

Caste and Music: Transformation in Garhwali music

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Drumming, folk songs and commercial recordings are an integral part of the Uttarakhand's musical repertoire. For decades now, musicians from Garhwal have traveled to recording studios in Delhi and Dehradun to record their own compositions or local village songs. This expansion of regional music was caused by rapid urbanization, accessibility to media technologies and migration. Production of music in Uttarakhand is the result of dynamics between caste, gender and access to technology. Therefore, popular Uttarakhandi music needs to be understood not only as commercial, but also driven by a shared cultural need on part of the people who produce and consume it. New technologies can decentralize and democratize production and consumption of songs, thereby helping in production of a more localized product. This paper will attempt to summarize the transformation of particular genres of Garhwali music, which were earlier sung by particular sections of the population, but are now marketed as mass commodities by the local recording industry. According to Peter Manuel, before the recording industry, a singer could not be separated from his performance. Recording technology has led to such alienation where a song can be heard irrespective of time and location. Thus transformed as a commodity, the song is subject to new dimensions of market pressures and incentives (Manuel, 2001). A live performance strengthened the idea of community in a village or town, which is now undermined by new technologies, leading to impersonal oral culture replacing traditional oral culture (Manuel, 2001). There is a caste affiliation between vocational and non-vocational musicians in the region and in such a scenario, caste status, identity and social status of local musicians becomes important. At one point while hereditary caste musicians held a subordinate position (yet they played a central role in social life), have now been displaced by high-caste performers of the recording industry. The same is true of female singers as well.

The majority of my fieldwork was undertaken in the month of July, 2012 and involved interviewing the residents of New Tehri, musicians, producers, distributors and observation of events where music was a feature. As part of my research I was able to rely on certain non-state organizations and members of the community in the region. The research was largely conducted through interviews and interaction with the larger community, facilitators, musicians, journalists and academics in the field. As a local facilitator, I was able to rely on Hevalvani (or voice of Heval, a name derived from the valley where the initiative is located), the only community radio running in the area. Another source of excellent material was Mr. Mahipal Singh Negi, a former journalist who was involved with the anti-dam movement and has written extensively on it and activists from a local NGO - Mahila Samakhya, New Tehri. Although most of my field work was confined to Chamba and New Tehri, I was able to visit a remote village Gyoli, near Pokhal in Tehri district to view a religious ceremony in honour of the village diety.

The musicians I spoke to for the purpose of this study were largely local. Over the last few months, due to requests by listeners, Hevalvani has been inviting local folk and popular singers to their studio. It was with their help that I was able to identify singers I could interview and obtain recordings of songs that were important for my research. Also, the numerous CD distributors I spoke to provided me with contact details of singers and Disk Jockeys I could interview. As caste musicians such Aujhis are primarily located in villages, I attended religious ceremonies and weddings in New Tehri and Gyoli for easy access to them. The respondents also include consumers of the music who are local residents. I have tried to bring in perspectives of women, but largely my informants were men. This wasn't deliberate, but largely happened due to the reluctance of women to talk around family members. In such scenarios, they either asked their husbands or children to talk on their behalf, often citing their lack of 'clarity'. I found that women were much more inclined to talk freely when they were a) alone in the house b) outside the home (in a market, temple or park) c) When they were elderly. On such occasions female respondents were eager to put their point across and in cases where they were accompanied by female companions, asked them to add in as well.

Pahari caste structure is divided into two sections comprising of high caste groups (Brahmin and Rajput) and low-caste artisan groups (Shilpkar). Among the Shilpkars, there are distinct caste groups which are clearly defined. In this study, I will only be looking at two groups of hereditary caste musicians -Aujhis and Baddis, who are Shilpkars and were considered to be untouchables. Aujhi musicians by caste specialize in playing instruments, the most important among these being dhol-damaun. Baddis on the other hand were called to sing, dance and perform acrobatic displays for ritual and entertainment purposes. Their role has diminished to such an extent that very few among them are still practicing musicians (Alter, 2008).

Singing and dancing are not limited to particular castes, it is socially acceptable and doesn't pollute ones caste status. But in the past, it was widely considered to be an occupation for the untouchables. Thus we can say that there are two forms of professional musicians in Uttarakhand. The first category comprises of those that take up music because their caste and vocation is largely defined by it. Aujhis fall in this category. The second category comprises of those that have taken up music even though their castes are not defined by it. Between these two groups, we can make a distinction by their ceremonial importance. In the case of Aujhis, manifestation of the deity can happen only if an Aujhi is playing the dhol and damaun. Even if the same instruments are played by a Brahmin, the ritual will remain incomplete.

There is minor variation in language and customs across Garhwal. There is an all-encompassing Garhwali identity alongwith a regional Uttarakhandi identity, these minor variations are equally important but are in the process of getting homogenized (Stefan-Fiol, 2008). There are regional variations in the language and can indicate the speaker's "residence".

Older forms of the language can be observed in certain folk songs such as pawaras, mangal and jag. Pawaras for example are epics about heroes which are orally transmitted. While they cannot be historically verified, they are important to get a sense of the past which was dominated by royal feuds (Alter, 2008).

The singers of such epic tales form the lowest rung of caste hierarchies. In the past, these musicians sang about the rulers, thus playing an important role in preserving the cultural and historical heritage. According to some of the people I interviewed, when centuries old skeletons were found in the Rookkund lake, it was the contents of a Pawara explain which gave investigators an idea of what could have lead to the death of over 500 people centuries back.

Caste Musicians

Aujhis:

According to Andrew Alter, 'Dhol sagar', the knowledge of Aujhis is so large that it refers to an 'ocean of knowledge on drumming'. Aujhi's have a particular ritual and spiritual importance as their drumming is used to communicate with the divine. Just like in Sufism, qawwali is the means of communicating with the spiritual realm through music, similarly dhol sagar is not concerned with dancing purely for entertainment, but for unity with the divine. Possession of an individual by a deity is considered to be auspicious. A mortal who has done great deeds can also become a deity and thus the boundaries between mortals and gods are blurred. Their stories are re-enacted and spirits of gods come to possess the bodies of people through the nature of music.

Devtas come to possess people only when Aujhis play their music. So while the musician belongs to a very low caste, through their powerful drumming, they have the ability to summon deities (Alter, 2008). Festivals and celebrations are a crucial source of income for caste musicians as their music is an important part of ritual. It is assumed that this ritual importance would provide them with an upper hand during monetary negotiations. This is not so. In fact status of such musician caste groups is very low within the Garhwali society. With issues of caste and purity still being integral, many such musicians continue to be excluded from society. This creates an ambiguous position for them within the social structures because even though their music is integral for the completion of any ritual, they have very limited social and economic power.

In the past, with the patronage of the local village upper caste families and rulers, musicians had much more respect and economic security. With the collapse of local structures, and migration of families from the village, musicians have to solicit work. With the influx of the 'DJ culture', mass migration from villages and their paradoxical position in the social hierarchy, they have to resort to manual labour for survival. They have limited negotiation power as any offer to play at a wedding or puja is accepted, even if it means being paid a paltry sum as compensation. The Aujhi's I spoke to told me that as compensation ranged from 500-700 rupees, they had to take up alternative occupations such as daily wage labour to make ends meet.

Aujhi's are probably the biggest musician caste group in Garhwal for whom music is a vocation. They can mostly be found in villages and are absent from towns in Uttarakhand. Each village will have its own family of Aujhi musicians. All members of this caste share the same last name, which is Das and they are often referred to as "Das-log". They are known to worship their instrument as sacred and thus many define the term Das as servitude to their instruments and craft.

Aujhis specialize in playing the Dhol-Damaun, which is at times played along with Nagara or Mashak (bagpipes). They derive their income and subsistence from musical specialization. The depraved social status and economic conditions of the Aujhi musicians was revealed to me in my interviews with members of that community. In the weddings that I attended in New Tehri, Aujhi's had been called from the ancestral village of the family, but mostly retained as an obligation. As Aujhis are mostly found in villages, people in towns at times prefer not to go through the trouble of calling them specially.

While earlier Aujhis were an integral part of the entertainment and festivities at a wedding, over the past few years their role has diminished considerably. If and when they are called, it is largely for cultural and obligatory purposes. They are invited to play as a wedding or auspicious occasion is deemed to be incomplete without the drumming of the Aujhi, yet during the occasion itself they are largely sidelined. Earlier when the village economy was stable and there was patronage from upper castes residing in the village, Aujhis were called for various ceremonies and were an integral part of it. This way they had a steady flow of income. Whether in the form of cash or grains, their needs were taken care of.

Traditionally Aujhis have a different song and drumming pattern for each ritual of the wedding. Songs are primarily about asking the "Kul devta" (house deity) of the family and ancestors to bestow blessings on the auspicious occasion or to celebrate the occasion with fanfare. Their importance has diminished over the past couple of years with the influx of what locals describe as "DJ and Band culture". There are now wedding bands accompanying the Aujhis when the baraat leaves. In the two baraats that I witnessed, neither the Aujhis or brass band made the effort of coordinating their performance with each other. These different groups of musicians chose to play their own style of music for

the baraat simultaneously. An interesting part of the evening is when both started 'dueling' with each other through rapid drum beats. The brass band comprises of trumpets, trombones, drums etc. which very easily managed to overpower the music coming from the Aujhi's dhol. As the baraat started making its way forward, the baraatis had divided into two groups – people that were dancing to bollywood songs being played by the band and those dancing to the beat of the drums.

Because of deeply entrenched caste hierarchies and low social position of the Aujhis, the art is dying out. Out of the six Aujhi musicians I had spoken to, one had already left the profession and the other five had chosen not to pass along the craft to their children. For their performance they were paid between Rs. 500-700, which also included traveling costs. Musicians admitted that most people were reluctant to pay that much for their services, in spite of knowing that for certain occasions such as weddings, it meant giving their services for 2-3 days. Many attributed this to their low social status, as one musician said, "Look at how much these same people are willing to pay big money for a band and DJ. If we were high caste musicians or were playing newer, bollywood songs, we wouldn't be paid so less". This same Aujhi had over the past few months learnt how to play bollywood songs, as he demonstrated by playing Chikni Chameli. He was yet to play this at a wedding, but had hoped by adapting his skills to what people were looking for, he could get more work and better pay. Though he admitted he was reluctant to play such songs in weddings as it was not part of centuries old Aujhi repertoire, but he wanted to show that he had the skills to do so.

As the money earned by playing music is not enough for sustenance, many have resorted to manual labour under NREGA or some secondary occupation to make ends meet. In the case of Dev Das, a former Aujhi performer who now ran his own tailoring shop in New Tehri, reservations for low caste communities meant that his children could get government jobs. He admitted that he was reluctant to tell people about his past, though

most could guess once they knew his surname. “We are treated like ‘das’. I decided to educate my children as they found this work to be shameful”.

Baddis:

Similarly, the number of Baddi singers has gone down considerably over the years and now only a handful of Baddi musicians still remain in Garhwal. They specialize as musical entertainers, but now very few remain as practicing musicians. At one point Baddi musicians would travel from one place to another and women played a significant role as singers and dancers. There remained a stigma between entertainment and prostitution and was perhaps one of the reasons behind their disappearance. Nevertheless, Baddis were called to sing, dance and perform acrobatic displays for ritual functions (Alter, 2008).

It is important to note that though there are very few Baddi musicians left and that many Aujhi's are reluctant to pass on their skills to their children, some protection in the form of 'artistic patronage' has emerged for them by recognition of their music as art and influx of tourism. Though there is next to no state support, some are being appreciated for their talent by being invited to perform at cultural events. With a large migrant population based out of Uttarakhand, slowly some are also getting offers to play in cities like Delhi and Mumbai for events organized by Uttarakhand Samitis. Tourism has also meant that hotels require them to perform at various 'cultural nights' which are held for tourists who want to experience folk culture of the state and it is emerging as an important source of income and subsistence for certain musicians.

Auji's use music to perform their castes duties within the society. In contrast, non-caste musicians come to music by choice as singing and dancing is not the exclusive domain of any particular caste or group.

There is a large repertoire of folk songs and dances which are performed by upper castes and lower castes alike. Such singers though are not specialists and may perform for entertainment purposes. The present trend of commodification of music through the recording industry has had an impact on the musical practice. Many upper caste local singers have now started to seek a vocation as recording artists in this commercial arena. In this case, one of the important factors being redefined are the concepts related to artistry and vocation. For an Aujhi his music is a vocation. Playing instruments is part of their inherited role in society. It is how they derive their subsistence and its artistic value is secondary in nature. But by becoming recording artists (like in the case of Uttam Das, an Aujhi who has garnered fame through the recording industry) they are able to raise their craft to an artistic endeavour by performing in the same arena as other well-to-do upper caste artists (Fiol-Patrick, 2008).

Uttam Das has dealt with the vocational and artistic aspects in his own way. He is the only known musician in the state who can play the dhol and damaun at the same time, a task carried out by two musicians. Because of this uniqueness of his act, he has recorded CD's and in turn has been invited abroad for performances. Along the way he also opened up a music school in his village to impart the knowledge of Dhol Sagar and in August 2012 held an open workshop for people who wanted to learn this art which has been largely restricted to a particular caste. His main source of income is not derived from the sale of his CD's, but through the fame generated by the easy accessibility of his music. As more people got to know of him, he started receiving offers to play at functions in India and abroad.

Another story which was brought to my attention was of Makani Devi and Sandali Devi from Narender Nagar in Tehri District. Both these women belonged to Shilpkar families and upon death of their husbands took up dhol-damaun to make ends meet. They were discovered in 2010 by a women's organization that was holding a stage show of folk and traditional songs sung primarily by women. These two women have emerged as Uttarakhand's only female duo that perform an art largely restricted to men from their communities.

It is important to bring up these two stories as they show how traditional caste and gender structures are being challenged. For certain low-caste musicians, their art offers them a way of going beyond vague their normal social status in society. By releasing a CD or performing on stage, these musicians aspire to break out of their low-caste status by improving their status through music in the very society which placed them in the bottom of the social hierarchy. These are instances where musicians may reverse relationships of power. Brahmins maintain a superior hierarchical position, but when rituals require music to communicate with gods, caste musicians reinforce their stake to society.

Non-caste musicians:

These are singers who receive payment for musical performances and don't have connection to any endogamous musician caste, but come to music by choice. To understand non-caste music specialists, we need to understand the regional music industry. In the 80's as regional music industry grew, accessibility of media technologies and influx of rural migrants in cities helped in emergence of new genres. They evolved a new type of music without abandoning their original regional styles. A typical album of Uttarakhandi geet comprises of songs which are influenced by folk, devotional and regional elements.

This is marketed as regional folk music and the popularity of this combination suggests that for recording companies, this is a formula that works, as a local producer said to me:

“This makes a CD multi-dimensional. There are different songs for different moods. So one day you can listen to a jagar, the next you can listen to a love song. You get value for money. People are more likely to buy such CD’s rather than compositions that purely focus either on devotional songs or ‘masti’ music”.

Also, as musicians primarily derive their incomes from stage shows, a CD displaying their different musical abilities helps them get more contracts for live performances. It becomes a medium through which organizers get to know that a particular musician will not only be able to sing songs that are traditionally rich, but also popular songs that people could dance to. Therefore, the structure of songs in a stage show where folk, ‘masti music’, devotional etc have to be a part of one performance has come to be incorporated in the composition of a CD as well.. Different mood settings and preferences have to be accommodated within a limited price of one CD.

Jyoti Dhobal, a local singer and producer from New Tehri who also ran a garments shop as his primary occupation admitted that he had self financed and distributed a CD of his compositions for fame and prestige rather than just money. “I always loved singing and wanted to be famous. I know it’s very difficult to ‘make it big’ in this business, that’s why I never closed my shop. But I always wanted to be known for my singing, so I decided to invest my money in the music businesses”. Therefore there are two types of recording artists – those that get paid by recording companies for their music, and those that self-finance their own CD’s.

Studying the text of songs helps us to understand the way in which ‘tradition’ is an integral aspect of a lot of these songs. Many of the sentiments and themes are drawn from the rural life: village imagery, boy pining after his village love, natural beauty of the hills etc. To heighten the village imagery, many music producers add a sample of flowing water or chirping birds. In this way, by emphasizing on themes which are familiar to the consumer, the songs take on a melodramatic tone. We have to understand the extent to which music is said to have meaning. According to Peter Manuel in “Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India”, while lyrics are abstract in nature, they also suggest a preferred reading which is generally located within commonly agreed on meanings of the group from which it originates. Therefore, certain Garhwali songs establish a particular definition of romanticized femininity: the naïve, innocent village belle with a certain dreamlike quality and elusiveness.

The singers themselves are consumers of regional music as well. They make an assessment of regional music in specific local contexts and change their musical focus accordingly. Either by bypassing recording industry and releasing their songs directly online, or by changing the focus of their music to a more political one, or by singing traditional folk songs for the more ‘cultured’ audience, musicians are constantly reassessing their strategies as they evaluate the impact of other musicians.

Musical accompaniments are an amalgam of traditional (dhol-damau, masak-baja, ransingha) and modern (Violin, drums, flute, tabla, guitar and keyboard) musical instruments. While modern instruments take the lead in a composition, by addition of folk instruments, many songs categorize themselves as ‘folk’ or ‘traditional’ even though they might not be so.

Recorded devotional music showcases a more polished, professional version of the song, with an orchestra and other accompaniments, compared to the actual live rendition by a

caste musician. Before recorded music, a musician was deeply embedded in his musical performance. Recorded music takes on a life of its own where consumers can listen to a fixed rendition of a song irrespective of time or place. This brought about fundamental changes in traditional patterns of musical production and consumption. For some, the spread of media technologies has contributed to the decline of the folk musician.

Devotional Songs

Producers realize that successful devotional CD's enjoy a longer 'shelf life' compared to other popular releases. These recordings become an asset for a long time as the devotees will always look for these devotional songs. Demand for popular songs dwindles within a few months of its release. According to Peter Manuel, mainstream Hindi bhajans can be regarded as a sort of commercial 'great tradition', in the sense that it enjoys a pan-regional audience. Decentralization of the music industry meant that commercial versions of 'lesser traditions' have been marketed by the small, grass-roots oriented producers. Tapes of devotional music may be played in the background purely for aesthetic value or devotees might use an appropriate CD to accompany a domestic or temple puja.

Recordings often include chimes or group singing in order to recreate the temple atmosphere. Much of Garhwali devotional songs can be classified according to the particular deity to whom it is addressed. Many devotional songs centre on specific deities. In many cases, the producers or singers themselves might be devotees of a particular deity. Local singers Ravi and Padam Gosain produced a CD on the pilgrimage honouring Lord Maniknath as they themselves were ardent followers of his. Out of countless CD's they have produced, distributed and sang in, the one on Lord Maniknath did very well commercially, a fact they attribute to 'blessings from the god'.

With devotional music, it is not clear whether usage of CD's is actually replacing or merely supplementing the live performance. Certain devotional genres are flourishing in live performances because of their popularity in CD's. The practice of hiring famous singers to perform at temples or at a jagar leads to a situation where organizations or temples compete with each other for holding the most frequent or biggest extravaganza. This current popularity shows that perhaps recorded and live performances have are mutually reinforcing each other rather than just competing (Manuel, 2001).

Regional Recording industry in Garhwal

The business of production, consumption and distribution.

Individuals have managed to blend both folk and individual material to come up with a standardized musical commodity. This distribution of the commodity depends upon the migrant population and their consumption of the music. While around 15 years back cassettes were the medium of choice, this eventually got replaced by CD's, and now in the era of online piracy, many musicians feel the need to release their music directly online. Businesses associated with production and distribution have suffered the most due to online piracy. As singers go on to sing in stage shows due to an increase in their popularity, their economic interests are barely affected.

Because of the development in media technologies, sales of cassettes and CD's are very low as most people prefer to download the music. In such a scenario, local singers have realized that instead of waiting for an audio company to release the CD or autonomously getting it released by investing somewhere between 1.5-2 lakhs, it makes economic sense to release a song online and wait for the public to catch up. As more people get to know these singers, it is expected that offers for stage shows would also come in.

The producers from big recording labels are largely non-Uttarakhandis based in plains. There are two prominent Garhwali music production companies and while one is based out of Delhi, the other is based out of Dehradun. There are two different routes emerging for singers take to get their CD's out in the market. The songs are recorded independently using their own capital. This recording is sent to big music producing companies in Delhi and Dehradun as sample. If the companies like what they hear, they invest their own money for the production and distribution. Because of low sales, such companies prefer to work with already established singers to protect their profits. In such a situation, two singers that I met had already released their own CD's by using their own capital.

Getting a decent recording done can cost anywhere between Rs. 3,000- 30,000. Hevalvani, the local community radio also leases out its studio for recording purposes for a sum of Rs. 3,000. Over the last couple of months they had already done voice-overs for self-financed local documentaries and recorded songs for some local musicians.

The consumer market is largely made up of migrant population in Delhi, locals and tourists. Many CD distributors admitted that garhwali music CD's were sold relatively well in Delhi compared to Uttarakhand itself. Alongwith greater disposable income, for the Delhi based migrant, buying a CD that represented their culture held more value than simply downloading the songs. For the migrants in cities, these CD's represent a part of their culture. But within Uttarakhand itself, demand had dramatically declined, with people preferring to download songs online. According to Stefan Patrick-Fiol, for consumers of regional popular music, these songs represent their ability to participate in the idea of modernity, but where the signs are regional and localized. Shops that earlier only sold cassettes and CD's now have to participate in a side business to sustain themselves. They were now also selling cellphone hardware or converted their shops into internet cafes. Out of 12 shops that I could identify in New Tehri, Chamba and Buaradi

that earlier sold only cassettes and CD's, all had to resume some secondary business due to sharp decline in demand because of online downloading.

Local singers:

Dhanraj, a 24 year old recording artist was originally from Pratap Nagar in Tehri. He came from a family that largely practiced agriculture and moved to new tehri to try his luck in singing. As a child he listened to songs by Ramesh Baliyal, Narendra Singh Negi and Chandra Singh Rahi on the family's tape recorder. He decided to try his hand in singing because there was no money in agriculture. "It doesn't rain on time anymore; earlier irrigation was not such a big problem, now there is such a severe shortage. You have to work very hard to get some results in farming. As a child I did a lot of labour on our family fields, but things got even tougher".

He recorded his first song in new tehri at Rama Studio by borrowing R.s 30,000 from people he knew. Producers in Delhi and Dehradun did not pick up his recording and ultimately a local New Tehri based singer/ producer Jyoti Dhobal decided to mass produce the CD under his label, J.P. Music. In his only released CD, 'Ujadi Mukhdi', most of the songs are on women, with subjects ranging from a boy's encounter with a fair skinned girl, to a migrant who misses his wife, to a boy pining after a girl who rejected him. He also included a song about a baddi folk singer who is telling his wife not to dance anymore because men might fall for her. The videos of these songs heavily rely on the traditional imagery of a green-vibrant village and the naïve village belle alongwith traditional Garhwali costumes.

For Dhanraj, his music reflected what he saw around him, textually and visually. “I have friends who went through these situations, so I decided to write a song about it. But I also know that they also like fast bollywood songs they can dance to, so I kept the music very ‘modern’. As there is no money to be made by people purchasing the CD’s, he derives his income from stage shows organized in villages and towns during melas or different occasions. With crowd participation ranging from a few hundreds to thousands, Dhanraj sings in around 2-3 stage shows in a month, making between 5,000-7,000 in each show. “We get between 20,000-25,000, but most of that goes into paying my accompanying musicians and other overhead costs. But this is certainly better than doing mazdoori or working in a hotel like my brother.”

He found that by ensuring two singing offers every month, he could sustain himself without having to take up a job which he found to be cumbersome. To reiterate his point, he cited a simple analogy. “Earlier in Uttarakhand we used to have small roads, you didn’t need cars for them. Now we have newer, bigger roads. You need a car or a bus to cover the same area, you can’t walk on those roads. I walked a lot as a kid, but now if I can find easier way, why shouldn’t I take it?”

While Dhanraj was vague on the subject of caste, he admitted to me that he came from a lower caste in his village Katoli, in Pratap Nagar. He talked about while earlier each caste had its own occupational role, now people in his village were looking for a way out to improve their economic position, thereby hoping to improve their social position as well. Improved social position is also the reason why he liked performing in Delhi hotels. “When we go for stage shows in Delhi, they give us more importance and respect. There are foreigners and garhwali migrants who show a keen interest in our songs”.

Dhanraj considered Gajender Rana to be one his influences because of how he popularized more 'modern' Garhwali music. "In the beginning when the trend of DJ's started in Uttarakhand, they used to primarily play Hindi, Punjabi or English songs. After Gajender Rana and others took out more fast paced songs with modern beats, younger people started listening to more and more garhwali music". For him Gajender Rana's songs were more open ended and easier to understand than compared to Narendra Singh Negi's.

"With Negi Ji's songs you have to think what he is trying to say. People are leaving villages, many don't understand the context behind certain terms which are very specific to village life".

After the popularity of Narendra Singh Negi and his political songs, I met at least 2 musicians who were planning on writing more politically inclined songs. This bears no relation to their own taste in music, but found it to be a new 'avenue' which they hadn't explored and which had become very lucrative in the past couple of years. Either they were still in the process of writing these songs, or had started to sing more folk and political songs in their stage shows. This meant that apart from offers to perform at weddings or melas, a more lucrative market comprising of the migrant population based in Delhi or abroad had also opened up for them, apart from the well-to-do resorts and hotels in the area which require a more 'culturally intensive' performance for the tourists.

In fact the only music school in the area had been funded by a popular resort with whom the artists had a tie-up concerning performances. This school is run by two upper caste Brahmin siblings, Ravi and Padam Gosain who themselves are local singers and producers.

Apart from being invested in production and distribution of CD's and VCD's, they opened up a music school where both children and adults are trained. But a big part of their income is derived by participating in pre-planned cultural stage shows which comprise of folk and cultural songs. As these songs are in Garhwali, a three-way translation process occurs.

There are two translators on stage. After each stanza the first one translates it into Hindi, and then the second person translates it into English if it is an international audience. Such a cultural extravaganza is a part of the marketability of any local resort or hotel. This has meant that the context behind the folk songs has now changed. Folk songs which were earlier restricted to women, particular castes, seasons or festivals, now come to occupy centerstage as an artistic performance.

Ravi and Padam Gosain received training in classical music during their 12 year long stay in Delhi. Their biggest concern is that younger singers like Dhanraj are not trained in the art of music and are responsible for churning out songs that are creating an image among people that Garhwali identity is something to be ashamed of, or as in their words, "they have cheapened our language and culture. That's why people don't want to admit that they listen to garhwali songs, eventhough they do." For Padam Gosain, Narendra Singh Negi and songs which are 'attached to the soil' were the biggest influence. But interestingly enough the earlier repertoire of their songs was very much 'populist' in nature. In my first interview with Ravi Gosain, he admitted that they had changed what sort of songs they wrote and performed after seeing the popularity of Narendra Singh Negi. "People at Hevalvani introduced us to some local NGO's. They organize cultural events and were looking for singers who could sing more traditional songs. With these new singers you cannot separate one singer from the next. We realized that singing our more traditional songs would distinguish us from the crowd".

This also meant that by singing more ‘cultural’ songs, they have done well compared to other singers who are largely limited to singing in village stage shows. “Our audience comprises of economically well-off tourists, domestic and foreign”. This meant better money and more offers to perform in stage shows.

Music and hegemony: gender and caste

More active role of certain forms of media can result in perpetuation of interests of certain group interests (Manuel, 2001). Similarly, influence of media technologies in regional music in Uttarakhand helped in entrenching power and influence of certain groups. Women play a marginalized role in the recording industry and there has been a usurpation of songs earlier sung exclusively by women or lower castes by male, upper caste musicians. The close ties of regional popular music to folk music provides raw material for songs, but we also see a transformation in the nature of performance itself. Many forms of music that are gender and caste specific in terms of performers have now come to be recorded by male, upper-caste singers. Women’s music is related to work, weddings, birth, seasons and other occasions. There have also been songs performed by women of lower castes for male audiences. As new technologies have led to a diversification of genres, one expects that music created by women might have its own niche in the market. This is not so. On the whole, female singers in the recording industry primarily sing duets or have solo songs in CD’s of male singers. Meena Rana, a prominent singer from the industry who by her own estimate has sung more than 11,000 songs for 2,000 albums or more in languages like Garhwali, Kumaoni, Jaunsari, Jaunpuri, Bhojpuri, Rajasthani, Kargali, Balti and in Hindi since 1993, came out with her first solo album, Chandra only in the year 2010.

Narendra Singh Negi sings songs that are largely folk. Over the past couple of years, he has started to sing songs that were earlier exclusively reserved either women or lower castes—such as Bajuband, Jagars, Mangal Geet, songs sung by Ghasiyaris (women who collect grass). According to Stefan Patrick-Fiol, what ends up being created and recorded is a standardized version of mangal geet and other folk songs. Jagariya are largely lower caste village ritual performers who largely lead possession ceremonies through their music. There are two types of jagars—one invoking blessings of a devi or a devta, the other communicating with the ghost of a dead person. While jagariyas are not caste musicians like Aujhis and Baddis, they are mostly Shipkars. Jagar music has now been transformed from a primarily ritual music, to being one of the biggest selling genre of CD's in Uttarakhand. There has been a transformation of jagar music with high caste musicians adapting a standardized jagar for their CD's. Two famous jagar musicians from different caste – Narender Singh Negi who is a rajput and from a traditionally non-music performing caste; and Pritam Bhartwan, a scheduled caste whose ancestors sang jagars as a profession show us how VCD's depicting jagar is an example of mass produced devotional videos and songs.

In my interviews with respondents across age and class groups, everyone cited Negi as one of the most influential singers. For many, his songs come to embody the culture, tradition and present day society in Uttarakhand. Considered to be a poet and singer par excellence, the lyrics of his songs talk about social conditions, politics, aspirations and disappointments of Uttarakhandis. During the 90's, his political songs inspired people to take part in anti-dam movement and also during the statehood agitations. His song, Nauchani Narayana is a sarcastic comment on politicians in Uttarakahnd, specially directed at former Uttarakhand Chief Minister N.D. Tiwari who has been embroiled in allegation of corruption and impropriety. Referring to N.D. Tiwari as “naughty narayana”, Negi sang the song in a traditional Jagar style. He has pioneered the use of ‘jagar’ style to make political statements. Traditionally jagars are sung by jagariyas to the sound of dhol-damau and thali. It builds up a crescendo in which some members of the

audience come to be possessed. He has adopted a similar technique of many of his political and social songs.

Nauchani Narayana

Though long opposing the demand for a separate state, the seat of power was too attractive to resist. The perks you give to VIP's are like offerings given to deities
You allow the looting of state treasury, You solve the problems of those that flatter you. How far can an old man carry the future of Uttarakhand?

In the plains of Dehradun the court is established
In an imitation capital, an army of couriers enjoy their wealth.

Because of this open criticism of state's senior leadership, Narendra Singh Negi found himself the center of controversy after the release of this song. The state made attempts to censor the song by preventing any live performance of the song and by raiding offices of the distributors. Though the song's main focus was on N.D. Tiwari, it spoofed the general political class in Uttarakhand. Not so surprisingly, even after almost six years since its release, Nauchani Narayana is still selling copies of the CD every day. Its popularity shows no sign of waning and during my interviews was cited by young and the old alike as one of their favourite songs.

Conclusion:

The new technologies with their localized ownership and control present us with possibilities for new and diverse forms of expression. Another view posits mass media as a manipulative instrument that favours those who due to their power and resources control the media and are least likely to question the existing power relations (Manuel, 2001). But it can be a contested territory where hegemonic and oppositional values can engage each other (Manuel, 2001). In the case of Garhwali popular music, it can be seen as a site for negotiation and mediation of traditional/modern, city/countryside, male/female etc.

There is a complicated interplay between caste and gender that lies behind production of regional songs in Uttarakhand. There is a significance of locality and cultural identity in garhwali popular music and the popularity of music can largely be attributed to i) promotion of songs by local musicians, ii) easy access to songs, iii) allocation of time slots for garhwali music in local channels or emergence of local music channels in the lines of MTV specially devoted to garhwali songs, iv) concert opportunities for local musicians and v) garhwali migrant population in cities.

The issue of song ownership is a complicated one. As one musician said to me, “folk songs are called lok-git because they belong to people. We don’t know who wrote them and when”. Thus, appropriation of these songs by high-caste musicians is something which cannot be helped. The wide spread accessibility of different media technologies has done a restructuring and reorientation of the music industry to a certain extent. From one perspective it might be assumed that dominant social groups have unprecedented access, representation and control of mass media.

But the low expense of some of these technologies, especially songs which can be downloaded and transferred to phones, has created a medium whose low expense makes it conducive to localized grassroots control and corresponding diversity of content. In the specific context of Uttarakhand, instances where lower caste musicians have had access to recording technologies, they have been able to improve their economic situation by an increase in their negotiation abilities due to the access to a bigger consumer market. For lower caste musicians spatially limited to villages, it offers an opportunity to move beyond the limited village structure and showcase their music as an 'artistic performance' through CD's and stage shows in towns and cities. It is this movement of folk and traditional songs from context specific scenarios of rituals and auspicious occasions to a stage performance that upper caste male musicians are able to tap into, thus transforming the very nature of these songs.

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