communication. Just like language, music is a means of communication. Sometimes language is not capable of conveying emotions, whereas music transcends language by communicating emotions directly. From the Vedic age itself, music has been considered an effective

means of communication with God. The signaling power of music has been reflected in the mythology of Krishna playing the flute to attract Radha and the Gopis. The power of music as a means of communication is much more pronounced in folk music. In the early stages of our society, when language was not sufficiently developed in man, he relied more on vocal tones for communication, and folk music could serve as an unambiguous signal for expressing human thoughts.

“In the Shiva purana, it is said that “the power to create comes from Eros.” Vatsyayana defines Eros as the tendency to seek to satisfy hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell, which are mental activities. The Sharvas like the Shaktas consider creation as penetration. Respect, devotion, love, affection, sympathy, friendship, courtship, embraces, kisses are all manifestations of attraction, of relations of an erotic kind. Eros inflames the mind. Indeed, desire is the seed of thought, the first thing that appears in a child’s mind. Eros is an immense force, manifests in the feelings, emotions, and impulses of human beings.” (Vatsyayana 25)

Sexual desire in folk song is often shaped by what is socially permissible. Traditional genres create a space through language, music, humor, ritual, for longing, seduction, erotic fantasy, and queer identity to be expressed. From Bhojpuri to Rajasthani folk song sung by women in rural India, to British erotic ballads and Bosnian sevdalinka, folk traditions have long carried powerful expressions of human desire—often hidden in metaphor but deeply felt and vivid. Many Japanese peasant songs are highly erotic in content, with vivid references to sexual organs. The unconscious desires, symbolic representations, metaphors, and the role of sexuality are primarily rooted in the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Jacques Lacan. Tribal Folk Songs are oral traditions that serve as a collective expression of the unconscious, encoding a community's memories, desires, and taboos. When applied to tribal folk songs, the psychoanalytical approach can uncover deeper psychological and cultural underpinnings related to Sexuality, desire, gender roles, repression, and identity.

Folk songs grow out of the folk community. It is the reflection of the philosophy of the folk community. In the case of Bhawaiya, this folk community is the Koch-Rajbanshi tribe of the then Kamrup. In ancient times, Assam was known as Kamrupa and Pragjyotishpura. It is widely believed that the name Kamrupa is linked to the Hindu god Kamadeva, also known as Kama, the god of love and desire. He is often compared to the Western figures Cupid or Eros. That is the reason why sexual love, and not the unworldly platonic love, has been deeply rooted in the songs of this area. We can find references to Kamarupa in the “Kalika Purana” and in the “Jogini Tantra.” There are other mythological aspects of the history of ancient Kamrupa. However, a clear-cut history of Kamrupa dates back to the 7th century AD, during the reign of Kumar Bhaskar Barma. At the time, the Chinese visitor Huen-Tsang visited Kamrupa and wrote a long account of it. During the colonial period, the British Government took possession of Assam in 1826 and declared Kamrupa a district of Assam. The name Assam came only during the Ahom rule.

In the land of Kamrupa, one such community is the Koch-Rajbanshi, and their folk tradition is Bhawaiya Chatka. The Koch-Rajbanshis were primarily agricultural. However, other trades, such as boatmen transporting goods on oxen and buffaloes, tilling land, and taming elephants, were also practiced. In sync with these trades, songs such as Maishals (The keepers of buffaloes), Mahout (Keepers of elephants), Gaadiyaal (Cart-driver) were in vogue amongst the Koch-Rajbangsi. Not only in Assam, but Bhawaiya is also one of the most popular folk song forms in Bengal and Bangladesh for years. The songs have been composed in the Kamrupi and Rajbanshi dialects, which have long served as the lingua franca of this vast area. The themes covered by Bhawaiya relate to every aspect of life in the Rajbangsi community. They are sung to meet the day-to-day, ordinary requirements and purposes of social life. There are religious, cult, devotional, love songs, and folk dramas, among many other sub-themes, but this paper will focus on the sexual aspect of the songs sung by this community. *Bhawaiya-Catka* songs do cover a large portion of it, discussing sexual love.

Primitive man was naked, and his clothing consisted of merely a few tree leaves, if any. Love was instinctual. With the passage of time and changes in socioeconomic, political, and educational structures, sexual love gained attention, and suppression, and societal laws were developed to regulate the behaviour of the sexes toward one another. Under these conditions, sexual love becomes a mystery, and its sufferings and cravings become themes of poetic effusion, with musical notes quickly lending a hand in its realization. Music fuelled the fires of love and passion more effectively than religion. Even though religion and music created a good blend of regeneration and eternal happiness. The same concept applies to the Bhawaiya as well. Bhawaiya songs are based on rituals, customs, and the worship of folk gods and goddesses, and they evolved into solo songs depicting the pains, pleasures, and wishes of the Rajbanshis and Koch-Rajbanshis. It expresses the anguish and grief of young widows, sanganis (concubines), spouses yearning for their husbands' affection, and even young women who have fallen in love with the charming voice and melodious music of the dotora, the string instrument played by the Mahout, Maishal, and Garial.

Bhawaiya is a love and desire song, in the language of Dr. Haripada Chakrabarti, a former North Bengal University professor and folklore expert. If we examine it closely, we may see that it is either the grass widow's song or an expression of erotic thoughts, anxiety, and sexual tension from a deceived and disappointed person. Sadhu is the hero in some places; in others, it is the boatman, Maishal, cowboy, or Baidya. The hero and heroines of the Bhawaiya song express their thoughts directly and without hesitation or fear. Although the spokesperson or singer is a man, he expresses the experiences and emotions of women. Probably for this reason, Bhawaiya love is not an unworldly, supernatural, or heavenly miracle; rather, it is extremely tangible in the daily lives of hardworking people. For a brief while, the hero and heroine meet in nature's abundant wealth and limitless isolation. Their love is formed through mutual understanding and consent, which immediately soothes their tension and anguish.



"When we repress our desires, they do not disappear but stay beneath the surface and continue to exert their influence. Prohibition arouses desire and suggests stratagems for satisfying it." (Vatsyayana 30)

Female sexuality and desire were frequently depicted from a male perspective in the early phases of writing and literary theory, with women being seen as objects of male desire rather than people with their own independent sexual desires. There is no space for women to express and experience their own desires. Laura Gaze, a feminist theorist, coined the term "Male Gaze" in 1975 to describe how women are depicted and viewed from a masculine, heterosexual perspective, often objectifying them for male pleasure. This applies to visual arts and literature, and it implies that the media portrays women as sexual objects to satisfy the desires of a male audience. The human psyche, language, and society all contain structures related to desire. It is not simply "what happens," but also how desire functions, particularly in the context of female sexuality. According to psychoanalytic theory, traditional phallic frameworks model sexuality in terms of men, something which is hard, rough, and ends up in penetration. In addition to "raw wanting," desire is frequently analysed as a lack, a fantasy, and a drive. This makes the question of how women's desire is portrayed in male-normed language and cultural practices, and makes it more difficult to understand in relation to female sexuality.

This paper will study female sexuality and how desire and sexual tension have been presented through the folk songs of the Koch-Rajbanshi tribe and the Rajbanshi community. It will discuss the Bhawaiya songs of the Rajbanshi community of Assam and Bengal. The area of Kamrup and north Bengal is deeply rooted in sex-oriented love songs. Bhawaiya is popular for recording the true nature and feelings of the tribes of Kamrup at the time. This paper will also discuss how folk songs become a means of releasing sexual tension and erotic desire through metaphor and code words. The psychoanalytical theory will be used as a lens for analyzing the erotic lyrics of the folk songs, especially in terms of how they express, repress, or sublimate female sexual desire. Rooted in Freudian and post-Freudian thought, this approach investigates the unconscious motivations, symbolic language, and cultural taboos surrounding sex and gender roles. When applied to folk traditions, it reveals how erotic songs function as psychic outlets, cultural fantasies, and social safety valves for women in patriarchal societies.

Bhawaiya songs address a broad spectrum of female sexual and psychological issues from all stages of life. It discusses the emotion of love in young minds, beginning with the time when a woman realizes she needs a man in her life to meet her mental and physical demands and make her life more fulfilling. If she does not get anyone after her mind, she becomes dissatisfied and depressed, and all her aspirations and desires for womanhood go unfulfilled. At that point, the poor, illiterate young girl had no recourse except to blame God. Some classic folk songs from the Rajbanshi community of North Bengal depict the feelings of such a young girl.

*Parthama Jauvaner kale na hail mor biya,  
Ar katakal Rahim ghare ekakini hayya re Bidhi nidaya.*

*Haila pail mor sonar jauvan maleyar jhare,  
Mao bape mor hail badi na dil parer ghare re Bidhi nidaya  
Bapok kao sarame mui maok na kao laze,  
Dhiki dhiki tushir aghun jaleche dehar maje re Re bidhi nidaya...  
Emon man mor karere bidhi emon man mor kare,  
Moner matan cyangra paile dhariya palao dure Re bidhi Nidya.*

Here is the translation:

In the prime of my youth, I remained unmarried,  
Moreover, now I am left alone in this house, oh, cruel fate.  
My golden youth has withered away like a flower in the storm,  
My parents did not arrange my marriage in time, oh heartless fate.  
I do not care about my father's pride or my mother's shame,  
A burning fire is simmering within my body, oh cruel fate.  
Why did fate play such a trick on me?  
If I had found a suitable partner,  
I would have settled down long ago, oh heartless fate.

The song was found in the Linguistic Survey of India, edited by George A. Grierson in 1904, and was collected by Babu Muralidhar Ray Choudhury of Jalpaiguri in 1898. The woman in the song is in her bloom of youth and has not given in to marriage. The core themes in the song are repressed desire and unfulfilled sexuality. The line "A burning fire is simmering within my body, oh cruel fate" is an example of libidinal frustration. In psychoanalysis, it occurs when the psychic energy (libido) that drives pleasure-seeking and sexual desire cannot be adequately expressed or satisfied due to internal or external barriers. Here, the barrier can be her parents' failure to arrange a marriage, which acts as a suppressive force, an internalized superego that enforces societal and familial expectations. "Burning fire" is a metaphorical symbol of repressed sexual energy, likely due to societal suppression of female sexuality, especially when a female is unmarried. The speaker's youth "withered away" under this unyielding pressure, creating guilt and shame even as it fuels intensified longing. There is an inner conflict of rejecting social and family standards and eloping with a man of her choice. However, the persistence of "cruel fate" suggests that societal judgment remains a constant external pressure. The lyrics poignantly expose the conflict between repressed tensions and societal sexual norms. The burning fire inside her is not just a personal longing of emotional and physical desire; it is a symbol of thwarted autonomy in a society that commodifies marriage as a validation of womanhood.

There are many Rajbanshi folk songs about grief, sorrow, and lamentations by women.

*Aki dadare jaivan dekhiya chati mor phale  
Tola matir kala jeman re halphal halphal kare.  
Ai matan nariro jaivan dine dine bare re.  
Maye bale choto chotore bape na dyay biya  
Ar katakal rakhim jaivan ancale bandhiya re  
Dadare jaivan dekhiya chati mor phate*

Here is the translation-

Oh dear, seeing this youthful beauty makes my heart ache,  
Like the soft black clay trembling after the plough turns it.  
This girl's youth blossoms more and more each day.  
Her mother says, "She is still a child."  
Moreover, her father refuses to marry her off.  
However, how long can this youthful charm be kept hidden under a veil?  
Oh dear, seeing her youth breaks my heart.

This song also depicts the fears and pain of a young girl. This song uses a metaphor to indicate that the growth of a banana tree planted in newly elevated soil is very rapid, as is the growth of a young lady. This song, like the preceding one, is about the hidden longing of unmarried women in the Rajbanshi society for a companion who can meet their physical and emotional requirements. In both songs, phrases such as "burning desire" and "the youth of young women" are used to represent their desire to marry and gain societal acceptance, which will eventually lead them to realize their yearning for love.

Bhawaiya is full of such songs. It is also fascinating to discuss Bhawaiya's heroes. Heroines are typically portrayed as young girls with limitless energy and desire, married women with unsatisfied wants who are separated from their spouses, and even widows with untamed desire. Maishals (buffalo caretakers), Garial (cart drivers), and Mahout (Elephant caretakers), the heroes of Bhawaiya folk ballads, all endure similar emotions and feelings of alienation. Their job requires them to put up with such conditions. Back then, Kamroop and North Bengal were jungle areas abounding with tigers, cheetahs, wolves, boars, and other animals. The Maishals had to defend their pets against attacks by wild animals. So Maishals were young, well-built men. The Maishals would eat flattened rice with curd in the morning before grazing buffalo in the nearby pastures. They address the buffaloes with affection. While grazing the herd, the Maishals would practice Bhawaiya songs whenever they got the opportunity. In other words, they are young, strong, Maishals with many qualities that may easily make him a hero to a young lady, whether she is his life partner or not.

The drive for sexual attraction intersects with deeper instincts and symbolic meaning. Evolutionary psychology often provides insights into how physically strong, well-built men are sexually desirable to women. Freud posited a similar idea in his 1920 book "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," with concepts such as Eros and Thanatos. Freud concluded that all instincts fall into one of the significant classes: life drives and death drives- later dubbed Eros and Thanatos by other psychologists. Sometimes referred to as sexual instincts, the life drive deals with basic survival, pleasure, and reproduction. Apart from sexual procreation, these drives also include instincts such as thirst, hunger, and pain. This energy is created by the life drive known as libido. This life drive, or Eros, was opposed by a self-destructive death instinct, later known as Thanatos. So, the strength in a mate could symbolize both protecting (Eros) and controlled aggression (Thanatos). In primitive days, a physically strong man may have fulfilled deep-seated instincts for security, fertility, and survival.



A Maishal would thus spend the majority of the year away from his house, looking after the buffaloes and protecting them from various adversaries in exchange for a salary. He could spend only 2/3 months with his family. So, a young, strong, and built Maishal might have to leave his newly married wife immediately after the wedding and set out for the Bathan (Job). The young wife, therefore, expresses her pangs in Bhawaiya that she did not have the opportunity to become a mother because of her husband's forced absence.

*Batan batan karen Maishal O!*  
*Aji kat dine bauriben o mor cyangra Maishal re*  
*Bhaiser (maisher) pithit cariya re Maishal, cheren kasiar phul*  
*Asharo savan mase nadi hulasthul re.*  
*Dudh khoailen syare re doi khoailen bhare*  
*Tui Maishal Chariya geile gabur bayser ari re.*  
*Aji kat dine bauriben mor Maishal bandhu re.*

Translation:

O my young buffalo-keeper! When will you come back?  
 You tear away the reed flowers while riding the buffalo,  
 Moreover, the same applies to river spates in the months of Ashar and Sravana.  
 You fed us milk by seers and curd by yokes; if you now desert me,  
 I will consider myself a widow at a young age.

The departure of the beloved causes a profound identity crisis that is like bereavement—a "death" of love, relationship, and shared identity. The descriptions of torn "reed flowers" and the river's flow during the monsoon season (Ashar and Savana) convey heightened natural and sensual fertility. The monsoon season is a time of emotional turmoil and sexual arousal in culture. Using seasonal and physical analogies, the swollen rivers and delicate blooms represent both sexual excitement and emotional overflow, suggesting desire entwined with longing. This folk song represents the voice of women, who are frequently marginalized in patriarchal systems. While women are nonetheless bound to place and emotional labour, male vocational figures such as buffalo keepers possess mobility and agency. She expresses desire and grief lyrically in her lament.

We have long addressed Rajbanshi folk songs about husband-wife love and the grief of unmarried women. However, a significant portion of Bhawaiya has been filled by illegal love, or extramarital love. The Maishals are essential to Bhawaiya's extramarital love. The Maishal maintains his bathan (cow/buffalo pasture) primarily on the riverbed near the village. The village's young women would come to the river's bathing area to bathe and get water. The strong-built young Maishal, an adept on dotora playing (a plucked, two-stringed folk musical instrument) and Bhawaiya melodies, may have captivated such ladies' hearts. The Maishal had also noticed people staring at him with astonishment. The result is love between two people. Maishal's love, however, is fleeting, as he must return to his giri with the buffalo herders as soon as the rain falls, leaving his sweetheart in sadness. Their love will not be fulfilled as they desire.

The song below the introduction describes the situation in which the young girl is cleaning her body and breasts in chest-high water, and a strange Maishal is playing the dotora's string at that moment.

Introducer:

*Hay re, bukka panit namiya kainya bukka manjan kare  
 Kon Thakkar baideisa Maishal dotora thokar mare.*

The feelings and desires of two youths are transformed into a Bhawaiya song in the form of a conversation between them.

Maishal: *Jal bharo Sundari kainya kacharat nage dheu  
 Ekelay aisachen ghate songe nai ki keu kainya hey.*

O beautiful girl! You are filling your pitcher with water,  
 Moreover, the waves strike the banks of the river.  
 Have you come to the bathing ghat all alone?  
 And nobody with you?

Kainya: *Ekelay pathaiche bidhi ekelay ghare thaki  
 E bhara jaivaner bhar akelay Dhari raki Maishal O.*

God has sent to this world all alone,  
 Moreover, I live all alone in my house.  
 Moreover, I put up with my youthfulness all alone.

Maishal: *Keman tomar bap mao kainya keman tomar hiya,  
 Ekelay aisachen ghate bukke pashan diya kainya hey.*

How are your parents, and how is your heart?  
 You have come alone to the ghat,  
 With rock stone on your heart (cruel heart)

Kainya: *Bhale amar bap-mao Maishal, bhale amar hiya,  
 Ekelay aisachi ghate bukke sirphal niya, Maishal O.*

Quite well are my parents, and pretty is my heart,  
 I have come to the ghat alone with marmalade fruits on my bosom.

Maishal: *Bapo-mao Chariya kainya jangale bane ghuri  
 Ai sirphaler naigya paile chari maishal giri, kainya hey.*

Leaving the parents, O girl! You roam in the jungles and bushes.  
 I can leave the job of Maishal if I get access to those marmalade fruits.

Kainya: *Katar gachat sirphal maishal tate bhyangruler hari,  
 Keman kari ai na sirphal khaiben tomra pari.*

The marmelos fruits are on the horent tree with the horents nest there now,  
 How can you reach those fruits to snatch them?

Maishal: *Nal khagra kata barit aser byapar kari,  
 Tomra jadi sahay thaken sirphal khamo pari.*

My job is to deal with juicy things in the midst of reeds and thorny bushes,  
I can reach and snatch the fruits if you accord me consent.

In the above-mentioned song, the Maishal addresses a beautiful girl at a bathing ghat (river ghat), observing that she is alone and filling her pitcher with water; he asks if she has come alone and why nobody is with her. The girl says that she lives all alone and deals with her youthfulness in solitude. He again asks about her parents and her heart; she replies that her heart is not unkind; rather, it is like two grown-up breasts, like two juicy marmalade fruits. He responds, leaving her parents, "Why is she roaming in the jungles and bushes?" Seeing her, he could give up his work if he could reach her marmalade fruits. But she replied that her fruit is on a "horny tree" with hornets' nests, and it is hard to reach. The Maishal now shows his bravery, as his business is to deal with juicy things during the jungles of reeds, and as such, he can have and eat those fruits if the girl helps with her consent.

This folk song's lyrics represent forbiddenness, desire, and the relationship between idealization, risk, and consent. Metaphors such as fruit, waves, and flowing water are used to illustrate the girl's and Maishal's longing. Water frequently stands for sexuality, purification, and unconscious emotions. Bathing by the river may allude to vulnerability, purity, and desire. The speaker is secluded and alone, which heightens the anxiety as he is far from his home. Additionally, the female is by herself, highlighting parallelism. The speaker perceives the subject (a beautiful girl) as a focus of desire when he sees her alone and half-naked by the river, but he also casts her purity and solitude onto the idealized female. The subject is also alone and full of youthfulness; seeing the young muscular Maishal, she seduces him with the mention of her marmalade fruits, which symbolize the representation of her sexual desire (breast)

The presence of danger (thorny bushes, hornets) suggests that approaching desire is risky. This aligns with notions of chastity/ virtue/ purity- the girl is protected by natural barriers. The speaker must prove his worth (consent, bravery) to access the fruit. There is also an implicit moral dimension: perhaps social prohibition. The speaker experiences desire; he wants the fruit (sexual pleasure or union), but is blocked by physical and emotional obstacles. The girl, though alone and full of youth and carrying fruit of blossom, seems cautious or distant: the rock, stone, thorns, and hornets suggest her refusal to the speaker's approach. There is desire and repression in the song; despite longing for sexual pleasure, there is a tension between sexuality and social and moral norms. Desire must be suppressed or contained; the "stone heart" and "thorny bushes" may symbolize the internalized repression. The longing and frustration suggest unfulfilled desire. The speaker's (Maishal) willingness to leave his job shows the weight of desire. It may be possible that the Maishal is married but far away from his wife and home, and he sees the beautiful and lonely girl he desired for sexual gratification. Similarly, the girl is not passive; but she comes alone, speaks, and has a voice for her own desire. She is probably married or away from her husband and full of desire, or she might be unmarried and seeking the pleasure of youthfulness. The poem does not just depict male desire dominating, but suggests female agency and female sexuality

strongly. Consent is explicitly present; the speaker acknowledges that her consent is required for him to overcome obstacles to sexual union.

Putting it together, the song seems to dramatize a psychic conflict: the speaker's longing desire (unattained and erotic) and the other, who is both the object of desire and the subject of her own agency and desire, which must be suppressed by the superego and the internal censor, threatening pain if overstepped. The marmelos fruit suggests their intense sexual desire for each other. The expression of desire is simple. There is no hypocrisy in the language of proposing.

There are quite a few very popular 'Maishal' songs, based on extra-marital relations between the Maishal and his ladylove.

*Amar bari jan o mor praner Maishal re, Maishal baiste diba mora*  
*Bukkote helani diya Maishal re, Maishal bajaiben dohora*  
*Amar bari jan o mor praner Maishal re, Maishla baiste diba pira*  
*Jalpan karite diba Maishal re, Maishal Sali dhaner cira*  
*Sali dhaner cira re Maishal, Banni dhaner khoi*  
*Gharat ache campa kala Maishal re, Maishal gamcha bandha doi.*

O Maishal! Please come to my house.  
 I will offer you a cane stool.  
 Sitting on it, you can play your dotora,  
 Leaning your body on my bosom.  
 Do come to my house.  
 I will offer you a small plank to sit  
 And tiffin of flattened rice from 'Sali' paddy.  
 The tiffin will be of flattened rice from 'Sali' paddy,  
 Sweetened rice from 'Banni' paddy,  
 Banana called 'campa' and thick condensed curd.

The speaker, who has met the Maishal quite often on her way to the bathing ghat of the river, while going for bath and water, and has been attracted by the young, beautiful Maishal playing dotora and melodious songs. So, the speaker is inviting "Maishal" to their house, promising physical comfort (a seat, leaning on the bosom), musical intimacy (playing dotora), and offering food, delicious rice, sweetened rice, banana, curd, etc. The invitation suggests not just hospitality, but something more intimate, sexual, and eroticized. Desire often works via fantasy: imagining an ideal scenario of union, pleasure, and uninterrupted attention. The 'bosom' is strongly associated with erotic longing. The speaker invites the Maishal to sit very close to her while playing dotora and leaning against her breasts. In psychoanalytic reading, food is often symbolic, as are feeding, nourishment, and oral satisfaction. Flattened rice, sweetened rice, banana, and curd can be analogous to oral erotism, craving, and indulgence. Repressed desire is often expressed indirectly, through metaphor and symbolic imagery. And through symbols and metaphors, the song suggests erotic proximity and longing. The song does not suggest whether the speaker and the Maishal are married or unmarried, but this folk song is considered an example of extramarital sexual love.

The speaker may be married but dissatisfied with her marriage, be far from her husband, and, in that scenario, the melodious voice of Dotorah and his muscular physical appearance might have attracted her and stimulated her repressed desire for sensual love.

The story of extramarital love can also be seen in songs about the elephant driver. The elephant driver takes the elephant to graze on the riverbank and to bathe in the river. While grazing the elephant, he sings Bhawaiya with the dotora on his hands, or he plays the flute. The girl with the bloom of youth sees him every day, gradually becomes attracted to him, and falls in love. She wants in life a companion, such as a healthy young man with a melodious voice and the sound of a doctor. Her feelings are expressed in the song-

*Gangadharer pare pare re, O mor Maute caray hati,  
 Ki maya nagailen Maut re, O tor galar raser kati.  
 Uca kari bandho chapor re, O mui aiste jaite dekhim,  
 Ki maya nagailen Maut re,  
 Dai Khoailen dudh khoailen re, Maut na khoailen mata,  
 Ebar hyate tutiya gelo re, aina aisa jaoar ghata.*

On the banks of the Gangadhar, my Mahout!  
 You are grazing the elephant.  
 What a spell you have cast on me  
 O Mahout, with the love beads on your neck!  
 What a spell! Do build your hut on a high place  
 So that I can see it when I go by.  
 What a spell! You gave me milk; you fed me on curd  
 But you never gave me the dregs of the liquid curd.  
 Your journeys along this road are now meaningless.

The speaker freely expresses desire and is mesmerized by the Mahout. The Mahout's powerful physique and melodic voice captivate the girl, making her want to see him more. In the song, the female character expresses erotic desire and actively longs for proximity ("build your hut on a high place so that I can see it when I go by"), as well as "spell" and "love beads." The Mahout withholds the "dregs" of curd but offers some food (milk, curd). As a result, there is ambivalent giving and receiving; there is partial, not complete, fulfillment. The milk or curd could represent bodily fluids and sexual intimacy, etc. Withholding dregs could be interpreted as a sign that the lover does not fully participate, possibly in terms of emotional depth or sexual consummation. The speaker requests complete closeness but only gets a portion of it. Frustration, bitterness, and possibly longing that becomes more agonizing due to the gap can result from this. The speaker may be seeking consistency because the Mahout is ephemeral, constantly on the go, and does not remain to establish or remain near, or at least not in a completely accessible manner.

So far, we have discussed the love and desire of a girl or woman with youth in bloom, whether married or unmarried. Bhawaiya also deals with the love affairs of a



young widow. Some young widows lost their husbands at a tender age. The young girl, married to an older person for various reasons, is easily fascinated by a muscular Garial, Maishal, Mahut, or any other non-disabled young man. The older adult dies within a few years, and the young girl becomes a widow with social restrictions and is unfilled with desire and love. In Bhawaiya, there are lots of songs conveying grief, sorrows, and depression of young widows. Sometimes the young girl has been married to an older man who has been in a position to satisfy her physically, leading to a strained relationship between the two. The unfulfilled desire and mental torture have made her life intolerable. The only silver lining in such an oasis is the presence of the younger brother-in-law, almost the same age as the young girl.

*Oki bhabere dyaora thuiya aisek mok bapore bhaiyar dyaise.*

*Bapo bhaiyar dyase jabo, barani bhukiya khabo.*

*Oki bhabere.....ghare*

*Bapo bhai mor duracar byaceya khaice mok durantar re,*

*Byaceya khaice mok madasiyar ghare re.*

*Madasiya mad re khay, pani dite mor rati pohay*

*Naler dange saril hail mor kala re.*

With what thoughts have you come, brother-in-law,

Sent by my father and brother?

I will go and eat rice with ghee.

With what thoughts have you come....

At home, my father and brother are ruthless,

They have sent me far away,

They have sent me to a distant land, to a drunkard's home.

The drunkard drinks wine and spends the night asking for water,

My body has become dark like the banks of the Nala River

### Conclusion:

Desire refers to the longing, interest, or motivation for sexual and erotic involvement, which can be emotional, relational, or physical. Whereas "sexuality" refers to the erotic, emotional, relational, and identity aspects of being sexual. Rather than being merely "biological drives," women's desire and sexuality have historically been constrained, limited, or influenced by gendered societal norms. Our sexual inclinations were built into our systems 315,000 years ago. Our instincts served as the foundation for sexual alterations, from the basic want to procreate to the sporadic urge to masturbate, which underwent significant transformations as culture and tradition evolved. Human sexual behaviour was altered more quickly by culture than by our instincts. Women's desire becomes something to be *fixed*, *diagnosed*, or *treated*, rather than something to be understood in its social, relational, and cultural context. As rules and standards about female sexuality become increasingly restrictive, sex gets intertwined with ideas of property.

Moral and social norms govern women's bodies and sexualities in many traditional societies. However, among native tribes, the situation is different. One of

the earliest traditions of storytelling and performance is found in tribal folk songs. Rather than being the work of a single author, they are shaped by collective memory and are oral, communal, and flexible. Throughout history, folk songs have offered a different platform for women's voices to be heard in patriarchal settings. Women can incorporate subversive connotations into their lyrics and actions, as they are frequently exempt from censorship because they are seen as "unstructured" and part of daily life. Folk songs frequently originate from tribal and community oral traditions, when people—particularly women—could express their feelings, experiences, and desires without being constrained by formal or patriarchal systems of authority.

In this sense, the Koch-Rajbanshi tribe and Rajbanshi community are renowned for their folk songs, such as Bhawaiya songs, ritualistic songs, and cult songs, which openly express desire and freely discuss female sexuality. Rajbanshi folk songs and sexuality have been the subject of research articles and theses by a few academics. The deity Hudum Deo is worshipped as a rain-God, or the one who brings rain, in the folk traditions of the Koch-Rajbongshi community, which is primarily found in western Assam, such as Dhubri and Goalpara. Apart from a drummer wearing a blindfold, men are typically not allowed in the main ceremonial area. The ceremony is female-centered, meaning that only women conduct it. Women openly disclose their sexual desire in the highly erotic songs of this rite.

The above-mentioned songs discuss a variety of social structures, taboos, and customs that are common in Rajbanshi society. They also discuss love, desire, suppressed sexual urges, spouse or extramarital love, widow love, etc. Even though the Bhawaiya songs have a male voice, they clearly convey the unmet sexual desires of women. In patriarchal societies, female sexual desire is frequently suppressed, prohibited, and deemed morally or socially "dangerous," much like Freud compared female sexuality to a "dark continent." In some way, Freud's use of the term "dark continent" turns female sexuality into an unexplored area, a mysterious, unknown region. In this situation, the folk songs can be interpreted as a means of partially reversing repression and bringing the desire back in encoded, symbolic forms. The female sexual urge is represented in folk songs symbolically or metaphorically since these songs serve as a sort of social unconscious, expressing things that cannot be openly acknowledged or expressed in words. Additionally, Bhawaiya songs express female sexual desires that transcend socially acceptable boundaries, such as widowed desire, "illicit" love, youthful longing, and extramarital desire. These songs express the dissatisfaction of women's sexual desires in marriage due to absentee, uninterested, or negligent husbands. The lyrics use desire to describe the emotional and sexual frustration this causes. Songs give women a voice by expressing their emotions, disappointments, and desires, even though many of them are created "about" women and are frequently composed by male poets. This helps the folk culture develop a female sexual subjectivity.

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