I EVEN REGRET NIGHT
Holi Songs of Demerara

Lalchhari Sharma
Translated by Rajiv Mohabir

Kaya Press (2014)
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The Tale Of Demerara

निजव्यान सहित दमराका बयान
Chand

In the region of his birth,
in Chhapra district in Mairitaand village,

Lord Brahma begat a son
named Lalbihari, the Beloved of Bihar.

Having come here, I live in the country
of Demerara. I pass my days

in the refuge that is Hari.
Doha

There are many provinces in British Guiana: some queer, some miserable, depending on your own eyes. Everyone knows the wondrous village of Golden Fleece in Essiquibo District. Where Pandit Paramanand resides is renowned both here and abroad. Again I bow before Rama; also I bow before the wise one's feet, the foundation of my life.
Demerara's Condition

हमरा हाल
Chaurai

I want to write a little
of Demerara’s customs. Listen,
this is a country of infinite ills,
where wisdom is scarce.

I left my home and came to Demerara,
my name penned as “Coolie.”
Forsaking bhajans, forsaking dharma,
the Vedas I abandoned, to my disgrace.

Of the routines of this Demerara life,
I write these kavitt, these verses.
Kavitt

As the bell tolls five, the pot heats on the fire: rice and yogurt boil with sugar. I eat my fill and the sardar comes to the door, bringing orders we must endure. Washing the pot I keep the rice, I prepare my chillam pipe to deal with this. Men and women join together bearing hoes on their shoulders, the way clogged with those who have come to Demerara.
Demerara's Condition

First we ford the waterway, our ragged clothes soaked.
The sardar comes to apportion our tasks.
दोहा

ता पाषे महेश चला, टीपी ऊँच लगाय ॥
चाबुक तीनों हाथमें, सरपट पहुँचा आय ॥

Doha

Then behind us comes the sahib,
hat high on his head.

Grasping a whip, horse
cantering, he reaches the field.
Kavitt

Bearing a book, the sardar reaches the coolies. Inspecting the cane field, he accounts their work. If one does not finish the tasks, he vexes, then garnishes pay. When I witness this my entire body shakes. In Demerara there are police stations in every direction. O god, where have they taken and forgotten the poor?

कविता

बुक लेकर हैं निकल पहुँचा कृतियों में जाय, काम लिखत बनाय सब देख देखके।

जाकर हैं काम खोदो ताकर पैसा लीन्हो काटि, करत बराब मेरी काम बांधे देखिके।

हमरा दायु बरजोर पुलिस धाना चुकूयाँ, राग कहीं लायेहो गरीबन भुलायके।
Doha

Come Saturday, men
and women finally make merry.

Covered with orhnis,
scarves of five hues,

they approach
the manager's court.
कविता
कोई पहिर वाजुबन्द कोई सहीहै तुकुम्भ,
काजर मनोहर नयनों से लगायके।
आये सरदार कारे काज सबके साह्तुर,
पथरा देत नर नारि सबन देवाके।

Kavitt
Some in armbands, some standing,
their lovely waterlines besmeared in kohl.
When the sardar comes, he attends to all matters,
giving men and women their money.
In this manner five years pass
in steady woe. With a ticket,
the heart, like a chakor bird,
cries out to the moon.

Such mirth! Some act as sadhus,
some fakirs, wildly
prancing all around, without any idea
of what comes next.
Doha

One out of one hundred are patient as before in the village.

If they obey the sardar, their hearts remain content.
chhand

bhumi janam ka prant chhapara gaanv mairitand hai
brahmadev kar putra jano
lalbihari naam hai

aayke ham baas kinhan
desh dararalok hai

rahat ham hain sharan prabhu ke
kutat din sab nik hai

• • •

In Chhapra 'e get one village name Mairitaand
'an' Brahmc Bhagwan get one pickni

'ee name Lalbheri, 'E been come yah-so,
Me de a Demerara an' stay corner ged.
dohar

britis guyana deshi mein, yadyapi praanti anek
kahun vicitra kahu(n) atidukhi, yalmij man kar tek
essenquibo prant mei(n), golden fleece ek gaanv hai
ati sundar asthan yeh, sab janat yeh thaav

pandit paramanand ji, basi jaha(n) kar aahi
sabhi ko voh bidit hai, desh videshan mahi(n)

ramcharan puni bandi kar, mahisur pad man dhaar
pandit ji ke charan yug, hamre praan adhaar

* * *

Guyana get plenty place—
good kine an' bad kine

wha' you look fa a you go fine 'em. All body
does know Golden Fleece in Essiquibo

a whe' Pandit Paramanand stay.
Dem know fum yeh-so til a India.

Me bow in front Ram
he meh praan ke adhar,

* * *

likhan chato(n) kuchh damara riti,
sunhais sajjan kari priti
yeh hai desh kudesh apar,
rahat na dharam vivek vichara

desh chaan(n)ri kr damara aai,
aapan nam so kuli likhai
bhajan chaan(n)ri chaan(n)re nij-dharma,
chaan(n)ri vedpath karhin kukarma

nityakaram jo damara mahi(n),
so ab likho(n) kahitt ke mahi(n)

* * *

Me wan'write little 'bout
how Demerara deh. Hear,
dis country get bad kine people,
one body ne get sense.

Me lef' India an' come Demerara side
an' deh call me "Coolie."
All de ting me been lef' the Bedas
and so come me sharm.

Me wan'write little 'bout how me live
dis side, so me write dis.
kavitt

baji ghanti panch ki ki handi dini hai charhai
bhat liya hai banai dah i chini millike

kahi ke anand bhaye dvare aaye sardar
thadhe karat pukaar angya de(n) samhaar ke

ab dhoyna saspaan bhaat lel hai(n) bharat
chilam tayaar kari dihaat samhaar ke

jama bhaye naari kaandhe dhare hai(n) kudaari
bhir bhai bhanari pahunchhe damarhu jaalike

* * *
De boil ring a five s'lock en' de karahi pan de fiyah
rice and da'li boil wid sugah.
Me een belly full an' de sardar come a me door,
fe tell abbi wha' abbi mus' do. Me wash
de karahi an' keep de chowr, an' make de pipe
fe smoke lil bit. All body come one time
wid cutless an' ting, de road na get space
'e choke up wid matte.

damara haal

pahile pani mein helay latta kapara ki
bhijai aaye hai(n) sardar kaam det hai bataai ke

* * *
Fus' abbi mus' crass de wata
an' abbi close ovah wet.

De sardar come
fe tell abbi wha' abbi mus' do.

doha

ta paachhe saheb chala, topli unch lagayal
chabuk linho haath mein, sarpat phuncha aal

* * *
Den de sahib come fum behin' mattie
an' wear one hat.

'E tek 'e whip and grabble 'e haas
and come run cornah abbi.
buk liyohai nikaai pahuncha kultiyo(n) mein jaai
kam likhat banaai sab dekh dekh ke
jaakar hai kaam khoa taakar paisa linho kaati
karat kharaab meri kayua kampe dekhi ke
damara tapu barjor pulis thana chahu or
ram kahan (n) layeho gariban bhulaike
... "E bring one book come and reach abbi
an' look abbi wuk done and write 'em doung.
If one abbi na wuk done, 'e vex bad bad
an' na gi' abbi abbi peisa. When me see dis
me shake bad. Demerara get police
all about. O gad, dey tek abbi yeh-so
and fahget abbi because abbi been poor.

aayi sanichar rangla, khusi nar naari
ordhe panchrang chunari, chul manja drbaari
... "Come Sati-day, man an' ooman
all ovah jai.
O ooman war deh oorni
wha' get plenty colah
an' go comer de managah.

kavitt

koi pahir bajuband koi lkhadi hai dukandh
kanjar manohar nayano(n) se lagaai ke

aaye sardaar kari kaaj sab ke samhaar
payasa det nar naari saban devaai ke
... "De put an all deh banghe dem
an' stari' wid kijah
in deh eye, De sandar come
fe gi' abbi peisa
an' o gi' abbi all abbi money.
chaupai

bite paanch baris yahi bhanti
chinta sok karat dinaraati
tikat paai man bhayau anandaa
jimi chakorsisu nirakhat chandaa
bhayuu pramod dharahi naahi(n) dhiraa
koi sadhu bane fakira
hoi adhir chahu(m) disi dhaavhi(n)
elo jukti na man mein laavhi(n)

***

Jus' so abbi dis punish
bad five year. Wid a ticket
me heart cry out
like one burd.

Abbi dis ovah happy, some deh like sadhu
an' some deh like fakir
dance all about. Dem na sabi
what go come nex'.

doaa

san mein ek dhiraj dhari, rahe gaany ke mahi(n)
haat sune sardantke, khusi rahe manmaahi(n)

***

'Ve get only couple
mattie wha' patient.
If dey mine de sardar
deh go stay happy.
I began writing poetry when I was eight, building my own ideas of metaphor and image from the sun-dried bricks of folk music I knew. I do not come from a very literate household—in fact, my own paternal grandparents and my maternal great-grandparents were not able to read or write. My family came to Guyana to work the sugar plantations of Lunigan and Skeldon, bound by their own thumbprints on English contracts. But this did not mean that they did not possess a vast knowledge of their worlds.

I did not at first recognize my own writing as poetry; I thought of it as a record of my thoughts, written in a way that would be inaccessible to prying eyes. Poetry became a serious practice for me only after I started to learn my Aji’s language, which is a form of Bhojpuri—a dialect of Hindi spoken in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in India. Through her language, she taught me songs. Her music dazzled me. I did what I could to learn it, recording her songs and speaking with her in Bhojpuri every chance I had, hopeful that this would help me learn a little more of what she knew.

I began the process of translating in my early twenties as an undergraduate focused on religious studies. That is when I realized that my Aji’s language was a key to the culture of being Indo-Caribbean. The Bhojpuri that she had always spoken and sung was not standard Hindi but a new kind of language, one that had been created on sugar plantations and estates by indentured laborers and their children. My Aji was the last of our family who spoke Bhojpuri as a first language; due to its low social status, it had been abandoned in my parents’ generation.

I think this made me love it even more. It was a language unique to our community, which had survived and persisted despite one hundred and thirty years of living in the diaspora, of being told that everything about our identities was broken, that we spoke “broken” English and “broken” Hindi. It was thus my own personal, live connection to South Asian culture. I clung to every word of it I could find.
But one thing troubled me as both a scholar and a translator. I studied in the West, where the written word is the measure by which cultures are evaluated. Yet most of the traditions I had experienced were oral. This absence of written texts meant that any attempt to render the language of my Aji visible would require a measure of creative invention.

So when Gaiutra Bahadur wrote me to ask if I would be interested in translating these verses, the only known literary record of indenture written in Awadhi/Braj Bhasha/Bhojpuri in the Anglophone Caribbean, I almost fell out of my chair. It seemed an answer to a question I had never even dared to ask myself. Here was a text written in the very language that I felt was not just ancestral but an actual ancestor. It even mentioned Demerara, one of the places my family is from in Guyana.

Gaiutra had written about these songs in his book Coo-lee Woman: the Odyssey of Indenture, and she had even undertaken a rough draft of an English-language translation, which she provided to me to look over. But more surprises were to be found once I was able to view the scanned copies of the original work for myself. When I opened to the first page, I saw the folk songs were written not in standard Hindi, nor in the familiar lit and rhythm of my Aji's Bhojpuri. Rather, the language of the text Gaiutra provided me mirrored the classical Braj Bhasha used by the great sixteenth-century Hindu devotional poets. I began to understand that I held in my hands a new genre of devotional poem, one that was rooted in the Caribbean instead of India.

A NEW GENRE OF HINDU DEVOTIONAL POETRY
To fully appreciate the remarkable nature of this work, it is important to understand the context in which it was written.

Hindu devotional poetry draws upon a tradition that is perhaps most closely associated with medieval India, when writers such as Kabir, Surdas, and Mirabai, known as bhakti poets, revolutionized the formulaic, ritualistic practice of the Hindu religion as enacted by upper-caste (Brahmin) pandits and pujaris (priests). By sixteenth century, when Kabir, one of the most famous bhakti poets, is purported to have lived and worked as a weaver, Hindus were at a crossroads of sorts, their temples being demolished by monotheists in the North. At issue was increasing dissatisfaction with the caste system. The Brahmin or priestly class—the only ones authorized to perform the rituals and sacrifices required for the appeasement of the Vedic gods—often demanded significant fees to perform the ceremonies and prayers necessary to a proper ordering of the world. Without the Brahmins, these ceremonies and prayers would remain incomplete. However, this system also served to keep the castes separated. Many non-Brahmins chose to convert to the newly introduced religion of Islam, which taught that it was possible to speak to god without an intermediary. Others, many of them poets, pioneered a new way of relating to god within the Hindu context, addressing god as the Self, or in the case of the legendary bhakti poet Mirabai, as a lover.

These bhakti poets, or devotional poets, opened up a new world of possibility, one in which there was no more need for pandits, Brahmins, and temple charlatans. Instead, one could speak directly to god through song and prayer. In the poetry of this movement, all caste or religious distinctions, or indeed any other label that might separate one person from another, are considered to be a result of maya, that great illusion that keeps us thinking that we are not already with god, that we live lives separate and distinct from one another.

Because I’d spent time translating bhakti poetry in Jaipur and Varanasi, I quickly realized that Sharma’s work had been composed by someone educated in medieval Indian poetry. This came as something as a shock to me. In all my studies and in all my familial stories, I had never been made aware that indentured laborers might have had this kind of sophisticated education. For me, this is...
important because it goes against certain popular misconceptions. Most people believe that those who ended up indentured in the Caribbean were uneducated, duped by the British into working their colonial fields. But while many of those who chose to migrate were in fact illiterate, the indisputable, published fact of Sharma's songs shows that the situation was far more complicated.

These inheritances—this complexity—have however been largely lost. Not only are most Indo-Caribbean poetics derived from languages and cultures that are neither Bhojpuri nor Awadhi, but the colonial rupture of indentured servitude, and the alienation from languages that it led to, has meant that the people of the Caribbean have had to rebuild their cultures in English, the language of social prestige. As a result, the poetry taught in schools has been that of daffodils or other flora and fauna alien to a Caribbean landscape. Meanwhile, the meanings of folksongs and the particular customs that they belong to have been viewed as a kind of occult knowledge, one not supported by mainstream religion or cultural values.

Yet Sharma's songs give us an alternate view into the world of diasporic experience. The religiosity and sophistication I saw in his writings not only amazed me, it changed the landscape of my poetic imaginary. Born in England and raised in the United States, I had been told all my life that we come from a "broken" tradition. This text showed me a mirror—it showed me my face in one solid piece.

POETIC FORMS USED BY LALBIHARI SHARMA
The poetic forms that Lalbihari Sharma includes in *I EVEN REGRET NIGHT: HOLI SONGS OF DEMERA*—chaupai, chautal, doha, kavit, ulara, and bhajan—are derived from folksong, and each possesses its own structures and history rooted in performance and narrative tradition. They are celebratory in nature, and capacious enough to contain epic narratives as well as songs of praise. Typically sung during Phagua/Holi, they are performed by two lines of singers that face one another and sing back and forth different varieties of Phagua songs (songs of the holiday), each with its own particular pattern of vigor and rest.

In order to make accessible to the reader some of these forms that I have migrated into English through this translation, I present herewith a brief guide.

**Bhajan:** This is a type of devotional song that does not have a set metrical structure. Bhajans often contain lyrics that praise deities and can be used as part of religious worship ceremonies. Since they are written in the vernacular and not in Sanskrit, they are intended for use by lay people. Included in Sharma's text are two types of devotional bhajans. One is dedicated to the physical representation of god who comes to earth in bodily form. This style of bhajan is known as sagun bhakti, or devotion to the god that has form. The second is the bhajan in praise of the unseen god that pervades all things—the deity that is formless and inside us all. This is known as nirgun bhakti. Bhajans typically vary widely in rhythm and style, and can be sung to various ragas and tunes.

**Chhand:** A poem written as a quatrains. These are usually declarative in nature and used ceremoniously in praise of a specific person. In this collection, the chhand are used to introduce the poet Lalbihari Sharma, identifying his place of origin and telling us a little about where he is from as a way of establishing his credibility.

**Chaupai:** Literally a quatrains written in two lines with a meter of four main beats per section and sixteen syllables per line. This is the most common form used for narra-
tive poetry. Sharma's use of the chaupai structure pays homage to the great bhakti poet Tulsidas, who composed his famous *Sri Ramcharitmanas*, a rendition of the *Ramayana* in the vernacular Awadhi, using this form. Other classical examples of the chaupai include the “Hanuman Chalisa,” a prayer to the monkey god.

**Chautal:**

Literally four claps in the structure. This type of meter, which describes an entire subset of songs, is comprised of fourteen beats and is used when performing songs around Holi. Chautal songs are practiced in the Caribbean and also in villages in the Bhojpuri belt in India, namely Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. This style of singing is well-documented by the late Indo-Caribbean drummer and musician Rudy Rammarine and the ethnomusicologist Peter Manuel in their collection of chautal songs, *Chautal Rang Bahar: A Treasury of Chautal Songs From India and the Caribbean*. However, according to scholars, the practice of chautal has been diminishing in recent times, drowned out by the catchier and ubiquitous music of Bollywood.

**Doha:**

A rhyming couplet written with a 11/13 beat and 11/13 syllabation. A notable doha writer is Kabir, whose bhakti poetic tradition is threaded throughout Sharma's work.

**Kavitt:**

A poem written in quatrains whose rhythm is meant to correspond with the movements of a kathak dancer. In the songs presented here, Sharma deviates from the strict quadrain form of the kavitt, using its syllabation patterns but without ensuring the completeness of the four lines.

A short three to four line song that follows a chautal, but is usually lighter in tone and semantic significations. This indicates the chorus-like patter of gol singing that takes place during Holi. The ularas in this collection are highly repetitive and indicate the quality of repetitive recitation that offers a lyric respite from the more complicated and demanding performance of chautal.

**A TRANSLATOR’S CHOICES**

As a translator, I deal with a palimpsest of silences. While some translators feel compelled to “foreignize” their English, as Walter Benjamin insists, others strive to preserve the integrity of a line’s music, allowing all kinds of gaps in meaning. The South Asian forms that Sharma writes in depends upon the stresses of the Awadhi and Bhojpuri languages, a reservoir of cadence not available in the English language. Implicit cultural and political presumptions further vex translations that are mediated by colonial relationships—in this case, the power play that inevitably exists between colonial-era Hindustani poetry and the English language. In his book *Flesh and Fish Blood: Postcolonialism, Translation, and the Vernacular*, postcolonial scholar and translator Subramanian Shankar insists that translation must be read as a practice of “interpretation rather than rendering.” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her article, “The Politics of Translation,” says that translation—especially when pertaining to songs in Indic languages—is an act that must be undertaken in a way that considers the author: the newly migrated text must be comprehensible to the writer of the original, keeping the same register of language and tone.

The works presented here were originally meant as songs, as a living part of an oral culture. So by attempting this translation, I had been tasked with transforming a text meant for music into one that belongs to an entirely different world. Part of the translation process has thus
been carving these poems, originally intended to be worn in throats and ears, into forms that they could inhabit on a printed page.

I have attempted to address these issues by taking a cue from Borges, who says, "the original is unsuitable to the translation." Instead of relying on the metrical structures of the South Asian language presented by Sharma, I have attempted to translate meanings more closely to the semantic significations of the text. And in order to make these songs, originally published without any line breaks, read more like poems, I have changed their lineation to reflect their musicality. This has allowed me as translator more room in the text, making possible more twists of meaning.

I have thus chosen to format each style of poem in ways that I hope help to honor and pay homage to the type of song it references. My intention in so doing has been to transform these poems and make available their original meaning without having to adhere so fixedly to the structure of the form. For example, the dohas are translated as couplets and the chaupals are written into quatrains. This is something I learned to do from reading Agha Shahid Ali's translations of the legendary Urdu poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz in The Rebel's Silhouette. Instead of preserving couplets as they appear in Faiz's Urdu, Ali broke Faiz's lines into pieces that fit his own sense of what the lines wanted to accomplish. This particular way of translating the musical tradition of South Asian poetry provided me the inspiration to translate Sharma's songs with a sense that is both intuitive and reflective of my own poetic practice.

Finally, to allay any fear of over-fidelity to the original language to the detriment of its musical origins, I have allowed myself to consider my translations as one of many possible avatars or emanations of the original text.

ON THE DAMRA JOURNEY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY
What is instantly remarkable about this collection is how, by embedding Indian poetic inheritances within the realities of indentured diasporic experiences, Sharma manages a potent alchemy of philosophical guidance, musicality, and devotion.

As Bahadur's research tells us, Sharma was a sirdar, one of the drivers who kept other indentured laborers in line on the plantations. He thus saw firsthand, and perhaps even had a hand in, the trials and joys that his country folk suffered under the economic exploitation of the British in the period between 1838–1917. Indeed, this collection of songs begins by recalling the plantation experiences of those bonded by contract to work the earth and at the mercy of British planters.

At the same time, the use of the vernacular shows Sharma's work to be in conversation with bhakti devotional poets. Sharma is thus in effect reflecting upon the human condition according to Vedantic Hindu philosophy. Beyond creating a set of devotional songs tailored to the circumstances of Indo-Caribbean life, he is elaborating upon the soul's journey from the illusory (maya) to the Real.

If Sharma's songs start off with a consideration of the material conditions of plantation life and experiences, they soon attempt to escape those conditions through the narration of sacred myth.

By relating stories in which the incarnated gods Krishna, Radha, Rama, and Sita play Holi and pine for one another, experiencing human emotions, Sharma is able to delve deep into the psychic realms of indentureship.

For example, in one of his "Chautal" poems, Sharma writes in the voice of Radha, Krishna's consort, as she waits at home for her lover to return:

From abroad Piya sends
no word. I'm listless in the month
of Phagun without my love.
The papita bird cries out, piya—

I'm overcome by this distance between us.

HOLI SONGS OF DEMERARA
He stole away to another country
without telling me. The rain falls
like arrows or serpents, stirring worry
in my heart.

By reinterpreting the Krishna myth in order to emulate the pain of separation from one’s beloved, Sharma reflects the influence of the sixteenth century poet Mirabai, perhaps the most famous of the sagun bhakti poets. In Mirabai’s poems, the human soul is represented as a woman whose beloved, the divine, is absent, the two separated through illusion. According to the practice of sagun bhakti, the only clear path to liberation and a merging with the divine is through devotion to a specific form of god, a god with form.

But in Sharma’s poem, an implicit parallel is also being made between exile and indenture, the separation between the speaker and the beloved deepened and made more complex by the circumstances of migration. The speaker’s description of longing could refer as much to the distance between the indentured from their “home” as to that between the human and the divine.

Sharma ends his collection with a series of bhajans that show a spirituality that has shifted from embodying the perspectives of the women in mythology to a more devotional tone, taking the reader or listener into a personal space where the deity is not one of flesh and bone, but rather is simultaneously all-pervasive and seemingly absent. This turn to nirgun bhakti, or that form of devotion that praises a god without form, connects Sharma’s work to the poetry and hymns written by or attributed to the great bhakti poet-saint Kabir (1440-1518), whose religious philosophy laments the duality of the Real and maya. Kabir asserts that in order to escape the torture of illusion, and to escape the bondage of karma that ties the soul into the cycles of human incarnation and death, one must chant the name of Rama.

In his “Fourth Bhajan,” the poet Sharma makes clear the connections between his spirituality and his poetic lineage:

*Lalbihari is of no use;
you are alone and destitute.*

*This whole creation is a dreamlike illusion. Sing the only truth*

*of Rama’s name.*

The name of the divine is Rama, but not in the sense of Rama the sagun deity, son of King Dasharatha and incarnation of Vishnu. Rather, Rama is invoked as a way of acknowledging the eternal life force, the god behind the gods, the master divinity that is beyond human understanding—the Real behind the maya. In these final poems, the soul is thus figured as eternal, escaping torment through devotion and by keeping righteous company. Sharma asks:

*Without singing praises to Hari, who will attain bliss?*

In this move from the physical to the spiritual, Sharma the poet, the singer of songs, reconciles with the divine and shows his readers a clear path to liberation from suffering, offering help and advice along the way,

*Sing these thoughts of Rama,*
*give up your attachments*
*and desires.*

*Lalbihari says, “Try and understand,*
*the company of saints is absolute truth.”*
true appreciate that in order to do so I must write in and out of all my languages: Guyanese Creole, English, and Bhojpuri. In Sharma’s plantation Hindi, I hear echoes of my own ancestors singing for the spring of the soul, praying colors into play.

1 The languages that scholars agree have created modern Hindi include Braj Bhasha, Bhojpuri, and Awadhi—all non-standardized languages of North India, and all closely identified with the tradition of devotional poetry and music. Though seen to be more rustic and rooted in village life, these languages are, ironically, admired for their poetic depth and traditions.

2 India has four major castes that are organized into a hierarchical structure that include Brahmans (the priestly class) at the top, then Kshatriyas (the ruling class), Vaishyas (the mercantile class), and Shudras (the servant class). Dalits fall outside of the caste system entirely, and suffer oppression from this system as a result.

3 The chautal is particular is specific to Indo-Caribbean people—so much so that it became the forerunner to a new kind of Caribbean music with Indian roots: chutney music. During the 1960s, singers such as Sundar Popo and Yousef Islam sang bhakti poetry set to song and rhythm. In so doing, they brought the performance of folk music traditions to the public sphere, hardening back to the metaphors and experiences that had inspired their ancestors, but fitting them into the sonic landscape of the Caribbean. Following in the tradition of bhakti poets, these musicians found inspiration in the idea of liberation from caste and religion, but in the service of a new Caribbean cultural rebuilding.

4 This could be due to Bhojpuri cinema’s wild take off from obscurity to its present style of racy songs and dancing.

5 Though Rama is the seventh incarnation of Vishnu, he is held to be the formless god.

WORKS CITED

Lalbihari Sharma was born in Chapra village in the United Provinces of India (now Bihar, India) and indentured by the British East India Company to work the sugarcane fields. A musician and singer, he published his chautal folksongs in 1916.

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