

## Mediating the migrant experience: *dukha, viraha*, and nostalgia in Nepali Lok Dohori songs

*Pardeśaimā gayo dīn rundā,  
Hāsau khelau maukā mā bheṭ hudā.  
Paschim purvako  
Purvako, aba pheri bhet kahile hola ra duita dhurvako?  
Days abroad passed in weeping,  
Let's laugh and play, when we have the opportunity to meet.  
Of west and east  
Of the east, now when will we meet again, we of the two poles?*

In the couplet above, the singer has returned home to her village in Gorkha district after a long absence, and is beginning to sing about the experience of leaving and returning. Both tears and laughter characterize this experience, tears while away, laughter upon returning – or at least, the hope that those around her will want to enjoy themselves while she is with them. The singer here, Maya Gurung, is both a rural-urban migrant and a woman returning to her natal home (*maita*), so she has at her disposal two venerable narrative song traditions, of migration in general and of women's separation from their natal families, to draw from in forming her lyrical couplets. She will make references to the places around her, aspects of the natural world and those with social importance, and the quirks of the relatives who have come down to meet her and listen to her sing. A professional lok dohori singer herself, with a broad knowledge of tunes from various parts of the country, she is also drawing on current commercial lok dohori songs, here singing a song with a melody sourced far from her home village, musically as well as lyrically emphasizing the distance she finds herself from a place that feels like home. Gathered around her are uncles and aunts, brothers, sisters-in-law, nieces and nephews, and other villagers. They had all been dancing, but took a break to listen when she began to sing. Her friend, also back from her marital home, takes up a madal drum and begins to play. The dance now takes form to this new beat, as Maya expresses her longing for home, her sadness that the home she remembers is now alive only in memories, and greets and honors her relatives in song.

This kind of song-and-dance gathering takes place in numerous versions all over the Himalayan region, and in this region of Nepal's western hills, villagers talk of its importance in sharing sorrows and joys (*dukha-sukha badne*). This atmosphere of emotional sharing, characterized by simultaneous highs and lows, becomes an ideal expressive context in the lok dohori music industry in which singers like Maya produce songs and music videos oriented toward an audience that, if not rural-urban migrants themselves, has some attachment to Nepal's rural hills that leads them to recognize and value the "songfest" and its ways of sharing joys and sorrows through music, dance, and the sung poetry of often-improvised lyrics that draw on rich poetic traditions. It is a context in which multiple social mediations occur, from the intimate musical and conversational interactions among performers within the duration of a song, to the various publics in which the music may place them, to the social divisions the performance may make visible, to the global political economic conditions that

encompass them. With attention to these different and intersecting forms of social mediation,<sup>1</sup> this paper examines how artists in Nepal’s music industry contribute to shaping the experience of migrant life by highlighting particular emotional states, particularly those of suffering, longing, and nostalgia, in the songs and music videos they produce.

Nepal’s *lok dohori* music industry is based on migration at multiple levels. The majority of performers, arrangers, producers, investors, and even most of its audience are rural-urban migrants within Nepal, and many have also spent time working abroad. Kathmandu’s network of recording studios and live performance venues are supported by money from abroad, and commercial recordings and performances are oriented toward villagers, on the one hand, but equally toward those who may have previously lived in rural villages but are now returning from abroad with funds to spend. Commercial song production is a collaborative process involving many different individuals, most of whom will have personal experience engaging with popular songs as migrants themselves. Furthermore, this music industry is part of a much larger musical assemblage of folk and folk-related songs, which includes a wide variety of noncommercial performance and engagement with commercial media, in addition to types of songs that have never been commercialized.

The modern Nepali popular songs about migration that I examine in this article include many in the commercial *lok dohori* genre, and also film songs that can be put into genres of *lok pop* or *lok adhunika*. Together, these songs draw on poetic tropes of *dukha* (suffering) and *viraha* (longing) that are hundreds of years old, and these poetic tropes and the musical and visual tropes used along with them emphasize a particular structure of feeling around the dialectic of home and away. Yet to argue that all migration songs are only about *dukha* would not be accurate – the equally popular narrative of the migrant’s triumphant return home is one counter-example, and the popularity of humorous improvised couplets juxtaposed with sad refrains in live *dohori* performance, underscored by the fast danceable beats that characterize many of these songs, shows that a greater range of emotion is present.

### **Song in Migration History**

Migration has long been an important part of livelihoods for many poor residents of the Himalayan foothills, and indeed, throughout South Asia. Dirk Kolff, in his study *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*, describes a military labor market throughout the subcontinent from the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries. In the prevailing traditions of the time, men would leave their villages to seek employment, and attach themselves to the army of a regional *raja*. This was called *naukari* or service, a term that survives to this day in Nepali, most often referring to military or other service to the state.<sup>2</sup>

Such migration traditions, and their place within social structures and structures of feeling, are described and alluded to in songs and poetry, in particular, in the *viraha* genre. The term *viraha*, most simply translated as emotional pain, and in this context as longing, describes a thematic genre of song and poetry found throughout South Asia with

<sup>1</sup> Born, “Music: Ontology, Agency and Creativity.”

<sup>2</sup> Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850*.

songs about love and the pain of separation.<sup>3</sup> It is this theme of migration, separation, love, and longing that marks a song as *viraha*. The lyrical themes of *viraha* songs paint a consistent picture of migration traditions in which men venture out into the world to seek their fortunes, while women stay home and wait for their wandering sons, brothers, and lovers. Songs from both women’s and men’s perspectives associate village homes with the feminine, and cities and the wider world with the masculine. For example, Kolff cites the ballad, *Visaladevarasa*, composed in Old Marwari around 1450, in which a husband is going into *naukari* (here translated as “service as a courtier,” implying that he is going to serve a foreign king), and Kolff comments, “as so often in Indian literature, the woman of the house tries to make her travel-loving husband change his mind:”

O Lord, who tells you to go away and go into service as a courtier?

(when the master is away)

There is no money in the house or salt in the pitcher,

The low-born women quarrel in the house

Homes oppressed with debt are unpleasant,

Whether the master leaves as a *jogi*

Or whether he goes in shame into service as a courtier.<sup>4</sup>

The themes of women missing their husbands and trying to convince them to stay home, of poverty, and of debt, run through *viraha* songs, as the husbands always leave whether for military service, trade, or to become wandering ascetics, or some combination of these.<sup>5</sup> The tradition of *viraha* songs that express love and longing in the context of migration along these gendered lines provides a set of lyrical tropes on which dohori improvisers and writers of new songs draw, and thus influence the continuing character of migration songs today.

While *viraha* is discussed as a genre of poetry in many different South Asian languages, the broader word for songs expressing all types of sorrows, and the one more commonly used in Nepali, is *dukha*, suffering. In Nepal today, it is safe to say that “*dukha* songs” also comprise a broad thematic genre, within which *viraha* songs could be considered a subtype. So, all *viraha* songs are *dukha* songs, but not all *dukha* songs are *viraha* songs. Finally, there is also the closely related trope of remembering the village home (*gaugharko samjhana*), which does not necessarily hold the same connotations of love and longing for individual people as does *viraha*, and can be translated as nostalgia. These three concepts of *dukha*, *viraha*, and nostalgia characterize Nepali migration songs. As products of and participants in networks of social mediation, these songs, over centuries, have come to provide templates for how one should feel and express those feelings in the context of migration or separation from home or loved ones. We might see them as part of a pedagogy or regime of emotion<sup>6</sup> that mediates the relation between feeling and gendered social position among their performers and audiences. I will argue here that this is part of what they do, but that sociomusical mediation is also more complex and open-ended.

<sup>3</sup> Orsini, *Love in South Asia*.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *Visaladevarasa*, 57, cited in Kolff, *Naugar, Rajput, and Sepoy*, 76.

<sup>5</sup> Alter, *Moral Materialism: Sex and Masculinity in Modern India*. Kolff, *Naugar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850*.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, “Introduction: Regimes of Emotion”; Smith, “Towards a Manifesto for Feelings.”

As I briefly mentioned above, there are particular strands of migration songs that can be categorized according to the type of migration they address. The two most common strands diverge along gendered lines: songs about men’s migration for military service and trade,<sup>7</sup> and songs about women’s migration for marriage.<sup>8</sup> It is of course true that men migrate for other reasons than labor, including marriage, and women also migrate for labor. But the songs released today still depict a gendered difference in the experience of migration along the lines of much older *viraha* songs. Nevertheless, both types of songs express emotions about longing for the home places in which they were born, a nostalgia that has more similarities than differences. I have written elsewhere about women’s songs about remembering their natal homes,<sup>9</sup> songs about rural-urban migration in general,<sup>10</sup> and about songs in and about labor migration to the Gulf.<sup>11</sup> In this paper I thus focus on the military labor migration or the military *lāhure* experience. Along with women’s songs about remembering their *maita*, this constitutes one of the most broadly recognized set of migration-related poetic tropes and narratives in Nepali-language folk songs for the past two hundred years, since the advent of Nepalese recruitment into the British Army after the Anglo-Nepalese War, yet drawing on an even older tradition of songs about military labor migration that dates back several centuries.

### **Lyrics, Music, and Emotion in a Hundred-Year-Old Migration Lament**

The oldest example of which I am aware of a migration song recording in the Nepali language comes from “a collection of more than 2,500 audio-recordings of Allied prisoners of war done by the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission between 29 December 1915 and 19 December 1918, including a large number of non-white colonial prisoners.<sup>12</sup> The soldiers were asked to stand in front of the phonograph, and made to read out a text, or sing a song or tell a story.”<sup>13</sup> Carl Stumpf, one of the founders of the discipline of ethnomusicology, was the initiator of this project, which was framed as a linguistic study, with parallels to Boasian salvage ethnography. Among the prisoners was a man named Jashahadur Rai, born in 1893 or 1894 in the Indian district of Darjeeling. In the Zossen POW camp of Wünsdorf, on 6th June 1916, at 4 pm, he sang a song in Nepali into the phonograph of Carl Stumpf’s research assistant. The song now survives in a Wünsdorf archive, where is labeled “Gurkha Song, Own Words,” (PK 308). Jashahadur Rai died shortly after he sang this song, and was buried in Wünsdorf’s graveyard of the Common Wealth.

The song he sang, transcribed below, heartbreakingly expresses his suffering and his wish to return home, and also illustrates some of the themes that continue in *viraha* songs to this day. He addresses the song to the women he loves back home, apparently

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<sup>7</sup> Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850*; Hutt, *Devkota’s Muna-Madan: Translation and Analysis*.

<sup>8</sup> March, “Two Houses and the Pain of Separation in Tamang Narratives from Highland Nepal”; Narayan, “Singing from Separation: Women’s Voices in and about Kangra Folksongs”; Narayan, “Birds on a Branch: Girlfriends and Wedding Songs in Kangra.”

<sup>9</sup> Stirr, “Exchanges of Song”

<sup>10</sup> Stirr, “Exchanges of Song”

<sup>11</sup> Stirr, “Dohori on Sajha.com: Music Videos and the Politics of Memory”; Stirr, “Popular Music among Nepalis in Bahrain: Nightclubs, Media, Performance, and Publics.”

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Santanu Das for bringing this song to my attention, and to Ram Kumar Singh for helping with transcription.

<sup>13</sup> Born, “Music: Ontology, Agency and Creativity.”

both wife and sisters, addressing them with terms of endearment and kinship terms “*charī*,” “*didī*,” and “*kanchhī*,” but preceding these all with “*sun-lāune*,” “gold-wearing.” This could be read as an implied criticism, reminding them that it is his sacrifice that has brought them their gold, and leading to the question that runs through many migration songs to this day: was it worth it? The majority of the song expresses his personal experiences, narrating how he has seen the world and suffered greatly, and at the end, his implication that he has lost his faith in God seems to suggest that no, joining the British army and fighting in the First World War was most definitely not worth it.

Line	Nepali Transcription <sup>14</sup>	English Translation
1	<i>Sisai<sup>13</sup> kholā baḍhi jyān<sup>16</sup> āyo bagāyo bulbule</i>	With the rising of the Sisai river, I came, carried in its bubbling flow
2	<i>Germany desh mā āipugyau hamī Angrezko hukumle</i>	We arrived in the country, Germany, at the orders of the British
3	<i>Hai suna suna, sun lāune charī,<sup>17</sup> Angrezko hukumle</i>	Listen, oh listen, gold-wearing birdie, at the orders of the British
4	<i>Nepālī jyānko tīn dhāre pānī mul pāni turūrū</i>	Nepalis have three water taps, water flowing from the source
5	<i>Nepālī jyānko marne na bāchne man pani durūrū</i>	Nepali people, neither dying nor surviving, the heart also sobbing
6	<i>Na uḍī jānu na basī āunu, man rūnchha durūrū</i>	Neither can we fly away, nor can we arrive while staying put, the heart cries, sobbing
7	<i>Hai suna suna, sun lāune didī, man rūnchha durūrū</i>	Listen, oh listen, gold-wearing sister, the heart cries, sobbing
8	<i>Pāniko bulbul, yo manko chulbul, bujhāūchhau katin dīn</i>	The bubbling of water, the restlessness of this heart, how many days will it take to console yourself?
9	<i>Hai suna suna, sun lāune kānchhī, bujhāūchhau katin dīn</i>	Listen, oh listen, gold-wearing little one, how many days will it take to console yourself?

<sup>14</sup> Note on transcription: I give priority to the sound of what was sung and to visually representing poetic meter in the Nepali, so some spellings are nonstandard. And, I follow colloquial Nepali Romanization conventions and use ch and chh, instead of c and ch as in Sanskrit conventions.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the name of a river, as I have translated it, or perhaps he means “*susāī*,” “whistling,” a term commonly used to describe the sound of flowing streams.

<sup>16</sup> *Jyān* literally means “life” but also “body” – something like “incarnation” in the material sense, the material manifestation of life, different from *juni*, which is the time-span of “this life” as opposed to past and future lives. He uses this word to refer to himself and to other people, as well as sometimes to his body. This is common in songs and some rural, colloquial speech today as well. I’ve translated it differently in different verses according to the context. Since it appears so much throughout the song, it could also be treated as a *thego* – a word used not for its meaning but to fill out the syllables of the meter. I have translated as a meaningful word and not a *thego*, but either way it doesn’t change the meaning that much. *Jiu* is another word for body that he also uses, which connotes only the material body.

<sup>17</sup> *Charī* (“birdie”) is often used to refer to a girl in folk songs.

10	<i>Dui paisa bache tabalmar sigret salkāula mārchisle</i>	If I save two cents, I'll light a Tabalmar <sup>18</sup> cigarette with matches
11	<i>Hindustān pāri, ke rāmro pahād, ghāsaiko khaliyo</i>	Across Hindustan, what beautiful hills, storage places for fodder
12	<i>Baseko pirtī, chutāunam bhayo, man bādha baliyo</i>	The love we've had, we now have to break apart, bind your heart and be strong
13	<i>Hai suna suna, sun lāune charī, man bādha baliyo</i>	Listen, oh listen, gold-wearing birdie, bind your heart and be strong
	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> recording:</i>	
14	<i>Europai jyānko ke rāmro tarī gāseko tillī pāt</i>	The Europeans have such beautiful fields, shining leaves sewn together
15	<i>gwāpeko hunchha Tihara kisim dunaiko Dillī pāt</i>	They're joined together as if for Tihar, <sup>19</sup> a bowl made of leaves from Delhi
16	<i>he suna suna, sun laune didī, dunaiko Dillī pāt</i>	Listen, oh listen, gold-wearing sister, a bowl made of leaves from Delhi
17	<i>Europai jyānko baganai rāmro, torīko phul phulchha --phul phulchha phulchha man<sup>20</sup></i>	The Europeans have such beautiful gardens, mustard flowers bloom --when flowers bloom, so does the heart
18	<i>chaudhai sālko ladāiko suru dunyaiko bhukta man</i>	When the war of the year 14 began, the world's hearts suffered greatly
19	<i>garmiko mausam— garmiko mausam, garmi jyān bhayo, pankhaile humkaideu</i>	Hot summer weather— Hot summer weather, my body is hot, cool it off with a fan
20	<i>Europeko desh mā basnu man chhaina, India pathāideu</i>	I don't want to stay in a European country, please send me to India
21	<i>Gorkhālī khānchha khasiko shikhār khādaina rājai hās</i>	A Gorkhali eats goat meat, he doesn't eat swans
22	<i>Na bachdā gati, na mardā mati, Belgiumko mahārāj</i>	Surviving brings no progress, dying brings no knowledge, king of Belgium
23	<i>Jānu jyān jānu, jādā nai mero, dhou bhane kati dhou,</i>	Bodies must go, and when mine goes, if you wash it, how much can it be washed?
24	<i>Parālko āgo, jiu bhayo dāgo, rou bhane kati rou<sup>21</sup></i>	Fire of straw, my body has become like a string, if I cry, how much can I cry?

<sup>18</sup> This could be a brand of cigarette from that era.

<sup>19</sup> While the song is pretty clear here, I don't understand what a leaf-bowl from Delhi is supposed to signify in this context.

<sup>20</sup> Here he's changing the last phrase in order to rhyme with the next half of the couplet. So *torīko phul phulchha* (mustard flowers bloom) is the phrase he's throwing out.

25	<i>Pharānse jyānko kyā ramro tarī, ṭhulo chha suntalā</i>	The French have such beautiful fields, and there are large orange trees
26	<i>Pharāns ni miche ma herdā kheri, jiu badhchha tīn tolā</i>	I pushed through France too, and when I look back at it, my body gains 36 grams [out of fright] <sup>22</sup>
27	<i>Usai ra mero sāno jyān sāno ma kholdai kholdina</i>	That and my body is small, so small, I don't open up at all
28	<i>Germanko desh mā bātai jyān bujhdaina ma lājāile boldina</i>	In the country of the Germans, I don't understand their talk, and out of embarrassment, I don't speak
29	<i>Ki bhannu ṭhulo bhagavān bhannu dāju ke lāī?</i>	Tell me, brother, what can we call powerful – God?
30	<i>Madeshe jyānko hariyo pipal ghās kāṭū yellāī.</i>	Our green pipal tree of the plains might as well be cut down for fodder.

There are two recordings, recorded on two separate cylinders. While a difference in pitch at the beginning of the second recording suggests that some time elapsed between the two, the description of how prisoners' songs and testimonies were recorded also leads me to believe that there was not a break of more than a few minutes. I present them here as one song, but acknowledge a slight difference in thematic content between the two cylinders. The first one focuses on telling how he got there and addressing the women he loves; in the last couplets, he says what he must have known to be his last goodbye to them, asking his “*sun laune charī*” to bind her heart and be strong. The *viraha* aspects of love and longing are particularly highlighted in this first half, as are nostalgic memories of the hills of Hindustan and the mundane objects of everyday life, like the storage places for animals' fodder, or the bowls made of leaves. The second recording turns to his experiences in war and as a prisoner, admiring the fields and gardens of Europe all while remembering the horror of fighting, expressing the frustrations and humiliations of the POW camp, and wishing explicitly to be sent home. Line 28 is the only line in which he breaks the poetic meter, in an iconic illustration of discomfort and embarrassment at being unable to communicate while imprisoned in Germany. Line 29 and 30, the final couplet of the song, suggest that he has lost his faith. The first line of the couplet asks somewhat sarcastically what we can now call powerful after the suffering of the worlds' hearts in the war (mentioned in line 18), questioning if God can actually be believed to have any power. The second line of the couplet turns to a metaphor, the pipal tree that is worshipped as God. Saying that it might as well be cut down for fodder implies that he has lost all faith.

In musical terms, the song Jasbahadur Rai sang is a *jhyāure* song, defined as such by its poetic meter (*chhandā*, this particular one technically called *Asāre Jhyāure*), and

<sup>21</sup> The two lines of this couplet refer to funerary rituals – washing the body, making a cremation fire with straw as tinder.

<sup>22</sup> *Tolā* is a measure of weight. One *tolā* equals 12 grams. As to why he uses this particular number, *tīn tolā* is a common phrase in songs, often referring to gold. I think the phrase is *tīn tolā* and not, for example, *chār tolā*, because people find the alliteration pleasing.

by its 6-beat rhythmic *tāl*. *Asāre Jhyāure* poetic meter is associated with love songs of all varieties, tragic or happy.<sup>23</sup> Although Jasbahadur is singing alone without rhythmic accompaniment, the slow *jhyāure tāl* that would go along with this song, shown below with one possible pattern of *bols* for the *mādal*, is one often used with sad songs. This combination of poetic meter and *tāl* is common in slow, sad love songs. The melody Jasbahadur uses is a typical melody for this poetic meter.

	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Dhin	Tang	--	Phat	Tang	Dhin		Dhin	Tang	--	Phat	Tang	Dhin	

Figure 1. An example of one rhythmic pattern in slow *jhyāure tāl*.

## "Gurkha Song, Own Words"

Sung by Jasbahadur Rai at Zossen POW Camp, Wünsdorf, Germany, 1916



Figure 2. The melody of the first two couplets of Jasbahadur Rai's song.

Literary sources from the nineteenth century extensively demonstrate the association of *Asāre Jhyāure* poetic meter with love,<sup>24</sup> so we can make the informed assumption that this melody (based as it is on the poetic meter) would likely have held similar associations for Jasbahadur Rai at the time when he recorded it.<sup>25</sup> Although he was from Darjeeling, this melody could be heard in any number of places across the Nepali hills, west through the Mid-Western region. Thus the musical associations combined with the lyrics make this a song of love and ultimate sorrows, a nostalgic lament for a homeland the singer will never see again, mixed with anger at his predicament and the forces that have led him to an end far from home and those he loves. This poignant song blends an established pan-South-Asian tradition of *viraha* poetry with a poetic meter, melodic style, and *tāl* characteristic of Nepali-speaking areas, and thus serves as an excellent example of how poetics, narrative, and music intertwine to mediate

<sup>23</sup> Rhoderick Chalmers, "Pandits and Pulp Fiction," Anna Stirr, "Sounding and Writing a Nepali Public Sphere: The Music and Language of Jhyāure," Subi Shah, "Nepali Lok Gitko Jhalak."

<sup>24</sup> See Chalmers, Stirr

<sup>25</sup> However, this melody is not in the *Asare* rag of the hills of central and western Nepal, which has further associations with rice planting and thus even greater associations with love. As shown in Figure 2, the melody of Jasbahadur's song is in a major scale, yet without the characteristic patterns of any particular rag, classical or otherwise, as far as I am aware. This is the norm for most folk songs.



the emotions surrounding a military labor migrant or *lāhure*'s experience, in a set of traditions that continue to this day.

Understanding a bit about this tradition can help us see how it continues to influence contemporary migration songs, alongside changes, and how these songs remain important in people's lives. One way of examining the social work that songs accomplish, and the work people accomplish with songs, is to look at music as a form of social mediation. Georgina Born's recent work on music and mediation aims to theorize its processes in an open-ended way, without striving to create any sense of holistic closure. She suggests that we pay attention to four planes or orders of social mediation: the microsocial relations entailed in making music; music's use in creating imagined communities; music's relations with existing collectivities like nation, race, class, and gender; and the most broad level of the social and institutional orders that shape the relations of production, reproduction, and transformation.<sup>26</sup> She sees these orders or planes as part of a musical assemblage, connected in multiple yet nonlinear ways:

These four are irreducible to one another, and are articulated in contingent and non-linear ways through relations of affordance, conditioning, or causality...all of these orders of social mediation may enter into aesthetic experience for participants, listeners, or audiences...[and] if this relay of social relations – from wider social dynamics, to music-ensemble relations, to performance microsocialities – may sometimes be homologous, this is not inevitable.<sup>27</sup>

That the social relations that pervade the multiple social acts of making and engaging with music are not always homologous is central to studies of music and politics, and others like Born's study of the French experimental computer music institute IRCAM, which demonstrated that the prevailing egalitarian ethos of performance practice was in direct contradiction with highly rigid and hierarchical institutional norms. In instances like this, socio-musical experience can offer "a compensatory or alternative social space that fashions the social world differently."

The social space of the songfest in Nepal's rural hills has also been discussed as an alternative space in which the rules of conduct differ from those of everyday social relations.<sup>28</sup> In particular, this social space allows for the expression of emotions that may not be acceptable in other times and places. Amid the highly unequal social relations at the moment of recording Jasbahadur Rai's song, and the entire set of conditions that led him to be there in the first place, he drew on a song tradition and its associated context for singing that allowed him to express what he felt – the mix of emotions including love, fear, wonder, appreciation of beauty, desolation, disappointment, anger, frustration, sadness, longing, and more – in the dehumanizing conditions of a prison camp. Still, this realm of greater emotional expression intersects with other aspects of social relations in a less egalitarian or alternative way. In particular, gendered expectations about migration have continued to frame masculine and feminine activities and emotional positions in strikingly similar ways throughout the recorded history of folk song on the subcontinent

<sup>26</sup> Georgina Born, "Music: Ontology, Agency, Creativity," 8.

<sup>27</sup> Georgina Born, "Music: Ontology, Agency, Creativity," 9.

<sup>28</sup> Ahearn, "A Twisted Rope Binds My Waist": Locating Constraints on Meaning in a Tij Songfest"; Holland and Skinner, "Contested Ritual, Contested Femininities: (Re)Forming Self and Society in a Nepali Women's Festival"; Skinner, Holland, and Adhikari, "The Songs of Tij: A Genre of Critical Commentary for Women in Nepal"; Stirr, "Exchanges of Song: Migration, Gender, and Nation in Nepali Dohori Performance."

(that is, recorded in both writing and with audio or audiovisual technology). I thus concentrate on gendered themes and their relations to emotion in the following discussion of contemporary migration songs from Nepal’s music industry. In Born’s terms, paying attention to the intersection and interaction of the first order of social mediation with the third.

### Contemporary Songs of Migration

Nepal’s music industry, with myriad production and distribution companies that have proliferated since the early 1980s, continues to produce many songs related to migration of all sorts, and songs specifically focused on military labor migration (“*lāhure* songs”) form a significant number of these, and influence the others with their thematic content. All of them are about a male migrant and a woman who stays home while he is away. The themes of love (from sadly longing to expectantly anticipating) and money (including issues of greed, poverty, and debt), of military glory and exciting travel, of longing for home and for the one who has left, and of great suffering on the part of the *lāhure* and those he leaves at home, run through modern migration songs as well. Some songs express primarily joy or sorrow. But most songs contain and afford a range of emotions in their lyrics and music, which expand in a wide array of settings for listening, viewing, and performance.

### Cheerful Songs

Happy *lāhure* songs almost always involve the migrant’s return, and what he brings with him in both material and symbolic terms. Songs abound of *lāhures* home on leave flirting with young village girls who idealize both their wealth and their militarized hypermasculinity.<sup>29</sup> The oldest example I can find of this type of song is Mitrasen Thapa Magar’s 1936 song “*Lāhureko Relimai Fashionai Rāmro*,” in which the singer discusses the glamour of being a *lāhure*. In terms of musical *tāl* and melodic features, it is difficult to generalize about these songs, but all of the ones I mention here are in fast *jhyaure tāl* whether they are considered to be in the genres of *lok gīt*, *lok pop*, or *lok adhunik*. These latter songs are primarily from films, and it is this *jhyaure tāl* that adds the “*lok*” element to the other genres, and its fast tempo or *laya* that is associated with energetic dancing and often (though not always) with happy songs.

*Lāhures* and other male migrants in these cheerful songs bring fashion, the glamour of the foreign, and promises of fulfillment of generalized female fantasies. They pepper their Nepali with Hindi and English, and return to Nepal with fashionable gifts and promises of love, and perhaps new, exciting lives abroad for girls back home. “Friends and brothers, generals and colonels, in the Gorkhali battalions, take me and show me around London,” sings a girl in one song from the film *Daiva Sanjog*.<sup>30</sup> “*Achha, lekin* London’s damp will make you catch cold,” sings the *lāhure* in return, using the Hindi words for “yes, but...” in the beginning of his response. A girl in another song,

<sup>29</sup> Heather Streets argues that British imperial martial race discourse contributed significantly to idealization of military masculinity: “...the language of martial races overshadowed diverse cultural expressions and obscured massive regional changes brought about by incorporation into the Empire’s global reach. Instead, martial race discourse produced a masculinized, stylized vision of these regions and their people that has been extraordinarily difficult to resist both by outsiders and, as we have seen, sometimes even by insiders,” Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race, and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*.

<sup>30</sup> Sung by Shambhujit Banskota

from the film *Takdir*,<sup>31</sup> sings of the *pardeśī*, the one gone abroad, who will return with everything ready to marry the singer —the vermilion powder, bangles, and beads for her to wear as a wife. In “I’m a Lahure in a Gorkha Platoon” (“*Ma ta lāhure Gorkha paltanko*”), the soldiers themselves celebrate their *lāhure* status.<sup>32</sup> And in one song known as “*Lāhure dāī*,”<sup>33</sup> the women at home simply welcome the *lāhure* back:

*Lāhure dāī, chhuṭimā āko*  
*Hāsa bola, maukā mā bheṭ bhāko*  
 Brother soldier, home on leave,

Laugh and talk, now that we have the opportunity to meet.

So, cheerfulness in these songs is bound up with gendered notions of future-oriented possibilities, whether in the simple happiness that a male relative has returned to his patiently waiting female loved ones, or in the promises of wealth, status, and associations with desirable worldly experience that these men bring as marriage prospects. It is also worth noting that the songs, in the context of the films, follow the *rasa* tradition of aesthetics in drama by expressing one dominant emotion at a time,<sup>34</sup> while the films themselves contain a wide range of emotion and do not usually have happy endings. This perspective allows us to see these songs as representing stolen moments of happiness in a *dukha*-dominated genre, where the predominant emotion, though not one of the ones that corresponds to *rasa* theory, may be hope. Yet film songs have lives of their own outside of the films, and their recontextualizations in performance are worth examining.

These cheerful songs are performed mainly in contexts that aim to celebrate the life they describe. All of these recent songs are standards in *dohori* restaurants, from Nepal’s major cities to the communities of Gurkha soldiers and ex-Gurkhas in England. *Dohori* restaurants often aim to cater to “British and Indian *lāhures*” as customers, because they generally have more money than others returning from abroad, and especially the ones from the central and western hill areas are often partial to *lok dohori* songs that recall their home areas. The former manager of Kathmandu’s Nirmaya Rodhi Club, Ramesh Babu Shrestha, told me in an interview that he saw men returned from the British and Indian armies and Singapore police as his primary target audience, first because many of them lived around the Kamaladi area where the *dohori* restaurant was located, second because he was trying to impress his then father-in-law who was ex-British-army, and third because they had cultural links to the songs and their performance traditions, and (he thought) they felt a kinship with the songs and the performance practice of *lok dohori* that other customers may not have; in short, he thought they could make the restaurant thrive because they would have a personal connection to the performances that would keep them coming back and bringing their friends. To an extent, he was right, but the customer base of *dohori* restaurants is more diverse as well. Still, Ramesh Babu discouraged performing *dukha* and *viraha* songs about *lāhures*’ experiences, as the questioning of the *lāhure* life inherent in their lyrics might seem insulting to his preferred patrons.

Beyond *dohori* restaurants, these cheerful and energetic songs are popular in concerts *lok dohori* artists perform abroad, often sponsored by groups like the Magar

<sup>31</sup> Music by Mahesh Khadka, sung by Sadhana Sargam

<sup>32</sup> Sung by Khuman Adhikari, 2010

<sup>33</sup> Music by Narayan Rayamajhi, sung by Bishnu Majhi and Bishnu Khatri, 2012 (remake).

<sup>34</sup> Ranade, *Hindi Film Song*.

Sangh New York, or the Tamu Dhi UK, ethnic organizations whose members contain a large number of Nepalis retired from the British army, along with their families. Part of the ubiquity of these “cheerful *lāhure* songs” also has to do with the performers, who aim to create an atmosphere of excitement and fun in dohori restaurants and at concerts, with few sad songs, favoring songs that portray *lāhures* and the life of a soldier in a positive light. All of the “cheerful songs” mentioned here circulate among performers as mp3s in karaoke track form, as singers help each other to give the performances they think their audiences expect. A quick look at the karaoke tracks on professional lok dohori singer Suman Budha Magar’s laptop in the US in 2012, and also at those available at the Aradous Hotel’s dohori restaurant in Manama, Bahrain in 2010, revealed many “cheerful *lāhure* songs,” but zero slow, sorrowful songs about migration per se, though there were those about lost love and separation (*ādhunik* or *lok ādhunik*, from singers like Arun Thapa and Shambhu Rai). There is some room for sad songs in dohori restaurants and stage programs, especially at the beginning of the evening’s program and if they are requested. But, I have been present when singers (including myself, in Bahrain in 2010) have been asked to cut the sad, slow tunes and please give the audience something energetic. Despite performers’ emphasis on providing their audience an experience of joyful entertainment, and the prevalence of cheerful and energetic songs at live performance venues, songs expressing sorrow and nostalgia remain popular especially in their recorded forms, for watching and listening, and in more intimate performances among groups of friends.

### **Songs of *Dukha* and *Viraha* Today**

Like Jasbahadur’s song, contemporary songs of separation and longing regarding military labor migration acknowledge its darker sides, especially the real possibility of death and the fact that the traveling soldier, like Jasbahadur Rai, may never come home. One recent famous song is the 1990s song/2008 remake *Ramdi Bridge (Rāmdi Pul)*,<sup>35</sup> which takes place at the time of parting, and expresses a strong sense of apprehension that the *lāhure* may not survive.

*Rāmdi pula tārane bhittikai, bāche bheṭa, mare ni yettikai*

Right after crossing Ramdi bridge, if I survive, we’ll meet again, if I die, well then.

*Bāche bhane yehi bāṭo phirani, mare bhane, rifleko sirani*

If I survive, I’ll be back this way, if I die, a rifle for a pillow.

This song, in its 2008 remake in the Nepali film *Gorkha Paltan* (a vehicle for the Indian Idol winner and erstwhile Indian armed policeman, Prasant Tamang), displays a classic visual trope of the *lāhure* leaving home, paying respect to his parents in a ritual of leave-taking. He takes *tikā* from his mother, bows to the feet of both his parents, and leaves the courtyard of his home, walking down to join other *lāhures* on a bus through the Nepali hills, which carries them to a train through the Indian plains. This could be almost any *lāhure* music video. For example, the same sequence also appears in a 2003 video by lok dohori star Bhagwan Bhandari, *Mother, I’m Going Abroad (Lāge Āmā Pardeś Tira)*. In this video, Bhagwan plays himself as he leaves his parents (played by his real parents at

<sup>35</sup> Music and lyrics by Narayan Rayamajhi. This is the song I was asked not to repeat in a Manama dohori restaurant, because it was too sad and slow. The owner of this restaurant was a bit draconian about song preference and had banned other songs as well, including the widely popular “Nepali Ho,” for reasons the artists did not understand.

their family home in Syangja) for a manual labor job in Qatar (which was his actual job). The earliest of what are now many Gulf migration videos, *Mother, I'm Going Abroad* fits right into the existing *lāhure* song tropes, both visual and lyrical. Both of these songs are in slow *jhyāure tāl*, with different poetic meters. While *Ramdi Bridge* is a *dohori* song and *Mother, I'm Going Abroad* has a structure that can be sung as *dohori*, both of these songs are rarely used as the basis for new *dohori* improvisations in their verses, but rather performed as recorded. My speculation as to why is that their slow *jhyāure tāl* marks them as songs for listening rather than for dancing, and especially in the case of the now-classic song *Ramdi Bridge*, the original lyrics are what listeners expect to hear, as the song does not have a chorus. These songs, thought of as for listening and viewing, not for dancing, and not usually for making up one's own couplets, offer a more bounded sense of the relation between emotions and gendered social positions. Songs that are meant for dancing and improvising bring the experience of engaging with them closer to the songfest, in which a greater range of emotions and gendered expectations come into play.

A song on the same themes but with some important musical differences that change the emotional landscape of its live performances is “*Sararara Water on the Mill*” (*Sararara pānī ghaṭṭāmā*), sung in its original commercial version by Purushottam Neupane and Sharmila Gurung. Opening with nearly the same sequence of the *lāhure* leaving, this song focuses on the husband-wife relationship, and represents the conventionally gendered, centuries-old migration narrative of the man who heads out into the dangerous world and the woman who stays behind, dependent on her man.

This *dohori* song has a verse-chorus structure, within which the verses can be improvised, but they're pre-written on the recording. When people perform it live, the verses they sing are almost always different, but the choruses remain the same. The chorus the men sing is:

*Sararara pānī ghaṭṭāmā, Aba pyāri pharkanchhu pharkanna nām sārē hai  
pension paṭṭāmā*

Sararara water on the mill, Now, my dear, I don't know if I'll return; I've written your name down on the pension paper.

And the women's chorus is:

*Sararara pānī ghaṭṭāmā, Mero pyārā hajurai nahūdā man bujhlā ra pension  
paṭṭāmā*

Sararara water on the mill, My dear, without you, how can a pension paper comfort my heart?

While maybe the female chorus is meant to be another statement about the value of love over money in the vein of Jasbahadur's gentle admonishment of his “*sun lāune charī*,” it presents the feminine position as one of total dependence, whether on love or on money.

This was a song that, when it came out in 2006, was paradoxically popular in Kathmandu and Pokhara's *dohori* restaurants, where the prevailing tone of performances tends toward the cheerful, flirtatious, and celebratory rather than toward themes of *dukha*. Even four years after it came out, customers in Aldershot, England's *dohori* restaurants would also request this song. Since Aldershot is probably the largest community of ex-Gurkhas and their families outside of Nepal, it makes sense that an audience there would request songs that addressed (at least the conventional narratives relevant to) their own experience. Another reason for the song's continued popularity in live performance was probably its danceability. Unlike the other songs discussed so far, which are in a slow

*jhyāure tāl* that requires slower dancing and that in most commercial live performance venues would empty the dance floor as audience members opt to focus on listening, “Srarara Water On The Mill” is in a moderately fast 4-beat *khyāli tāl*. Audience members routinely dance to this song, though without some of the most energetic *jhyāure* dance moves that characterize dances to fast *jhyāure* songs. This combination of *dukha* and danceability recalls the mood characterizing village songfests, where the co-presence of joy and sorrow is expected and celebrated as part of the beauty of life.

While I have no recordings of “Srarara Water on the Mill” sung in village songfests, I do have one from a *dohorī* competition. This recording illustrates the conjunction of recurring, conventional tropes of *dukha* and *viraha* as expressed in the lyrics, and the *sukha* in collective singing and dancing that the song’s danceable beat helps facilitate. Dohori competitions replicate rural festivals more than small-scale songfests, and this particular competition took place at Kathmandu’s Bhrikuti Mandap in front of an audience of thousands, in the winter of 2007. It was run by the Lok Dohori Professional’s Organization, the organization of *dohorī* restaurant owners, and teams from each *dohorī* restaurant competed against each other, each side (men or women) gaining points for the quality of poetry in their lyrics and their musicality. In this particular competition round, the men from Jharana Dohori Sanjh competed against the women from Ganga Jamuna Dohori Sanjh. Each team has a lead singer and one or two side singers, who, as in rural songfests, both sing along with the lead singer on repetitions of couplets and refrains, and suggest couplets for him or her to sing in response to the opposing team. The particular gimmick of this competition was to give the singers a topic on which to improvise their couplets, testing their ability to come up with couplets dealing with a range of emotions and situations. The competition emcee gave this pair of teams their topic:

[Unrecorded: You two have been married for three days. And he’s in the army.] Now, you do this. You have to leave tomorrow. It’s evening today, and a letter arrived. You opened it and looked at it. And you have to leave right away. Tomorrow early in the morning you have to get going, you see. So it’s the conversation between the two of you. Rajiv. You, husband and wife. Understand? Because it fits the context, we’ve given them the tune, “Srarara water on the mill, now my dear, I don’t know if I’ll return, I’ve written your name on the pension paper.” Because it’s timely and fits the theme exactly, do you agree with this tune? Okay, who’s going to start?

The *sārangī* began to play, the emcee announced which teams were up next, and on this cold February day, many audience members got up to dance. The song unfolded like this (the transcription below contains only the improvised couplets, which were each repeated three times with the appropriate male or female choruses sung in between each repetition):

Couplet	Nepali transcription	English translation
1	Men: <i>Āyo chīṭṭhī najāna bhā chhaina</i> <i>Merī sanī chhodnai man lā chhaina</i>	A letter’s arrived, and I can’t not go My little one, I don’t want to leave you
2	Women: <i>Budhā sangai chhu ma ta</i> <i>tolāko</i> <i>Yati chīṭhai kina ho bolāko</i>	I’m sitting here with my husband, thinking Why did they have to call you so soon
3	Men: <i>Khāe jāgir parnale rinmā</i> <i>Basnai paryo arkāko adhinmā</i>	I went into the service to repay a loan I have to follow the orders of others

4	Women: <i>Pokhnai paina yo manko bilāuna</i> <i>Sakinna ra dui chār din milāuna</i>	I didn't get to express the laments in my heart Can't you get a few days extension?
5	Men: <i>Āyo hukum jānu nai parchha</i> <i>Sangai basna malāi ni rahar chha</i>	The order arrived, and I have to go I also wish I could stay here together
6	Women: <i>Dherai chha ni manakā kurā</i> <i>Sakesamma najānus hajura</i>	There are so many things in my heart If you can, please don't go, sir
7	Men: <i>Lāgne hoina sadhailāi para</i> <i>Bhaigo bhaigo ti āsu najhāra</i>	I'm not going away forever Enough, enough, don't let those tears fall
8	Women: <i>Jānchhu bhandā ma bāṭa</i> <i>chhuṭera</i> <i>Jharchhan āsu bhakano phuṭera</i>	When you say you're going away and leaving me Tears fall, breaking the dam
9	Men: <i>Bhane pani āsuko ādhi</i> <i>Merī pyārī basideu man bādhī</i>	Even if there's a storm of tears, My dear, keep your heart bound
10	Women: <i>Kasto hunchha āphaile bhana</i> <i>Samālda ni bujhdāina yo mana</i>	See for yourself how it is, Even if I try to convince myself, this heart won't understand
11	Men: <i>Ke garau ta pugena dekheko</i> <i>Yastai raichha bhagyamā lekheko</i>	What can you do, what we see never comes, We find this is what's written in our fate
12	Women: <i>Najau bhanchhu namāna pira</i> <i>Je je hunchha te garchha ākhira</i>	I'm saying, don't go, and don't be worried, I know you'll do whatever you're going to do in the end
13	Men: <i>Chhoḍnai byasta dui char din</i> <i>hāta</i> <i>Rukha muni roī basna bhandā ta</i>	Keep your hands busy for a few days, Rather than sitting and crying under a tree
14	Women: <i>Ekās āto chadaicham khāko</i> <i>Ke po rukho garchha ni majjako</i>	We've eaten our cornmeal mush from the same plate, Now you're making a mockery of our pleasure
15	Men: <i>Yo manaimā rinaiko churī chha</i> <i>Yasto thālchha chuhine dhurī chha</i>	The dagger of the loan is in my heart And these drops – the roof is leaking
16	Women: <i>Āe pani hāwā ra hurīlāi</i> <i>Khar kāṭera chhāula ni dhurīlāi</i>	Even if wind and hurricanes come, We'll cut thatch and mend the roof
17	Men: <i>jharchha āsu chatimā pugchha</i> <i>Sanī dherai nasamjhāu dil dukchha</i>	Tears fall onto my chest, Little one, don't try to convince me so much, my heart hurts
18	Women: <i>jen tena hāmlāi pugyachha</i> <i>khānu</i> <i>Je je hunchha yehi basam hai sānu</i>	We have enough to eat simply, Whatever happens, let's stay here, alright little one?
19	Men: <i>Mai hu timlāi sadhai sāth dine</i> <i>Naroī basa āune chhu pheri ni</i>	I'm the one who will always keep you company Don't cry, I am coming back again
20	Women: <i>Timi mero ma timro bhara</i>	You depend on me, and I on you

	<i>Chhoḍi hīḍne bho kurā nagara</i>	Don't talk of going and leaving me.
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The themes in this narrative hark back to the song from 1450 that Kolff quotes as exemplary of *viraha* tradition: the man is determined to go, and the woman tries to convince him to stay home. These singers are professionals being tested on their ability to create a narrative on a given topic – they are acting, rather than expressing what is in their hearts, their *manko kura* as the phrase in the song goes. Yet their skillful use of narrative tropes reproduces the masculine and feminine emotional positions found in hundreds of years of *viraha* songs. Listening at the time, and later transcribing and translating, I found the song moving, as did the emcee, who summed up the song this way:

If eyes didn't try to cry, and lips didn't try to laugh, what a beautiful life it would be. But look, love can fill up the heart in an instant, just an instant, like this couple about to be separated after three days of marriage. Brother, you sang an extremely sweet song, heartfelt congratulations and thanks to you both.

With a nod to a perspective that emotional equanimity might be best, the emcee recognized the singers for playing their roles well and creating what he felt to be a believable enactment of the emotional states of lovers who would be separated too soon. The female singer's final couplet suggests a relation of mutual dependence between husband and wife, in contrast to the original recording's expression of total feminine dependence.

Judges, other artists, and some others including ethnomusicologists may listen intently to all the lyrics of a song in a dohori competition. Not so everyone in the audience, some of whom are there primarily to dance, and others for the social atmosphere. The tempo of the song in the competition increased considerably in comparison to the original, making it easy to dance to. Some of the members of Sampurna Tamu Samaj showed up in their ethnic dress to dance, and other audience members flocked to the dance floor set up between the judges' table and the stage. Food stalls surrounded the perimeter and audience members flocked to them, and sat in small groups a bit away from the main stage area, eating their snacks and chatting. The performance event itself involved all of these things, the push and pull between conventions of *dukha* and *viraha* songs, and lyrical and musical reinterpretations, mediating multiple ways of emotional engagement with the reality of migrant lives.

## Conclusion

I end with another songfest performance, this time an urban one. The participants have all migrated multiple times, within Nepal and around the world with the British and Indian armies. The song they sing follows the conventional gendered narrative to a point, but here the woman hesitates, resisting the pull of the man's masculine qualities in which he seems so confident.

*Purnimāko junelī rātaimā, mai hu kānchhī Malāya ko lāhure, sangai jāne jau  
hīḍa sāthaimā*

In the night of the shining full moon, here I am, Kanchhi, a lāhure in Malaya, if you want to, come on, come along together.

*Purnimāko junelī rātaimā, lāhure jīvan arkaiko hātaimā, sangai basna paindaina  
sāthaimā*

In the night of the shining full moon, a lāhure's life is in others' hands, and you



don't get to be together.

I first heard this song just this past winter at the Gurung/Tamu Lhosar party at Kathmandu's Tundhikhel, after participating in the parade, marching along singing *chudkā dohori* songs with Sat Muhane Deurali Tamu Society. Maya Gurung, the professional *lok dohori* singer whose song opened this article, was present there in the background, singing along. The lead *dohori* singers in the short video I recorded, Rum Gurung and his wife, have lived the life to which the song alludes. Rum was in the Indian Army, and his wife put up with it all. Now grandparents, they participate a great deal in social service, and are very much involved in the Tamu Society functions. In this video, members of the Tamu Society were sitting in their stall on the Tundhikhel, eating momos and drinking the copious bottles of homemade alcohol that everyone had carried throughout the whole parade, stashed in the decorative bags that the Society's women had knitted for this very occasion. At the beginning of the recording the women finish their couplet. The first line of the couplet is cut off, but they sing the second line, *dhartī muni mā*, “under the earth,” before returning to their chorus. Rum sings another verse couplet (a stock one) right after: *ghām āyo ghamāilo, bachunjela garau na ramāilo, purnimāko junelī rātaimā* ... “the sun came out, it's sunny, as long as we live, let's enjoy ourselves, in the night of the shining full moon...” Everyone joins in on the chorus, certainly enjoying themselves. On multiple other occasions, these men and women have expressed that feel like they have earned the right to enjoy life when they can, and the song holds special poignancy for them. As everyone sings, life goes on. Someone passes someone else money, trying to figure out how much is owed and who is paying for the momos. Side conversations continue and finish, and the participants join back into the song. The hubris of the male chorus, and even perhaps the hesitation of the female chorus, provide something for everyone to laugh at, remembering their younger selves and all they have been through in lives characterized by separation, some reunions, and some goodbyes. Part of the laughter and enjoyment, even when the song is sad, comes from comparing song narratives with their own lives, recognizing how some of the lyrics and their themes may correspond with realities of experiences and expectations, but also how their lives exceed the narratives in the songs. Music and dance embody some of that excess, as do improvised couplets with little or no connection to refrains, and sometimes little or no connection even to each other. The result is a multiply refracted performance experience irreducible to a single text, a single set of emotions, or a single narrative about gendered experiences of migration.

The idea of music mediating migrant experience also cannot be reduced to a pedagogy of emotions in which song themes present for hundreds of years thoroughly shape feelings regarding migration. The themes are there as resources on which to draw, play with, and challenge. Narrative themes do have a significant force – I have yet to hear a song or see a video that reverses gender roles – but at the level of performance, these narrative themes are also not all that matters. Songfests and related performances like *dohori* competitions, and even music videos, can function as alternative social spaces in which dominant gender hierarchies may be present but not dominant, and available for refashioning along with their associated emotional narratives regarding how migration feels, for those who move and those who remain in one place.

This brief discussion of the gendered emotional themes and musical associations in songs of *dukha*, *viraha*, and nostalgia, and their intersection with the microsocialities

formed in performance (the relation between Born’s third and first orders of sociomusical mediation) only begins to hint at how emotion and social categories come into play in performances of songs with such long histories. Further study of how these performances relate also to the other two orders of mediation – social collectivities or imagined communities, and the broader set of political-economic relations that run through them – may help bring about a greater understanding of how music mediates in this particular assemblage and its networks of migration and musical circulation.

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