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VULGARITY IN BHOJPURI ITEM SONGS: A SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper explores the rise and normalization of vulgar content in Bhojpuri item songs, examining how these lyrics and performances reflect and influence sociocultural norms, gender dynamics, and regional identity. The study uses a critical media analysis approach, supported by sociolinguistic and feminist theory, to decode the messages embedded in these songs and their broader implications for society. This paper critically examines the growing trend of vulgarity in Bhojpuri item songs, focusing on their linguistic, visual, and cultural components. Using feminist theory, critical discourse analysis, and sociolinguistics, the study highlights how these songs reflect and perpetuate patriarchal values, normalize misogyny, and shape societal attitudes toward gender and sexuality. Through the analysis of popular Bhojpuri item songs, the research reveals how entertainment intersects with cultural identity and socio-economic dynamics in North Indian society.

Keywords: Bhojpuri Cinema, Vulgarity, Item Songs, Sociocultural Analysis, Gender, Media Discourse, Linguistic Representation

Introduction

Bhojpuri cinema, often described as the voice of the Hindi heartland, has gained widespread popularity in recent decades. While the industry has provided regional identity and cultural representation, it has also come under scrutiny for its portrayal of women and the increasing vulgarity in its item songs. These songs marked by sexually suggestive lyrics, provocative visuals, and objectification of female bodies have become a staple in Bhojpuri films. This study explores the sociocultural dimensions of vulgarity in Bhojpuri item songs, raising critical questions about artistic freedom, cultural values, and gender dynamics. The lyrics of Bhojpuri item songs often include double entendres, crude metaphors, and sexual innuendos. Words such as "le le raja," "garmi chadhal ba," and "samaan hilawe" are layered with sexual subtext. These lexical choices amplify eroticism while using humor as a veil, making vulgarity socially palatable. Women in these songs are portrayed as commodities—passive, hypersexualized, and existing solely for male pleasure. Their body parts are fragmented and glorified, echoing objectification. Conversely, male characters are dominant, assertive, and often shown as consumers of female bodies. Despite criticism from progressive circles, these songs enjoy massive popularity among working-class male audiences. The entertainment value, regional pride, and aspirational fantasies they offer often outweigh concerns about vulgarity. For many, these songs represent a form of escapism and identity assertion in a rapidly changing socio-economic landscape. Comments on YouTube and Facebook often reflect misogynistic humor, casual sexism, and celebration of vulgarity. At the same time, some voices, especially from younger and urban audiences, criticize the objectification and call for cultural introspection.

Research Objective

To investigate how sexist language is influencing interpersonal relation and how sexist language works pragmatically in interpersonal interactions in Bhojpuri songs. A focus on how speakers use language to position one another in relation to social norms. To critically examine the lyrical content of Bhojpuri item songs with a focus on identifying vulgar, sexually suggestive, or objectifying language. To explore the sociocultural factors including regional audience preferences, gender dynamics, and commercialization that contribute to the production and popularity of vulgar content in Bhojpuri item songs. To analyze the representation of women in Bhojpuri item songs and assess how such portrayals reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes.

To investigate the psychological and social impact of vulgar Bhojpuri songs on different demographic groups, especially youth and rural audiences. To study the role of media, music companies, and digital platforms in promoting and distributing



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such content. To examine public perception and criticism of vulgarity in Bhojpuri music, including perspectives from both within and outside the Bhojpuri-speaking community. To propose possible cultural and policy-oriented interventions to balance artistic freedom with the need to reduce harmful or degrading depictions in Bhojpuri music.

Literature Review

Existing scholarship on Indian cinema has often examined item songs through the lens of Bollywood, focusing on gender politics and the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975). However, Bhojpuri cinema, despite its large audience, remains under-researched. Scholars like Badri Narayan and M. K. Verma have touched upon Bhojpuri media's reflection of caste, class, and gender structures. This study builds upon such work, with an emphasis on linguistic vulgarity and sociocultural implications. Feminist Film Theory: Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze explains how women in cinema are often portrayed as objects of male desire. Bhojpuri item songs exemplify this by focusing on women's bodies as spectacle. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): Drawing on Fairclough's CDA, the study examines how language in item songs reinforces dominant ideologies, especially concerning gender roles and power dynamics. The use of regional dialects, slang, and euphemisms plays a key role in how vulgarity is communicated and received. Sociolinguistic tools help unpack the cultural meanings behind such language. The study employs qualitative content analysis, focusing on five popular Bhojpuri item songs released between 2015 and 2023. Criteria for selection include popularity (YouTube views), public controversy, and lyrical explicitness. Tools used include textual analysis, visual semiotics, and an examination of audience responses via social media. Qualitative content analysis of selected Bhojpuri item songs (list 5–7 songs with lyrics) and the Criteria for selecting songs: popularity, controversy, lyrical explicitness. I have used Tools such as textual analysis, discourse analysis, visual semiotics. Audience reaction was through social media comments, YouTube views, likes, dislikes.

Analysis

Bhojpuri cinema, also known as Bhojiwood, is a vital cultural expression of the Bhojpuri-speaking population spread across Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and parts of Jharkhand. Over the past two decades, Bhojpuri films particularly item songs have gained popularity not just regionally but also among diasporic communities. However, this rise in popularity has sparked concerns over the increasing vulgarity in lyrics, choreography, and representation of women. The objective of this analysis is to study vulgarity in Bhojpuri item songs through a sociocultural lens, examining how it reflects, influences, and distorts societal norms, gender roles, and cultural identity. Language or imagery that is crude, obscene, sexually explicit, or offensive to public decency. Songs that often include provocative dance numbers, generally inserted for commercial appeal rather than narrative necessary. Studying the mutual interaction between society and culture especially values, norms, gender expectations, and moral boundaries. In Pre-1990s: Bhojpuri songs were largely based on folk traditions like Chaita, Kajri, Birha, and Bidesia. Women were portrayed with dignity. In Post-2000s: Commercialization led to increased production of films and music with low budgets and high returns. This paved the way for sensationalist content. Influenced by Bollywood, Bhojpuri cinema incorporated sexualized performances as a strategy to attract attention and revenue. Heavy use of double entendre, euphemisms, and explicit references to body parts and sexual acts. Examples:

“Ratiya Mein Dherail Ba Jawani” (The night is loaded with youth)

“Sasura Bada Paisawala” (Father-in-law is very rich) – while seemingly innocent, the visual and lyrical undertone is suggestive.

Women are often portrayed as sexual commodities. Lyrics objectify the female body, reducing identity to body parts, sexual availability, or monetary value. Men are portrayed as dominant, desiring, and entitled. Dancers wear revealing outfits, exaggerated body movements are used to evoke erotic appeal. Camera angles often focus on body parts, reinforcing the male gaze. Producers aim for virality, using vulgar content as a marketing tactic. YouTube algorithms and mass viewership increase demand for clickbait-style music videos. Censorship is lenient or ineffective in regional cinema. Many songs are released on private YouTube channels, bypassing traditional regulation. Despite criticism, such songs have millions of views. Audiences in rural and urban slums consume these songs as entertainment and escapism. Bollywood item songs like



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Munni Badnaam Hui and Fevicol Se set a trend for regional adaptations. Traditional values and folk traditions are overshadowed by commodified vulgar content. It leads to the misrepresentation of Bhojpuri culture as inherently crude or obscene. Reinforces patriarchal ideologies, where women exist primarily for male pleasure. Promotes a culture of street-level harassment, where lyrics often mimic catcalls. Young viewers imitate dialogues, songs, and gestures, reinforcing toxic masculinity. Speakers of Bhojpuri face cultural embarrassment, especially in urban or cosmopolitan contexts. Dr. Avinash Pandey (Cultural Critic): Argues that Bhojpuri item songs reflect the "hyper-masculinized fantasies of a class denied dignity elsewhere." Arvind Kumar (Sociologist): Points out that vulgarity becomes a "countercultural resistance" to mainstream moralities but ends up reinforcing gender inequalities. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Theoretical Link): "Can the Subaltern Speak?" The voice of women in Bhojpuri songs is often ventriloquized by male writers and performers. Feminist Bhojpuri artists: Some emerging artists are reasserting folk traditions and feminist narratives. Movements for clean Bhojpuri cinema are gaining traction among cultural activists. Youth on platforms like Instagram and YouTube are creating parodies and critiques of vulgar songs. Stronger regulatory mechanisms for music videos and lyrics on digital platforms. Promoting folk-based content and women-led productions. Media literacy programs to help youth critically evaluate media content. Holding YouTube and content platforms responsible for suggestive thumbnails and metadata manipulation. Encouraging academic studies on the cultural dynamics of Bhojpuri media. The rise of vulgarity in Bhojpuri item songs is a complex sociocultural phenomenon driven by commercialization, patriarchy, and evolving media landscapes. While these songs reflect certain truths of societal desire and market logic, they also perpetuate regressive gender stereotypes and damage the cultural reputation of Bhojpuri-speaking communities. A balanced approach involving cultural introspection, critical media engagement, and creative resistance is needed to reclaim Bhojpuri identity from the clutches of commodified vulgarity. Here are few examples:

1. "Lollipop Lagelu" – Pawan Singh

One of the most iconic Bhojpuri party anthems, instantly recognizable and widely celebrated for its catchy hook and energy. Released in 1997, the song propelled Pawan Singh to superstardom. It means that "When you put on some lipstick, the whole district starts moving. The best in the area, your hips. When your hips start moving, they look like a lollipop." This highlights the playful, flirtatious tone of the song, where the singer is captivated by his lover's sway and charm. The lyrics repeatedly reference "kamariya kare lapa lap, lollipop lagelu" essentially praising how her hips move in a rhythmic, enticing way, likening them to a lollipop in motion. The song is lighthearted and fun, focusing on playful attraction. The singer admires his lover's lipstick and leisurely hip movements, comparing them to a lollipop symbolic of sweetness, movement, and allure.

2. "Phulauri Bina Chutney Kaise Bani" (Kaise Bani)

A timeless Bhojpuri folk classic that crossed oceans. Originally a traditional song, it gained international traction through the Chutney music genre via Trinidadian singer Sundar Popo. It was later adapted in Bollywood (e.g., Dabangg 2). It means that "How will phulauri be made (or how can it be enjoyed) without chutney?" Here, phulauri (also spelled pholourie or fulori) is a traditional deep-fried snack made from ground split peas or gram flour commonly served with chutney.

3. "Arrah Hile Chhapra Hile Baliya Hilela"

Another beloved folk song, it became hugely popular after being featured in the 1977 Bhojpuri film Dangal. It has since been recreated in both Bhojpuri and Bollywood with notable renditions in Angaara and Jabariya Jodi. Literally, it says "Arrah shakes, Chhapra shakes, Ballia shakes" but it's not really about the towns physically moving. In Bhojpuri song culture, "hile" (to shake/move) is often a metaphor for excitement, dancing, or sexual attraction. The "shaking" of these cities is an exaggerated way of saying that the singer's beloved or the dancer's moves are so captivating that the whole region is stirred up. This song is part of the double entendre style where lines sound innocent but carry a sexual undertone.



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4. "Dildar" – Vishal Mishra & Manoj Tiwari

A refreshing romantic track praised for its clean, emotional tone. Among listeners looking to avoid objectification or overtly sexual themes, it's often cited as a thoughtful choice. The song "Dildar" was released as a single on March 21, 2022. Manoj Tiwari penned the lyrics and performed the song, while Vishal Mishra composed the music. "Dildar": A Hindi/Bhojpuri term meaning "lover" or "beloved." Literally, someone who has won or possesses a heart. The lyrics means that:

Kaa karab agar kahin pyaar ho gayil "What to do if love has happened somewhere?" expressing a dilemma of falling in love.

Mujhe ek nazar mila rahe, dildaar ho gayil "I caught a single glance, and (you) became my beloved." Suggests a love-at-first-sight moment.

Naina milake bhadi gayil aage..."Eyes met and got closer... some words slipped out..." indicating growing attraction and budding confession.

Dhak dhak badhal jaise lagal, ikraar ho gayil "My heart started pounding as if it's changed, and (my) confession happened." A beautiful way to describe a sudden rush of emotions leading to admission of love.

"Dildaar" is a charming, romantic number celebrating the magic of unexpected love. With heart thumping beats and soft lyrical confession ("dildaar ho gayil"), it resonates emotionally with listeners who cherish those initial moments of connection.

5. "Senoor Rang," "Muski," "Nathuniya Pagal Kaile"

Curated by a Reddit user as some of their "soothing Bhojpuri songs," these tracks are appreciated for their more melodious, lyrical beauty contrasting with the upbeat dance numbers. This song, from the film Har Har Gange, features Pawan Singh and Priyanka Singh. There isn't an available translation or meaning breakdown online. Still, based on the title—senoor rang literally translates to "vermillion color" (associated with marriage or marital bliss)—the song likely invokes traditional beauty, festivity, or romantic connotations related to married life.

The title "Muski" means "smile" in Bhojpuri/Hindi. In the song "Piya Ji Ke Muski" from the film Doli Saja Ke Rakhna, it metaphorically refers to the beloved's smile carrying romantic, affectionate undertones. However, there's no detailed line-by-line translation available online as yet.

This Bhojpuri number literally, "the nose ring is driving me crazy" stars Pawan Singh and Kajal Raghwani. It's celebrated for its charm without lewdness: fans say, "This is a classy Bhojpuri song with no double meaning, and it touches the heart. Every word is beautifully written." The title suggests a playful fascination with the nose ring likely a romantic or cultural symbol sparking attraction or admiration in the singer.

In context, "Muski pe jhumela tata..." is another vivid way to describe alluring movement or dance, drawing a comparison between a smile (muski) and intoxicating swaying. This line is meant to be playful and somewhat flirtatious.

Conclusion

Bhojpuri item songs are more than just entertainment; they are cultural texts that reflect and shape societal norms. While they cater to mass appeal and regional pride, they also perpetuate problematic gender dynamics and normalize vulgarity. This study calls for greater media literacy, critical engagement with popular culture, and a reevaluation of creative responsibilities in regional cinema. Bhojpuri item songs often reinforce patriarchal norms through vulgar language and objectification. Vulgarity is normalized through humor, rhythm, and mass consumption. The popularity of such songs is tied to regional pride, escapism, and market dynamics. A significant disconnect exists between creators' intentions and



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ethical/social accountability. Vulgarly in Bhojpuri item songs is often normalized through linguistic play, catchy rhythms, and visual spectacle. These songs perpetuate gender stereotypes, reinforcing patriarchal values. The appeal of such content lies in its ability to entertain, provoke, and reflect local aspirations and anxieties. There's a growing tension between market-driven content and cultural accountability. Need for media literacy and content regulation without stifling creativity.

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