

**Constituting ‘Standard Public’ and ‘Alternative Public’: A
Study of the Discourse around Language and Identity in Selected
Bundeli Texts**

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**Doctor of Philosophy in
Comparative Literature**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Constituting ‘Standard Public’ and ‘Alternative Public’: A Study of the Discourse around Language and Identity in Selected Bundeli Texts,**” submitted by Barkhade Dipakbhai Mangalbhai, bearing Reg. No. 14HCPH02, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of **Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature**, to the Center for Comparative Literature, University of Hyderabad, India is a bona fide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

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A. Published in

“Reading *Annihilation of Caste* from a Cultural Perspective” in *All About Ambedkar: A Journal on Theory and Praxis* (ISSN 2582-9785) Vol. 2, No.2, edited by Mahitosh Mandal, Dec. 2021, pp.160-167

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&

B. Presented in the following conferences:

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Further, the student has passed the following courses towards fulfilment of coursework requirement for Ph.D.:

No.	Course Code	Course	Credits	Pass/Fail
1.	CL 802	Research Method and Diss. Writing	02	PASS
2.	RS 802	Theorizing Region: Indian Context	04	PASS
3.	CL 811	History, Representation and Identity	04	PASS
4.	CL 812	Course with Supervisor	02	PASS
5.	AL-871	Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice	04	PASS

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DECLARATION

I, **Barkhade Dipakbhai Mangalbhai** (Reg. No. 14HCPH02), hereby declare that this doctoral thesis, titled **“Constituting ‘Standard Public’ and ‘Alternative Public’: A Study of the Discourse around Language and Identity in Selected Bundeli Texts,”** submitted to the Center for Comparative Literature, University of Hyderabad, India by me under the supervision of Prof. Sowmya Dechamma C. C. is a bona fide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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Date: 20/01/2022

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Introduction

Reconstructing Bundeli as a Counter-Public: A Genealogical Tracing of Discourse around 'Minor' Languages

I begin with a childhood memory. It was 2000-2001 and, at thirteen years old, I was in the eighth grade at the Gujarati Medium High school in my town, Selamba, in the district of Narmada, Gujarat State, India. It was the last term of the year. There was a sports festival going on in the school campus. We were cheering the Kabaddi players amidst groups of boisterous lads. We were excited and engrossed in watching our favorite players at the spot. All of a sudden, we watched the students, who were around us, leaving the spot in a hurry to the other side. I turned back and saw that all the students had swarmed on the backside, where our sports teacher, who attended his duty from a nearby hamlet, had fallen unconscious on the ground. No sooner we reached the room where the body of the sports teacher had been taken inside the school, he was declared dead with a heart attack. Our sports teacher was an Adivasi. His brother, a doctor by profession, had reached the school after receiving news of the mishap. He had taken cognizance of the tragedy and came out of the room. The man appeared to be in an attack mode and condemned Mr. Patel, a man from Gujarati upper-caste, and the senior head of the school for insensitively putting pressure on his brother to manage the sports festival. He expressed his anger on the Gujarati administrator because the latter had been informed about his brother's heart surgery. He blamed the upper-caste Gujarati administrator, who had treated his brother cruelly. He complained of caste discrimination. I remember this incident even today for this reason: the brother of our sports teacher had vehemently cried out his pain in socially charged language. To my awe as a child, the expression was in English which had left the environment charged. When we attended the sports teacher's funeral in his hamlet, I heard some members crying out the pain in English near the body of our sports teacher. The incident left a deep impression on my mind because it was fascinating to me, to my age and social background in a socio-economically

‘backward’ place.¹ In a nutshell, the Adivasi brother witnessed an event of institutional atrocity. He used his mother-tongue, Dehvali,² with the members of his community and with the non-Adivasi members in the dominant public language, Gujarati. But his response was contingent upon a provoking situation in English, the language of the master. This suggests that the memory of a speaker from the marginalized community is complex. Such contingency can go unnoticed when you are trained to understand language as an external object, which happens ‘out there’ in the public as a performance, and as a commodity of the capitalists in the networks of institutions and markets for consumption, but not in the form of how you experience/embody language and affect it entails in the day to day life.

I share the above anecdote to throw light on my exposure to social discrimination at an early age across linguistic boundaries and its affect. The event of emotional outbursts in the English language by the member of an Adivasi community had disturbed, on the one hand, the caste dynamics in the vernacular space, and had left, on the other, an affective or expressive trace behind. My encounter with the described event had ingrained in me the potential to experience the rupture in the inhabitation of my linguistic and cultural space. In the present introduction to my Ph.D. thesis, I attempt to recollect the moments of resistance in day-to-day discourses that are erased by the mainstream academia. Academics largely approach language as an external event, not as an embodied one. My academic interest in the Bundeli language and language-based identities emerges from such personal events. Therefore, my effort in this introduction is to point out how the events of affect become central in the production of the linguistic and cultural archive. And, how, through the expression of such experiences, the ethnolinguistic caste minority

¹ Narmada district has been counted in the list of India’s “250 most backward districts.” It is entitled to a separate fund for its socio-economic development under “Backward Regions Grant Fund Program (BRGF)” since 2006. See, “A Note on the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme.” Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 8 Sept. 2009, [archive.org/web/20120405033402/http://www.nird.org.in/brgf/doc/brgf_BackgroundNote.pdf](http://www.nird.org.in/brgf/doc/brgf_BackgroundNote.pdf). Accessed 26 Nov. 2020.

² In a personal interview with Jitendra Vasava, the convenor of Adivasi Sahitya Sabha, Sagbara (Gujarat), I was informed that Dehvali was one of languages spoken by the members of Adivasi community in my village and the entire Sagbara block of Narmada district, south Gujarat and Nandurbar, north Maharashtra. Vasava, Jitendra. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 25 Nov. 2020. The local Bundeli Chamars, including all other caste groups, cannot do their mercantile business with the local Dehvali speakers without speaking in it in the daily routine. I myself grew up speaking Dehvali as the local language, Bundeli as my home-tongue and Gujarati as the language in the local school.

offers its version of language and culture that differs from the dominant version of language, culture, politics, and history.

Firstly, I am discriminated against for speaking Bundeli in Selamba. This is a collective issue. Bundeli is identified by the upper-caste Marwaris (the *vaisya* or merchant community who claim high rank in the caste hierarchy) as the language of Chamars (members of Schedule Caste (SC), a tanner community which is stratified at the very last in the bottom of caste-hierarchy and treated as ‘ex-untouchable’ due to their caste occupation of repairing/making shoes). I was taught that my home language was *chamari* (a language of ‘lower’ caste) both inside and outside my community. The basic reason behind the mentioned identification was utter ignorance and casteist prejudices among the upper-caste male and cultural shame among the local Chamars themselves. Since the upper-caste non-Bundeli speakers legitimized Bundeli into a language of ‘lower-caste’ community, the negative impact of social gaze was normalized in my mind. I was humiliated by the upper-caste male for carrying the identity of an ‘inferior’ language in the streets of Selamba on a daily basis. This event of early childhood kept me intrigued for a long time because I experienced it as an insider at my home and as an outsider in the local school, at the playgrounds with local Marwari boys, the local health center, the shops owned by the upper-castes and the local Hindu temple surrounded by the men and women of privileged Marwari castes. The caste identity of the Bundeli language implicates the bodies of Chamars in the public spaces of Selamba in many complex ways.

My focus here is on the Bundeli community that is recognized as Chamar and that speaks the Bundeli language in the north Maharashtra districts and south Gujarat districts, India. Since I belong to the community that I am associated as a research student, the information mentioned here and its interpretation constitute an ongoing process of my observation and understanding of my community over the past seven years or so, when I began to be conscious of ‘our’/my difference from the mainstream culture. I lived with my community in Selamba in the district of Narmada, Gujarat until I joined my Under-Graduate studies in 2005-2006 outside my home district and moved onto my research in 2014 outside Gujarat, my home state. The following fourteen to fifteen years since 2005, I have spent studying, researching, and working outside Narmada. As Narmada is adjacent to Nandurbar and other districts in north Maharashtra, where a

large chunk of Bundeli speaking Chamars settled over a period of time, I, like most Bundeli speaking Chamars, ‘revisit’ Narmada and Nandurbar for weddings, funerals, childbirths, and celebration of *bhujariya*—our main festival which is celebrated in August as an event of community gathering to express thanks and apologies and well wishes with one another. *Bhujariya* is quite popular in Madhya Pradesh districts of Bundelkhand in Central India. It is popular with the names *bhujariya* and *kajli* as part of the agrarian society in the rural sphere. I do not find the new generation, which has assimilated into the Gujarati or the Marathi mainstream culture, visiting regularly to attend *bhujariya*. As a researcher, I visit my village Selamba to participate in *bhujariya* and find it assimilated into the Hindu fold.

I hold an ‘insider’ position in my community. But I am inclined to keep an approach to critically observe my cultural differences from that of my ‘own’ community. I can note the markers of the underdeveloped status of my ethnolinguistic community in terms of socio-economic reforms. I am bound to play different roles in cultural participation at various levels inside family, village, community, and events of joy and sorrow. But I make a clear distinction between cultural differences and cultural backwardness. I argue that to associate culturally with my ethnolinguistic caste minority is a way to experience social contradictions. I explain my association with my community in the background of its age-old migration and resettlement into the new political boundaries of Gujarat and Maharashtra.

During my Ph.D., I visited my hometown to attend a cultural meeting which was organized by the senior male members at Nandurbar. My *nana* (mother’s father) as one of the senior members, had led the meeting. He presented a leaflet with the title, ‘Chamar Samaj Mandal’ and requested the members present to consider the replacement of the term, *chamar* with *chamakar*, a cognate of the former in Sanskritized Marathi form. The members expressed their strong consent to my *nana*’s request. They argued that (Bundeli speaking) Chamars needed to look ‘respectable’ while representing their community in the public space. As an insider to such events, I counted upon what the term, *chamakar* had carried in the lives of people belonging to my ethnolinguistic caste minority. The educated members found it unpleasant to speak in Bundeli with their fellow members. They practiced class prejudice with me and others like me on the ground of our roots in the village. They practiced casteism with the members of

other non-Bundeli sub-castes in the Dalit community. They demanded high dowry. There were serious issues such as communal prejudice towards Muslims. In a nutshell, my ethnolinguistic caste minority made/makes all attempts to assimilate themselves into a majoritarian Hindu Marathi/Gujarati/Hindi culture.

I find celebration of cultural differences, in the name of ‘Hindu’ culture, contradictory. It does not set my/our ethnolinguistic caste minority on the pathway to socio-economic reformation in life. In fact, it is treated as ‘ex-untouchable’, ‘polluted’ for its caste-occupation in society. Instead, Bundeli has been an alien subject to the world outside my community including, to my surprise, to the Bundeli society itself in Bundelkhand.³ Therefore, the events of affect across caste and language discrimination between my childhood and my studies during my 20s and 30s are central to my argument in this Introductory chapter. I am speaking of the Bundeli community that speaks the Bundeli language but is recognized as Chamars (ex-untouchables) in the public sphere. This Bundeli community of north Maharashtra districts and south Gujarat districts is a substantial minority with qualitative differences across language, ethnicity, and low socio-economic status.

These Bundeli speakers number less than ten thousand and speak a Bundeli different from the standardized Bundeli in MP districts of Bundelkhand. I crudely assume that my ancestors had the route to north Maharashtra from MP districts of Bundelkhand. It is interesting to note that north Maharashtra borders Madhya Pradesh.⁴ The high percentage of population belonging to the Schedule Caste (SCs) is also a significant feature of Bundelkhand.⁵ They were

³ By Bundeli society, I mean the Bundeli intellectuals, who tend to claim a ‘standard’ Bundeli in the region of Bundelkhand. Bundelkhand is divided between south Uttar Pradesh and north Madhya Pradesh (two Indian states). The Bundeli intellectuals demand recognition for Bundeli language in the Eight Schedule of Indian Constitution.

⁴ The North Maharashtra districts form the region called Khandesh. Bhusaval is one of the last districts in Khandesh which falls into the division of Central India according to the Indian railway divisions.

⁵ “Castes in Bundelkhand.” *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, bundelkhand.in/info/castes-in-bundelkhand.

considered ‘criminals’ during British rule and continue to be considered at the bottom of the socio-economic graph.⁶

I grew up by seeing my grand-mother occupied in the tanning business with her brother, son, and nephews. Today, it is the polymer sole and thermoplastic sole industry that has taken over the footwear industry. The Bundeli Chamars now mostly run footwear shops in the towns of north Maharashtra and south Gujarat. They are economically mobilized after switching to other small retail businesses too. They are dispersed in the major cities of Nashik, Mumbai, and Surat with jobs in the public sector and private sector. A very few of them have agricultural land in the villages of north Maharashtra. It is not the same case in the districts of south Gujarat where some families are settled but inherit lands in the districts of north Maharashtra. They are cut from their traditional labor in the process of social change. They have earned a new status as retailers and officers.

The members of the mentioned group, Bundeli Chamars, are scattered in the process of migration from Bundelkhand (now in the districts of north Madhya Pradesh and south Uttar Pradesh) to north Maharashtra and south Gujarat. They are not really organized in terms of an ethnolinguistic minority. They are also not much politicized as the ‘ex-untouchable’ caste of India. They succumb more to the Hindu logic of identification than to the logic of the Dalit movement for self-respect in terms of Ambedkarite politics. Jaffrelot, in the forward to Suryakant Waghmore’s book, *Civility of Caste*, finds that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar himself could not attract Chamars significantly in his political parties during 1940s and Dalit politics in Maharashtra has concentrated on Mahars and the Republican Party of India (xi). He notes that Dalit politics is breaking the deadlocks and moving beyond one ethnic line (xii).

As an example of the power of Hinduization, it is important to note that there is no place for fire-worship among Bundeli Chamars but for *kham* (See Fig. 1) in the marriage ceremony.

⁶ Ibid.



(Fig. 1 Installment of Kham during a marriage ceremony in my ethno-linguistic caste minority)

The bride and bridegroom worship *kham* (a tree pole designed artistically). I discovered *kham* at the city museum in Bhopal, MP during my field-work.⁷ *Kham* is popular with the same name. It is preserved there as a marker of Adivasi culture. There is a cultural proximity between Bundeli Chamars and the indigenous Adivasis known as the Bhils of central India who are spread over

⁷ Janardan Gond mentions the *kham* wood in reference to the wedding ritual in the area of Gond Adivasi in “Vindhyachal and Satpura [Dewas, Hoshangabad, Betul, Mandla, Chhindwara and Balaghat]” in MP. It is interesting to note that Selamba, my village (now a town) and the north Maharashtra districts are set across Satpura bordering MP. See, Gond, Janardan. “The Identity of Adivasi Literature.” *Forward Press*, 11 Nov. 2017, forwardpress.in/2017/11/the-identity-of-adivasi-literature/?amp. Accessed on 15 Nov. 2020.

north Maharashtra and south Gujarat across the Narmada river, Tapi river, and Satpura hills. Both Narmada and Nandurbar are tribal constituencies. However, the replacement of *kham* with fire and the presence of a priest in the marriage ceremony nowadays is a sign of Hinduization of the ethnic practices shared among Bundeli Chamars.

The Bundeli Chamars worship Ravidas, the poet of the Bhakti movement, who proposed the concept of “Begumpura (a place with no pain)” to imagine a casteless society against the caste-prejudices and social discrimination in India.⁸ But again for the Bundeli Chamars, Ravidas does not stand in isolation from Hinduism and mainstream Marathi (See Fig.2).

⁸ Madhopuri, Balbir. “Building Begumpura.” *Indian Express*, 8 Sept. 2019 [indian express.com/article/opinion/columns/guru-ravidas-poems-punjabi-begumpura-society-5975930/](https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/guru-ravidas-poems-punjabi-begumpura-society-5975930/).



(Fig. 2. A Banner in Marathi at a Cultural Event in Nandurbar)

I attended a *samooth vivah* (collective marriage ceremony) in May, 2014. It is organized by the political leaders of my ethno-linguistic caste minority. The organizers of such event celebrate it with a grand image of Ravidas, the cultural icon of Bundeli Chamars. However, the linguistic category, *chamar* is replaced with its cognate, *charmakar* in Sanskritized Marathi while the political symbol of Ambedkar is replaced with the Hindu symbol of Ganesha. There are differences in language and ethnic culture between the Bundeli Chamars and the local Adivasi community and the upper-caste groups within and outside the mentioned districts. But it is their caste status and its contradictions which characterize the cultural identity of Bundeli Chamars in the public spaces.

I also see that the intersections between caste and Bundeli language are connected with the practice of listening to Alha songs on YouTube (since the visual and aural media is more accessible than the privileged reading practices). My parents subscribe to Bundelkhandi channels to access the memory of the legend warriors on YouTube today. They claim themselves to be the progeny of Alha and Udal, who are remembered as the quintessential soldiers of Parmal king of

Bundelkhand, according to oral literature. They tend to assume themselves as belonging to the *Kshatriya* caste (warrior caste) on this ground. They have not been to Bundelkhand but they connect to the region in virtual space with a Hindu logic of caste identity.

But the access to ethnicity via Bundeli language coincides with the ‘rural’, ‘backward’, and ‘untouchable’ status of my ethnolinguistic caste minority in the material context. Bundeli Chamars suffer from the persistent markers of illiteracy, poverty, and poor health, lack of infrastructure in the villages and towns due to their ‘ex-untouchable’ status in the larger political economy. The local Marwaris ridicule them based on the Bundeli language which is alien to the vicinity. The caste gaze in the linguistic approach of the upper-caste has been the case of a social mechanism to fix the Chamars in a cultural ghetto. On the other side, the assimilation into the mainstream Marathi/Gujarati/Hindi culture coincides with the perception of purification of self-identity among the Bundeli speaking Chamars. The upwardly mobile Bundeli Chamars opine that if the new generation spoke the ancestral language it would bring humiliation upon themselves and effect its economic progress. In this context, it becomes pertinent to ask: how then do I/we define our cultural identity?

I find the answer to this question in the act of self-affirmation of my social identity. It signifies the act of “becoming” a Bundeli Dalit from being a Bundeli Chamar. Manju Edachira argues that “A becoming is inevitable in the case of Dalits, where being itself is violated” (48). Becoming is an invitation to resist and care in the act of self-affirmation which I call a moment of affect here. Coming to terms with my self-affirmation is an indication of resistance to the negation of my cultural presence as Bundeli Chamar in the public space where my individual and collective identity is violated. Partly, I address here the limits in the mainstream academic discourses of linguistic movement, particularly, in north India. The issue of survival and existence as an ‘ex-untouchable’ is more challenging because it adds to the stigma of my/our ethnolinguistic identity. I illustrate the point with the following notes from my field-work.

During my fieldwork in Bundelkhand, I happened to meet Suresh Maurya (name changed) at the Bundeli Sahitya Sammelan, a literary gathering which was organized by a group of Bundeli intellectuals, a majority of them upper-caste male at Orchha, MP during 9-10 January

2016. I participated in the gathering as one of the Bundeli speakers. I presented an essay in Bundeli and revealed the status of my ethnolinguistic caste minority in north Maharashtra and south Gujarat. When I was done with my presentation, Suresh came to me and introduced himself as Dalit and wanted to share his personal experience. Suresh is a published Bundeli writer. He belongs to the Bundeli society as a linguistic minority in the so-called Hindi belt. However, he has experienced untouchability at a covert level in the middle of Bundeli intellectuals and his caste identity has been a stumbling block to participate fully at the literary gathering led by the upper-caste males. This incident made me realize that it is crucial to distinguish the linguistic identity in the socio-cultural context of India. Suresh is a representative of a substantial minority. This brings me to a crucial question: does one's claim on mother-tongue resonate with the aspirations of communities that are oppressed by caste?

Dalit writers in regional languages find English playing a crucial role in fostering the marginalized communities. In her article, "Caste in a Casteless Language?" Rita Kothari highlights the view of Neerav Patel, the pioneer of Gujarati Dalit Literature. Patel identifies Gujarati as his "mother-tongue" and English as the "foster-tongue" (61). He redefines his self away from the "stigmatizing nature" of Gujarati (61). According to him, a Dalit must choose to learn English himself/herself without intervention (61) of the translators from upper-castes. The rationale behind the choice of English indicates reasons beyond seeking economic opportunities. It pertains more to the idea of living a life with dignity. The new generation of the ethnolinguistic caste minority of Bundeli speaking Chamars carries the baggage of linguistic identity as an 'ex-untouchable' in an intersectional mode. It is structured in their unconscious. It therefore becomes imperative to diversify the spaces in Ambedkarite politics. If such generations are attracted and socialized in Ambedkarite politics, they can reconstruct the cultural past and offer a new manifesto for the future of Dalit society.

We have more than twenty-two Schedule languages. Bundeli is one among hundreds of languages which are included in the non-scheduled category. Papia Sengupta, in the preface to his book, *Language as Identity in Colonial India*, notes that only those languages will be included in the mentioned list of the non-scheduled languages which number more than ten thousand speakers as per the criteria of the Indian state (x-xi). There is no hope for recognition of

those languages which number below the criteria of the Indian state.⁹ There is less probability of the documentation of minor languages in the decadal census.

The Dalit-Adivasi people deserve due credit for preserving diversity in the cultural sphere, even at the cost of inequality. In his book, *Nationalism Without a Nation in India*, G. Aloysius defines nationalism as the site of power over culture in India. According to him, the elites from the upper-caste communities have accumulated power and wealth “without” transferring the same to the Dalit and Adivasi communities (129). The speakers belonging to the Dalit community and the Adivasi community have met the fate of invisibility and non-recognition. They remain uncoded in the linguistic census (Sengupta xi). If we understand the relation between power and culture in the Indian context, the power in culture in terms of its homogenization is void of any challenge to “Brahminical structures” (130). It rather dominates the Dalit-Adivasi communities on the one hand and has been structured itself around the tensions with the rise of anti-caste ideologies or mass movements (Aloysius 132-133).

Religion and language are the two leading forces in identity politics in pre and post-independent India. The works of Christopher R. King, Alok Rai, Lisa Mitchell, and Sumathi Ramaswamy are seminal in this regard. The national political parties bring the question of pan-identity on the front occasionally “in friction with the sub-national and the regional identities rooted in ethnicity, language and culture” (Sengupta xi). But the logic of negotiation between the agents of sub-nationalism and nationalism has been largely Hindu in the case of north India. In her book, *The Social Space of Language Vernacular Culture in Colonial Punjab*, Fatima Mir finds the logic of negotiation “state-centric” in the context of linguistic movements in south India (183-194). But it is limited to the advancement of the propertied class alone in north India. Also, the argument that the friction between ethnic groups and the state results in violence (Sengupta xi) can be quite misleading in the context of ethnolinguistic minorities. The Dalit and Adivasi

⁹ Chatterjee, Garga. “It’s time for the government to stop spreading the lie that Hindi is India’s ‘national language.’” *Scroll*, 9 Oct. 2016, scroll.in/article/818184/hindi-imposition-the-centre-must-realise-that-there-can-be-no-unity-without-linguistic-diversity.

constitute a majority of the population in smaller regions like Bundelkhand. But they are deprived of the resources and fundamental rights also because Bundelkhand is in the backyards between north MP and south UP. The misleading point here is that the people suffering from starvation and extreme poverty are blamed for underdevelopment and violence of all kinds. But the state and its agencies are criticized less after the violation of human rights in the hinterland of Bundelkhand.

In the description given above, I threw light on the nature of my linguistic identity. By foregrounding English and Bundeli, I engaged in a practice of imagining the future for my ethnolinguistic caste minority in the socio-political context. I frame my inquiry from a historical and post-structural perspective to provide the thesis with arguments on the nature of counter-publics in north India. In this sense, I highlight that the body too writes history. Body is not simply matter. It does lead to the experience of events in the present but in ways that it has already been placed in history. The moments of change are contingent upon the outbreak of events. The latter is unexpected in everyday life and likely to miss out in the purview of mainstream academia. The following section highlights the main points in this case.

Theoretical Framework

The linguistic minorities encounter the hegemony of Hindi, especially in western and northern India. In his article, “A Marginalized Voice in the History of “Hindi,” Aishwarj Kumar argues that the histories of local languages in Bihar have been overlooked (1709). They are not identified as independent languages of “the so-called ‘Hindi belt’” (1709). He rightly points out that the debates on the polarization between Urdu and Hindi have been predominant over the issues of linguistic minorities (1709). They are exclusive of the historical recognition of the minor languages in north India (1709). In her chapter, “Political Saliency of Language in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh,” Selma Sonntag observes that the minorities embody language, ethnicity, and class-based interests (222-223). Rama Jain offers historical details about Bundeli in the preface to her book on Bundeli grammar; R C B Leech mentioned ‘Bundelkhandi’ (Bundeli) for the first time in 1843 in the *Journal of Asiatic Society* and commented on Bundeli words (xi-x). V. A. Smith translated Bundeli folk songs of Hamirpur district in 1875 with a commentary in the same

journal (ix-x). Bundeli is found closer to Prakrit and Apabhramsha during her fieldwork in the villages (x). The scholarship of Jain is noteworthy but Bundeli is branched out in the category of *lok bhasha* (folk language) of Hindi language (xi). The minor languages are also neutralized when it comes to the question of caste. They are dominated by particular groups that negotiate caste and class interests with the state. The absence of a caste-angle is a short-coming in these scholarships of linguistic movements. They do not argue for the material advancement of the Dalit and the Adivasi groups who are stereotyped or remain absent in the academic discourses on language. The upper-caste gaze on ethnolinguistic minorities remains intact. It causes alienation in society. The multifaceted oppressions that the Dalits and Adivasis experience need to be addressed in discourses on belonging to a linguistic land.

Mitchell, in her book, *Language, Emotion and Politics in South India*, documents the history of linguistic ideology in both democratic and ambivalent processes (33). Her focus is not on how the minor identities are excluded through arbitrary linguistic forces. She takes note of the historical relationship between emotional experience, language, and cultural practices (211). She marks the different meanings in the story about “the silent bodies of” the members or the “martyred” Telugu speakers towards the formation of a linguistic state (211-212). The latter belonged to the minority. In this background, the intellectuals and the leaders are studied as guardians of their ideologies. The “people” too are studied, up-staging the former, as spectators or followers. They are studied less as writing their histories outside overlapping relationship between politics and the linguistic identity of a separate state. The popular discourse can be provided with “the categories of identity and difference” in modern conditions (108) but with “fractures into” its “unitary narrative” (190). The study of the guardians of ideologies is limited to the particular castes who have achieved their class interests vis-à-vis the state in India. Mitchell does not place the minority community further into multiple structures such as community, kinship, work, beliefs, etc.

In his book, *A Nation without a National Language*, Gopalrao Ekbote discusses Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s observation about Indian state. Ambedkar viewed that the Indian state is obliged to linguistic minorities morally more than politically in favor of a universal pattern of educational system (199). But subsequently, he was disillusioned with the social structure of India. J. Barton

Scott and Brannon D. Ingram, in their article, “What is a Public? Notes from South Asia,” argue that the category of ‘public’ is a discursive site (358). It is not possible to understand this category without dealing with its genealogy in India (358). Both point to what Ambedkar said: “caste has killed public spirit...[and] made public opinion impossible,” the role of the public is “an empty formality” in mass politics (366). When Ambedkar accepted Buddhism, he challenged the dynamic of caste and called attention to identify “the place of the Dalit as a ‘minor’ figure” (366).

In her book, *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste*, Toral Gajarawala takes the case of the realist novel in Hindi literature. She shows that sympathy has been one of the means to counter the wrongs of caste against minor communities in the literary language of affect (48). She argues that the mode of realism helped progressive writers like Premchand (1880-1936) from the upper-caste community and the readers counter the wrongs of caste (35). But this erases caste as “an analytic” category at the same time (35). Against this background, Aniket Jaaware observes that the new generation Dalit poet is concerned with the question of how he/she speaks of the social condition, especially, regarding his/her status in “a literary tradition and its belatedness” more than the social conditions themselves alone (3). Gajarawala explains the feature of “social realism” in Dalit literature as a pointer to the “failures” of realism in the mainstream Indian literature (3). In her book, *Passions of the Tongue*, Ramaswamy argues that identities are both, political and poetic. The representatives of language produce differences of meaning over their language though in shared terms (23).

Mitchell points out that the significance of local events is not much discussed outside the causalities (195). She finds Shahid Amin’s work, *Events, Metaphor, Memory Chauri Chaura 1922-1992* important in this case. She notes that the mainstream historians tend to overlook the significance of local events (195). It helps us understand the events through listening and their manifestation in writings. The impressions of local events do count (195). However, the form of expression can be marked in a variety of registers. It may not be accessible to everyone at the same time. Championing language as mother-tongue is nothing but a claim on a regional variety by a dominant group (24). The latter complains of “victimization” by a more “powerful” and privileged group (24). In this sense, I depart from both Ramaswamy and Mitchell to argue that

access to a particular form of expression is more or less contingent upon one's historical and social location.

The fact I remember the event like the death of my sports teacher and his Adivasi brother's bodily expression of emotion against a casteist administrator has a valid reason. Such an event took place in visceral mode via English (the language of power) in the interest of the marginal; it moved me bodily to feel the expression of protest contingent upon a particular situation like death, an outcome of social discrimination. Dechamma C. C. argues that the event of death narrates "a material history of the individual" and community whose histories are not counted by Brahminical structures and through these material histories, the marginal subject can unsettle the dominant narrative of history telling (12). It signifies the act of looking back at the dominant behavior and its canon in anger. But it shares a gesture of care as it calls for participation in the event of becoming or in the act of self-determination. It can offer a critique of the dominant ideology. It is the potential of such a bodily event of language and identity that affects the 'minor' bodies in bringing new possibilities for the future.

My argument revolves around how an individual or social groups define the notion of language and experience it too, not just the other way round in enactments of identities. The moments of affect are constitutive of rational questions. I share my interest in the events of affect which can offer scope to rethink the narratives about identity politics. I have looked at events like the social forces that trigger/ed me, the other individuals, and the social groups, namely, the 'standard' public and the 'alternative' public. I have engaged with the latter as the counter-publics in my thesis. I argue that the mentioned counter-publics experience social identity outside language or consciousness before starting to reconstruct it politically. The next section sums up the Chapters and the discourse on the constitution of the 'standard' public and the 'alternative' public with a focus on the formulation of counter-publics in the thesis.

Chapterization

The discussion on counter-publics in this dissertation is limited to the discourse analysis of the constitution of the 'standard' public in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 and the constitution of the 'alternative' public in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. Both the publics bring attributes of identity into

prominence through the use of narratives. In this regard, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 includes analysis of essays written in Bundeli and Hindi, interviews with the Bundeli intellectuals, films, the community calendar, multiple performances, Bundeli poetry, Bundeli short stories, Facebook posts, and ethnographic notes, etc.

The thesis takes up the theme of standardization of the Bundeli language as the main focus (analyzed in Chapter 1) towards a critique of linguistic hierarchy. It takes up the theme of personification or iconization of the Bundeli language into mother/goddess (analyzed in Chapter 2) in critiquing the gender ideology in contrast to the socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts.

Chapter 1 focuses on the linguistic politics practiced by the circle of provincial elites who engage in the standardization of the Bundeli language in the Bundelkhand districts of Madhya Pradesh (MP). This chapter is divided into nine sections. Section I highlights the profile of Bundeli elites who constitute the standard public. Section II discusses the practice of proposing a ‘pure’ linguistic nation among the elites. It explains the significance of the folk language which is placed at the center of reform towards the standardization of the Bundeli language. It highlights the paradox of linguistic identity that aims to standardize Bundeli. Section III is about the standard public’s claim on Bundeli as a written tradition and the paradoxes this entails. It discusses the dominance of writing on forms of orality practiced among the marginalized communities in north India. It explains how the standard public seeks to claim a written tradition for Bundeli language in the literary history of north India. Section IV highlights the secular notion of standard Bundeli. It discusses the homogenization of Bundeli concerning a semantic interplay between Bundeli and Bundelkhand. Section V notes the importance laid for its institutionalization and highlights the poor state of public presence and institutional support that hinders the development of Bundeli language. This contradiction in the discourse on standard Bundeli is discussed in Section VI in the form of a negotiation between the standard public and the state. It deals with the politics of Bundeli *chinar* (identity) among the members of the standard public. It explains the assimilative politics of the standard public and its opposition to Hindi chauvinists noting how the standard public negotiates with the state towards an assimilative politics. Section VII illustrates how the standard public represents the Bundeli *chinar* (identity), culture, and history. Section VIII reveals the implications of a standard Bundeli

identity. Section IX highlights the nature of linguistic hierarchy and explains why the latter is exclusive of the Bundeli “Other”. The last section sums up the chapter by setting up a discussion on *Bundeliyat* (Bundeliness) versus *Angreziyat* (Englishness) in the context of globalization. In short, the chapter documents the features of the standard public: how it is devoted to the established political rituals in mainstream Hindi literature; how it is delimited by territorial borders; how it exploits the metaphorical devices in the cultural politics of linguistic identity; and how in this case, it plays on binaries in the reconstruction of nature and culture; how it engages in a past that constitutes dominant discourses around secular nationalism. Secondly, the chapter discusses the socio-political domination of the upper-caste elites by focusing on their narrative of nationality. The latter is built upon the sub-themes of the demand for recognition of linguistic identity and linguistic minority in the Eighth Schedule and recognition of the Bundeli province respectively.

Chapter 2 is based on the Bundeli standard public’s claim on nationality in the socio-economic context of the Bundelkhand region. It introduces the concept of *Bundeli pani* (Bundeli honor) to illustrate that the subjects of Bundeli language and identity assert themselves differently in different contexts. In this background, the chapter is divided into three major sections. Section I juxtaposes the discourse on *Devihood* and the discourse on *Bundeli mata* within a socio-cultural context. It uses the Dalit History Month as a counter to the Bundeli calendar with a focus on the role of Phoolan Devi. It discusses the caste-gender dynamics against the upper-caste notion of sexuality. Section II discusses the political construct of *Bundeli mata* in its historical and institutional framework with a major focus on Bundeli *gazals* (poetry) and essays. Section III unpacks the gender ideology of the standard public. It elaborates on the masculinization of *Bundeli mata* in the ideological schema of the standard public. It uses the Bundeli calendar and ethnographic notes to explain the relation between Bundeli language, literature, and gender dynamics and its implications for gender and class status of the standard public.

In its second part, the thesis takes up the themes of everyday exclusion of the women from Dalitbahujan community in rural Bundelkhand (mainly from the districts in southern UP that constitute Bundelkhand). It analyzes the coverage of everyday issues in *Khabar Lahariya*

(analyzed in Chapter 3) to understand the Dalit Feminist Standpoint that emerges from the work of Dalitbahujan women reporters. It takes up the theme of *himmati mehariya* (courageous women) (analyzed in Chapter 4) for understanding the linguistic politics of *Khabar Lahariya* against the marginalization of women, and caste oppression. *Khabar Lahariya* was a weekly newspaper in print. It was run by Dalitbahujan women from the villages and small towns of Bundelkhand. Started in 2002, it shifted to digital medium in 2013. This has made Dalitbahujan women reporters popular in local and mainstream media for covering issues that matter most to the men and women belonging to poor and marginalized communities in the small towns and hinterlands of Bundelkhand.

Chapter 3 shows that the women reporters involved with *Khabar Lahariya* are devoted to make the Dalitbahujan community resourceful against the everyday crisis of caste-gender violence, illiteracy, land and property rights, and underdevelopment in Bundelkhand. It focuses on the role of Dalitbahujan women reporters of *Khabar Lahariya* in the constitution of an alternative public. The chapter discusses the challenges of reporting as Dalitbahujan women. The Chapter is divided in ten sections. Section I highlights the rule of violence in rural Bundelkhand. It highlights the role of Dalitbahujan women reporters against persistent sexual violence. Section II discusses the Dalitbahujan women reporters' everyday politics of alertness against male behavior in social and institutional spaces. It analyses the everyday cases of dubious situations while reporting in the interior villages. Section III analyses the local context of Dalitbahujan women's assertion of identity as reporters in the Hindi public sphere. Section IV highlights the Dalitbahujan women's voice as the dormant voice that is beginning to find assertion in a public space. It explains their linguistic politics as a counter to that of the standard public's linguistic politics. Section V redefines the Dalitbahujan women reporters as a linguistic minority vis-à-vis their status in the mainstream news media. It contextualizes the status of Dalitbahujan women reporters within the minority discourse. This is followed by a discussion on the Dalitbahujan women's spatial experience in Section VI. Section VII places Dalitbahujan women reporters in the theoretical context of Dalit Feminist Standpoint (DFS). It is an attempt to decipher epistemological position of Dalitbahujan women reporters who work in solidarity with the mainstream literacy and media feminists. Section VIII discusses the historical and institutional features of *Khabar Lahariya* in the context of Dalit feminism. It shows that Dalitbahujan women

reporters are an embodiment of democratic/feminist and anti-casteist practices. Section IX reveals the impact of their being reporters on their personal lives. It highlights their experiences in a positive note. Section X marks the fact that the Dalitbahujan women reporters are also achievers of a new identity, that of reporters in the mainstream in opposition to the urban-male upper-caste media.

Chapter 4 counters the reformist narratives of victimhood and the nationalist image of women as instrumental in the representation of a linguistic community. It is divided into five sections. Section I looks at how Dalitbahujan women reporters write the everyday lives of their selves and that of the community. It shows how Dalitbahujan women engage and make their own world in the field of civic journalism. It highlights the multifaceted outlook of Dalitbahujan women including their moral and ethical role in safeguarding the dignity of the common public. Section II explains the emergence of *himmati mehariya* (courageous women) in this context. It highlights the various facets of Dalitbahujan women's identity in the discourse of *himmati mehariya*. It analyses the everyday politics of Dalitbahujan women in opposition to the caste-gender oppression inside and outside the community and also places this in the economic context. It discusses the representation of local icons in contrast to the mainstream politics of the standard public. Section III extends the narrative of *himmati mehariya*. It focuses on the stories of Dalit and Adivasi women Pradhans (village heads). It discusses the significance of the stories in the context of thirty-three per cent reservations for Dalitbahujan women in the local elections. Section IV deals with the Dalitbahujan identity in a collective and in an ethnic context. It discusses the rise of the Kol men and women who demand an Adivasi status. Section V illustrates the debate between the standard public and Dalitbahujan women reporters who emerge as alternative public to the ideology and practices of standard public. It discusses the implications for a linguistic identity of Dalitbahujan women reporters in the constitution of the alternative public. The chapter is an attempt to understand the subjectivity of the Dalit and Adivasi women in the political processes at the lower rungs of power-structure in rural Bundelkhand.

Methodology of Discussion

The primary texts for Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 are essays, short stories, poetry, prefaces, etc., published in Bundeli language and circulated among the members of the standard public in the districts of MP that constitute Bundelkhand. The Bundeli texts also include other cultural texts such as posters of the Bundeli calendar, Dalit History Month, the movie which uses Bundeli dialogues in Hindi cinema, interview with the Bundeli writers and activists, their Facebook posts, ethnographic notes, maps, figures, etc.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 use reports, articles, editorials and Dalitbahujan literature published between 2002-2017 in *Khabar Lahariya*. Both the chapters include the interviews and discussions with the Dalitbahujan women reporters, both personal and public as published in the official channel of *Khabar Lahariya* news media on YouTube.

The discussion and argument in the thesis focus on the above mentioned primary texts in their interconnected contexts. It conceptualizes and designs the research problems in the multiplicity of contexts. It focuses on the implications of research for the participants and communities associated with the notion of standard public and the alternative public in a larger rubric of the counter-publics. By closely examining the specific domains or themes, namely, the standard Bundeli in Chapter 1, the *Bundeli mata* in Chapter 2, the alternative *patrakarita* (the quality journalists) in Chapter 3, and the emergence of *himmati mehariya* (courageous women) in Chapter 4, I attempt to show that it is possible to place the local idioms of linguistic affect within their larger contexts. It will be seen that the participants and communities associated with counter-publics create their networks of communication in both the print and the digital forms of expression.

Dalitbahujan Women Reporters as Alternative Public

The concept of public sphere has been explored and revised by several scholars. In his “Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere,” Craig Calhoun suggests that the invention of the concept of public sphere is significant as it invites for a qualitative discourse and quantitative participation in the democratization of public spaces (2). However, Nancy Fraser, in her essay,

“Rethinking the Public Sphere,” argues that Habermas’ concept is limited to an elitist circle because, according to Habermas, it is qualitative for its “rational-critical” nature but when it reaches to a quantitative or popular stage it loses such an outlook and turns into a reactionary nature (58). It is constituted by access to various forms of communication being confined to the participation of a particular class of people only. It is influential on a ruling governance in order to demand recognition for a cultural identity of a community. According to Fraser, Habermas’ concept of public sphere is exclusive of the women and the working class people; it is not structured on their full and free participation in regard to redistribution of the resources among them in a “welfare state mass democracy” (58). The notion of public sphere is always fraught with tensions between desirable/respectable issues and ground/material issues because state/power and economy/money are “both crucial topics for and rivals of the democratic public sphere” (Calhoun 6). This implies a “nexus” between certain dominant classes and the state on the one side (Fraser 74-75) and on the other side, a commodification of the forms of communication in “the peculiar political economy of the bourgeois” (64). This also implies that the manifestation of voices in public domain is embedded in private realm for the dominant groups while for the oppressed groups, the stakes for recognition of social issues are always embedded in public realm (71). Fraser points out that the women and the workers are excluded being “familialized” in the discourse of care and “economized” in the discourse of management (73). She argues that the public sphere is a tool of domination but it retains emancipatory force too in practice (62). According to her, the oppressed groups create “alternative publics” in “oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs”; hence, she calls them “counterpublics” which is “contestatory in function” (67).

In her essay, “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere,” Catherine R. Squires discusses the internal logistics of counterpublics. Unlike Fraser, Squires argues that Black public spheres carry specific responses to the dominant publics and the state in specific contexts and situations with a required set of registers (453-457). She finds the use of the term “counterpublic” “vague” for the reasons as follow: there is possibility of a factual break between “a shared marginality” and “counterideologies”, a lack of “constructive” talk and action for a transformative politics (447), an uneven position of counterpublics in “institutional locations” (450), electorally motivated parochial protests and “fragmentation” in a cultural-political historiography of the Black

community (452). Squires argues that the factor of diversity within black public sphere is foremost. Black public sphere is constituted of groups which share “a common racial makeup” (452). She shows that black public sphere takes “alternative means” of communication between counter publics. This can be understood in the internal configuration of communication among them. The external attributes of identity do not set the parameters of identity politics in black public spheres (446). The “racialized” identities hold differently ascribed rankings in a social hierarchy (453). Although the counterpublics are “emergent collectives,” they are rich and diverse as they inherit historical resources and function with internal logic of communication (453). Habermas introduces an ideal phase of public discourse. Fraser redefines it in terms of counterpublics with a materialist perspective. Squires highlights a phase where diversity and economy intertwine in the discourse of justice for equal redistribution of resources.

I categorize Dalitbahujan women as alternative public and not as a counter-public. In his book, *The Politics of the Governed*, Partha Chatterjee privileges the high-caste elites or the middle class as “civil society”. He categorizes the subject population of state into a “political society”. I posit that the categories of “political society” and “counter-public” both are conflated in the context of Bundeli identity. For instance, Chatterjee suggests that leaders from Other Backward Castes (OBC) such as Mulayam Sinh Yadav opposed the representation of women in parliament (77). He suggests that Hindu high-caste is pro-women, being privileged to constitute civil society, and Hindu OBC is anti-women. He sets this narrative but does not speak it overtly. In his book, *Civility against Caste*, Suryakant Waghmore responds to Chatterjee. He argues that the model of liberal society does not fail because it is simply used in Indian context (xx). The failure of civil society results in failure because India is caste-specific (xx). The faith in public institutions among Dalitbahujans is worth noting despite everyday violence committed against them (xix). The Dalitbahujans do not much rupture the western notion of civil society but question the casteist society and apply an institutional approach to de-caste it. They work simultaneously towards reformation of the structure and towards a representational regime. They avoid extreme positions like “Marxist” which resonates “elite suspicion of state and Constitution” (xxii). Chatterjee does not offer any alternative here but exploits the conceptual conflict between civil society, which trusts state, and bourgeois, which is believed to be controlling the political economy (5-6). According to liberal thinkers, it is not an issue if the civil

society performs in equal ways. The Marxists terms civil society as bourgeois society and the system depends on it. Chatterjee claims that civil society originated in the west and argues that it is the separate “political society” that works in a “post-colonial” society like India (6-7). According to Waghmore, it is important to de-caste the concept of civil society more than “displacing” or dislodging it (21). This would represent the Ambedkarite Dalitbahujans as the civilizing force in a casteist society (1). He turns the table against the caste behavior of upper-caste elites and makes the case of civility for Dalit politics from a globalized perspective (205-206).

Taking cues from Fraser and Squires in general context and Waghmore particularly in Indian context (discussed in Chapter 4), I observe that the Dalitbahujan women share marginality in the history of oppression on multiple axes of identity. They help us investigate the form in which modernity would suit the Dalitbahujans. I follow that women are not a homogenous group. They belong to Dalitbahujan castes and constitute the biggest minority of fifty percent. If given seats in parliament, it is likely that the Hindu high-caste women might achieve a majority of the seats as they are privileged with education and power. The women belonging to SC, ST and OBC may claim a ten percent of the seats due to their historical marginalization in public institutions. Chatterjee does not elaborate on caste, ethnicity, religion and backward status of Dalitbahujan men/women. He does not offer the alternative of quota within quota in his theory of political society. Given the socio-economic disparity, it is clear that there is no consensus among high caste women for a proportional representation in the parliament. The Dalitbahujan women are vulnerable within vulnerable. I argue that it will be quite vague to limit Dalitbahujan women reporters to a “political society” or a “counter-public”. I aim to highlight them into a civil society or an alternative public by elaborating how the Dalitbahujan women posit an alternative to contest the standard public in the making of Bundelkhand on the regional map of India. *Khabar Lahariya* positions them towards a center. Dalitbahujan women reporters constitute an alternative public for the reasons as follow:

Dalitbahujan women provide alternatives to the standard public and processes of social change in the construct of Bundeli identity. The Bundeli standard public compares writing or pen with Bundeli *moosar* (a cultural plough). The cultural plough is replaced with material and

distributive ethics in *Khabar Lahariya*. The Dalitbahujan women contribute to the making of a Dalitbahujan historiography. The latter is contextualized in the history of literacy campaigns but it breaks the dichotomies of rural and urban because the stories about the Dalitbahujan women in *Khabar Lahariya* narrate the history of universal struggle for equality and freedom.

The Dalitbahujan consciousness movement can be broadly dated back to the times of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in western India and Periyar E. V. Ramasamy in south India. Ramasamy did not want the newspaper to be “mere spectators” (396). He published an English magazine, *Revolt* in 1928, a Tamil magazine, *Puratchi* (Revolution) in 1933, a Tamil weekly, *Kudi Arasu* in 1925 and also a daily, *Viduthalai* in 1937 (32). According to his writings, he is staunch supporter of “communal representation” and critical of Brahmins for hating reservation policy in the well-being of Dalitbahujans (211). Ambedkar launched his journal, “*Mook Nayak, The Leader of the Silent*” during 1920. He demanded economic mobility and education for the Dalitbahujans to achieve knowledge and ability to share power (Parvathy 122-123). The political thought of Ambedkar-Phule-Periyar trio builds “an alternative identity of the people” based on Dravidian and Dalitbahujan perspectives (Jaffrelot 41).

Khabar Lahariya is an alternative political publication like its precursor, *Mahila Dakiya*. It is an alternative to the “liberal-secular” discourse led by the standard public. The Dalitbahujan women reporters focus on political discourses of marginalized Dalitbahujan communities. They do not engage with the nationalist generations. They work within network of activists and democratic initiatives. They borrow the pedagogic and feminist structures of thought from governmental and non-governmental entities. They reconstruct the spatial dimension of Dalitbahujan identity of women. It is played out in the embodiment of gender-equal and anti-caste institutions. They struggle to establish the rule of Dalitbahujan women against caste behavior of the standard public. This is demonstrated in the discourse of affirmative action.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters share different views on gender equality but the ethics of care binds them together in a larger exercise of liberty to express themselves. This stands as an alternative to the politics of emotion reinforced in the narrative of the standard public. The Dalitbahujan women reporters seek legal alternative. They defy the caste-order in processual

terms rather than in terms of invoking discrete events. They are not subsumed in dominant symbolic politics. They constitute alternative public by their voluntarily membership. They decolonize the discourse around the identity of women. They reject valorization of women's identity and fight for their right to question the state. They do not compromise in negotiation with the standard public and the state. The standard public does not equally share the tools of enabling self and community. The Dalitbahujan women reporters take up literacy to enable themselves, to solve the crisis and to create space for participation collectively. They cover the socio-economic issues of Dalitbahujan women and community in innovative way in the age of new media. *Khabar Lahariya* brings scope for employment for their benefit in media space.

The standard public is oriented to manipulate the resources which are orientalist in image and 'otherizes' Bundeli identity in language. It proposes Bundeli as a carrier of the ideal of 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram' (Welfare is Truth and Beauty). The Dalitbahujan women are critical of the standard public's claims to antiquity and the Indian tradition. They provide an alternative mode of reconstruction of knowledge and culture in *Khabar Lahariya*. They build up on a political imagination for the well-being of Dalitbahujans. They use an ethnographic mode of writing/reporting. They do not romanticize Bundeli culture but fight for rights and needs of the people.

Dalitbahujan women reporters constitute an alternative public, which is inspired by the ethics of redistribution and diversity. They correspond more or less to the account of counter-public explained by Fraser. But they differ from Fraser as they challenge modern Hindu democracy. They depart from and deconstruct the latter's cultural roots. This has implications for linguistic politics which I shall discuss in Chapter 3. I show that the alternative language of *Khabar Lahariya* rests in protection of state institutions and assertion of a new identity for Dalitbahujan women as journalists. Squires lays emphasis on a shared diversity among Blacks and highlights it as internal logic of communication. This can also be marked at the Khabar Lahariya office in New Delhi where the wall posters show a group of Dalitbahujan women raising their hands in resistance alongside the individual images of Black women leaders

associated with the Lower East Side Girls Club in United States.¹⁰ The spectrum and scope of politics in *Khabar Lahariya* moves beyond particular categories of experience of untouchability, ethnic food culture, cultural icons, etc. It offers a language of solidarity with identities which are stigmatized across caste, race, class, gender, religion, etc. This is where intersectionality of caste-gender is played out from below or from the grassroots. It does not become a reserve of mainstream literacy and media feminists.

Conclusion

I narrated the language experience of Bundeli Chamars. I used the events of affect related to language in my interpretation of the Brahminical structures. The narrative of language about the experience of Bundeli Chamars permeates in a linguistic continuum which is not apolitical. There are diverse experiences and uses in the representation of language in a particular environment. I described the case of my linguistic zone to explain that the Bundeli speaking Chamars succumb to the pressure and pulls of dominant ideology but they carry Bundeli language and cultural practices in continuum given their proximity with the Bhil tribe. The cultural boundaries of the Bundelkhand region are more fluid than its political boundaries in UP and MP. A social group like Bundeli Chamar pushes the political boundaries to different parts of the region, not just the other way round. The events of affect therefore are not just an expression of personal emotion but takes place in multiple structures such as community, kinship, work, beliefs, etc. There is a crisis of representation because language practices are steeped in the linguistic and cultural binaries which, in turn, reproduce the hierarchy of differences and margins. Language cannot be disguised into “one tangible index” to measure the differences in cultural experience (Ramaswamy 37). The continuum, as expressed through the event of affect, performs a participatory act but importantly, indicates the interpretative praxis.

¹⁰ Lower East Side Girls Club aims at “community based youth development” in New York. See, “Lower East Side Girls.” *Guide Star*, guidestar.org/profile/13-3942063.

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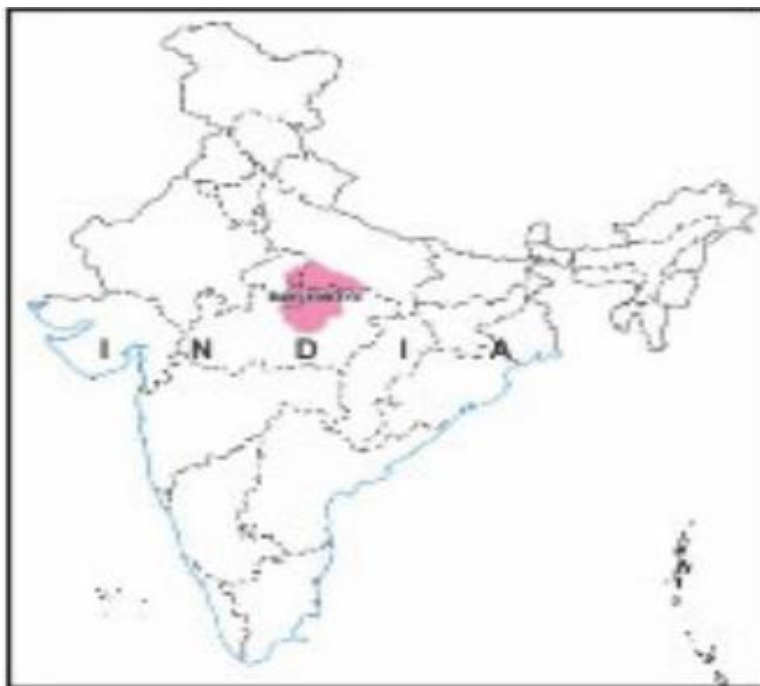
Interview

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Chapter 1

Bundeli: The Elite Public and Standardization of Language and Identity

Bundeli is largely an oral language. According to the linguistic census 2011, published by the Government of India, it is spoken by fifty six lakhs twenty-six thousand three hundred fifty six people in the region of Bundelkhand (6).¹¹ Bundelkhand is situated in the borders of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP), two states of India (See Fig. 1).



(Fig. 1 Bundelkhand Map).¹²

¹¹ “Abstract of Speakers’ Strength of Languages and Mother Tongues-2011.” Indian Gov. Data on Language and Mother Tongue, p.6, censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/Language-2011/Statement-1.pdf.

¹² “Bundelkhand Maps Download-Bundelkhand Manchitra.” *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, bundelkhand.in/maps/bundelkhand. Accessed 27 Nov. 2020.

The seven districts of Jhansi, Lalitpur, Jalaun, Hamirpur, Mahoba, Banda, Chitrakoot in southern UP and the six districts of Datia, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Panna, Sagar and Damoh in northern MP form the geographical boundaries of Bundelkhand region in Central India (See Fig. 2).¹³ The UP and MP governments, the media and the civil society organizations use the same definition to define the boundaries of Bundelkhand. But the cultural patrons of Bundelkhand propose more districts from MP to define the geo profile of Bundelkhand.¹⁴



(Fig.2 The Major Districts)¹⁵

The local elites of Bundelkhand are engaged in the politics of the Bundeli language in relation to the Hindi public sphere. I identify the Bundeli elites as the “cultural,” the “provincial” elites, who construct a standard public for Bundeli. They have been involved in producing literature in Bundeli by standardizing its prose. They aim to achieve an official status to Bundeli

¹³“Boundaries of Bundelkhand.” *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, bundelkhand.in/info/boundaries-of-bundelkhand. Accessed 27 Nov. 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “Bundelkhand Maps Download-Bundelkhand Manchitra.” *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, bundelkhand.in/maps/bundelkhand. Accessed 27 Nov. 2020.

by demanding its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. However, among these elites, there is also an acceptance of Hindi as the ‘national’ *bhasha* (*bhasha* can loosely be understood as the standard language)¹⁶ of India. This puts all the other languages to live the life of regional *boli* (‘dialects’) in the so-called “Hindi belt,” argues Aishwarj Kumar in his article, “A Marginalized Voice in the History of “Hindi”” (1709).¹⁷ This binary of *bhasha* vs *boli* has a history that perhaps goes back to millennia when dominant languages started to be put into the form of writing.

In her book, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940*, Francesca Orsini marks that this situation about the dichotomy of language and dialect is rooted in “the colonization” of language and culture in north India (4). The modern history of Hindi cannot be based on a one-way relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. The bilingual intellectuals of Bengal were successful and sophisticated in their behavior. They too created a “backward” image upon the United Province (4). Hindi was part of the education system “since 1916” in colonial Bengal (105n). The Hindi intellectuals followed the path of modern knowledge in the imitation of a second-hand notion of cultural progress. They experienced the status of the “subordinate elite” with some degree of humiliation in comparison to the “Bengali *bhadralok*” (middle class) (13-14). In this background, I map the role of the “cultural” elites of Bundelkhand, who subscribe to the Hindi ideology, its nationalist poets, writers, and political figures and often experience a similar position of “subordinate elite”, in the discourse on Bundeli language and identity.

¹⁶ All translations are mine unless otherwise mentioned.

¹⁷ In the same article, Aishwarj Kumar uses the phrase “Hindi belt” to expose the oppressive homogeneity of Hindi language in north India. He collects the writings of George Grierson who extensively documented the language in north India in the late nineteenth century. Kumar argues that the regional languages in Bihar are independent of Hindi and cannot be defined as “dialects” of Hindi from a historical perspective (1707).

Unlike M K Gandhi and Premchand, the Hindi nationalists fought for the promotion of Hindi as a national language “*because* it was culturally the language of the Hindu nation” (8). I argue that the group of Bundeli speakers, who are engaged in the standardization of Bundeli, can be seen as extending the Hindu identity. They hold recognition in the local literary associations. They represent the “secular” Hindu nation, which is built upon the liberal notion of the linguistic community. They include global issues of poverty, corruption, and social evils in Bundelkhand. However, they demand recognition to Bundeli in an antithetical relation to English. They follow a normative attitude in the development of a cultural identity for the Bundeli language. This, I argue, has implications for caste and gender relations in the linguistic hierarchy. The Bundeli elites produce Bundeli literature in the form of books that are circulated in the small circle of Bundeli speakers, who live in the major districts of Bundelkhand. As far as Bundeli readership is concerned, it is limited due to the lack of institutional support from the state and also owing to the cultural domination of Hindi in the print and digital media. The Bundeli elites, nevertheless, hold a regional individuality and popularity, especially, in the age of social media and the internet.

The present chapter focuses on essays written by Bundeli elites in Bundeli and Hindi, interviews, reports, poetry, performance, stories, community calendar, social media posts, etc. It attempts to offer a critique of the standardization of Bundeli by placing it in the context of linguistic hierarchies of India. It aims to explain how some speech forms become languages and some other speech forms become “dialects” in the Hindi public sphere. It also analyses other issues that the available texts bring up—different registers and questions of public and private usage, written literature, institutional/official use, literary use, and how the efforts at standardization have been effective.

Hindi language and literature and its ideology at large have assimilated Bundeli and many other local languages into its fold. Hindi has consolidated and culturally appropriated the minor languages such as Nimadi, Malwi, Bagheli, Bundeli, etc., in MP.¹⁸ Mainstream narratives

¹⁸ Shah, Madhukar. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 10 Nov. 2016

represent the smaller regions in north India as the "Hindi belt" as well as "Indian culture". By being part of the Hindi domain, it projects "Indianness." My aim is also to analyze these representations and see how these representations are highly upper-caste Hindu in nature. Not just that it excludes many cultures and languages in India, but it also reinforces the caste-cultural hierarchies. The proposed project seeks to problematize this narrative. Bundeli it should be noted, also aspires to be under the tag of the language of the separate state of Bundelkhand, a political demand current in the region.

The chapter locates the role of Bundeli elites in the larger debate on Hindi nationalism. It links the debate around languages with the socio-political realities of linguistic minorities in the post-independent period. It thus tries to understand the negotiation between the Indian state and the linguistic minorities in the case of Bundeli. In this regard, it explains the relationship between the Bundeli and its past and the struggle for its constitutional recognition.

The cultural elites and the colonial state have both played a significant role in the making of the Hindi public sphere since the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. In his book, *Hindi Nationalism*, Alok Rai defends the idea of the Hindi language against the divisive influence of Hindi nationalism. He identifies Hindi as a "dynamic" entity (6) and argues that the linguistic difference between Hindi and Urdu was an act of invention for the administrative purpose, not a recognition of two different languages in a polarized sense (23). Rai's work does not inform us about the complicated effects of linguistic nationalism in north India and how the British joined the upper-caste Hindu supporters to establish the supremacy of Hindi. In his book, *One Language Two Scripts*, Christopher King explains how cultural supremacy evolved between the Hindi language and "Hindu nationalism" among the Hindi elites in the nineteenth century. The Hindi elites formed a small ethnic group. They developed their objective of establishing cultural superiority by actively constructing the idea of a community and that of the nation in the succeeding period. They articulated their demands for the recognition of Hindi at various levels: they asserted Hindu symbols, gave those symbols internal value, and expressed their social status

against the predominant group of both Hindu and Muslims in the British administration.¹⁹ The rest is the story of how the political leaders manipulated the symbols of ethnicity, mostly marked by both language and religion, in mobilizing the community at the level of mass politics (1-4). Various contexts and activities reveal the implications of the success of the Hindi movement. In his article, “The Hindu-Urdu Controversy of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh and Communal Consciousness,” King makes some observations about the occupation of the elites in the Hindi movement. The Hindu elites vied with the traditional elites for clerical positions (113). They were engaged in the print and publishing activities. They worked under the patronage of the colonial state. They organized literary gatherings. They formed Nagari Pracharani Sabha in 1893, an autonomous institution (114). They aspired for the nationalist ideal of freedom and progress by claiming pride in the reconstruction of knowledge, history, and geography. Hindi language emerged as the national tradition (115-118). In the introduction to her book, *Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, Vasudha Dalmia uses the word “cellular” to show that the intellectual movements were mobilized under one umbrella term, Hindu tradition. It linked various trends organically in north India (10). The standardization and Sanskritization of Hindi is a watermark design in the cultural elites’ negotiation with the colonial state.

Having marked the role of cultural elites in the historical development of Hindi in north India, I take up the case of Bundeli elites, who engage in the standardization of the Bundeli language to formulate their cultural identity. I use the phrase, ‘standard’ public for the Bundeli elites to distinguish them from a majority of Bundeli speakers in the context of a linguistic minority because I explain their role following the features and the trends mentioned above (See Fig. 3). The standard public can also be called an interest group. It points to the unequal relationships among Bundeli speakers.

¹⁹ The Hindu caste groups, Kayasths, Khatri and Kashmiri Brahmins shared a close affinity with Urdu and Persian. They could share a secular tradition with Muslim community without feeling any danger of losing their status as Hindu. They formed a group of traditional elites (10). King, Christopher R. Introduction. *One Language Two Scripts*. Oxford UP, 1994, p. 10.



(Fig.3 The Standard Public at the Hall of Bundelkhand Riverside Hotel, Orchha)

The Bundeli speakers are allowed and, at the same time, disallowed to participate in the literary sphere. The location of Bundeli *bhasha* (standard Bundeli) recognizes the ideological sources such as *desh bhakti* (patriotism) in the standardization of Bundeli. The standard public speaks from the location of *bhasha*. They depend on the ideas of nationalist figures like Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (1864-1938)²⁰ and M.K. Gandhi (1869-1948).²¹ The location of *bhasha* renders a

²⁰ Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi successfully proposed and mobilized the ‘standardized’ Hindi by “privileging abstract” Sanskrit words and syntax over “concrete words” used in colloquial and regional territories. This had implications for rejection of public opinions and exclusion of marginalized communities if the Hindi literati did not find it fit to the standardized Hindi (410). Orsini, Francesca. “What Did They Mean by ‘Public’? Language, Literature and the Politics of Nationalism.” *EPW*, vol. 34, no.7, Feb. 1999, p. 410. *JSTOR*, jstor.org/stable/4407652?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

²¹ Gandhi advocated for Hindustani (spoken Hindi) because it could offer “a happy combination of Sanskritized Hindi and Persianised Urdu.” Kumar, Kuldeep. “Politics of Language in UP Reflects India’s History of Favouring Sanskrit over Urdu.” *The Wire*, Apr. 2017, thewire.in/politics/the-politics-of-language-in-up-reflects-the-nations-history-of-favouring-sanskrit-over-urdu. However, Gandhi made the “*tatsama* (Sanskrit)” and “*tadbhava* (Sanskrit derivative)” categories of Sanskrit the base of lexicography in the construction of Indo-Aryan languages. This certainly alienated the languages spoken by tribes and ethnic minorities (100). Sebastian, V. “Gandhi and the Standardization of Gujarati.” *EPW*, vol.44, no.31, Aug. 2009, p.100. *JSTOR*, jstor.org/stable/pdf/25663396.pdf?Refreqid=excelsior%3A223603bca851490bbbd9c7aa134f547a.

different recognition given to the love for one's nation, and that recognition is subject to certain structures of literary markers. The structures of literary markers in the location of *bhasha* is such that it simultaneously allows and disallows one's entry into the public space.

The chapter aims to highlight how the Bundeli *boli* (Bundeli dialects, as against Bundeli *bhasha*) is perceived, in Ilaiah's words, to be a "historical object of abuse" (169); the differences in the Bundeli 'other' as constructed in the urban context and how the Bundeli 'self' is conceived as having the potential for a political capacity to race with the so-called national language. The chapter also discusses the politics of sameness. The notion of Bundeli language is centralized in the rhetoric of preservation of single *atma* (soul) against the diversity of its forms. Bundeli's difference is marked against English and not against Hindi or other languages that surround it. I attempt to map how this marks the public image of the Bundeli language in the political imagination of the standard public.

Hailing as a Bundeli speaker from Gujarat, I am recognized by the standard public as a speaker of Bundeli "dialect" and as a Bundeli Other while participating in language discourse determined by the mainstream print media (See Fig. 4). This can be an anecdote, where the emphasis is on "written" language or a narrative that is conscious of the production of *language* in Bundeli. I ask: what does Bundeli language intend to do by showcasing itself through writing? Can this be considered as self-conscious archiving? If so, is it a reaction to protect the past of the Bundeli language, as the Bundeli writing its own history? Does Bundeli literature create a new aesthetic experience? What is the relationship of the standard public with the socio-political power? How does the standard public secure its cultural politics? How does it represent the issues of a linguistic minority in the socio-political context of Bundelkhand? The chapter seeks to question the self-reflective/self-erasing nature of print and publishing activity in the Bundeli language.



(Fig. 4 Poster of Bundeli Bhasha kau Rashtriya Sammelan, a two-day literary gathering on Bundeli language held at Orchha)

The members, who have associated themselves with the standard public, attend the literary gathering and engage in the standardization of Bundeli as a central objective in cultural politics. They write literature in Bundeli under the aegis of Kailash Madbaiya (1944-), the President of a council known as Akhil Bharatiya Bundelkhand Sahitya evam Sanskriti Parishad, Bhopal (All Indian Council of Bundelkhand Literature and Culture, Bhopal) and Madhukar Shah (1944-), (the grandson of the prince of Tikamgarh, a princely state, MP). I came in contact with the members of the standard public at the 'Bundeli Bhasha kau Rashtriya Sammelan,' a two-day literary gathering on the Bundeli language held during 9-10, January 2016 at Orchha, Tikamgarh district, MP. I interviewed them at their respective residences to understand their experience and perception of Bundeli language, culture, and identity. The following section is an analyses of the interviews with key figures in the Bundeli Standard Public.

Newness of Bundeli

Kailash Madbaiya is one of the foremost writers in Bundeli. He is active in the Bundeli standard public for long.²² He narrates how he went through linguistic humiliation for speaking Bundeli in public spaces. When he shifted to Bhopal from Banpur, a historical town in Lalitpur district (UP) in 1985, he was abused by the Hindi chauvinists. The Hindi chauvinists diminished his image by calling his mother-tongue ‘*dehat ki boli*’ (a dialect of the village). Madbaiya claims that Bundeli is no more a language of the *dehat* (village). He opposes the idea that Bundeli represented the ‘low’-caste identity.

Madbaiya belongs to the Jain community. He has a Ph.D. in science. He enjoys a cultural reputation as the President of his council that I have mentioned above. He along with other members of the standard public write and publish literary works in Bundeli. This, according to him, helps earn respect for Bundeli language and identity. He is a retired public service officer. He has published anthologies of essays in Bundeli. He organizes a literary gathering once a year. He has published his writings on several themes. He is determined to earn a dignified identity for Bundeli with the support of Madhukar Shah and the other like-minded people. President Ramnath Kovind presented Madbaiya Padma Shree for Literature and Education for the year 2019.²³

Madhukar Shah lives in New Delhi.²⁴ Shah is the princely inheritor of Tikamgarh, the princely state in Bundelkhand. He is a Hindu Rajput. He is an alumnus of University of Cambridge, USA but could not complete his Ph.D. He actively sponsors literary gatherings and publications for the progress of the Bundeli language and literature. Shah informs that Seth Govind Das (1896-1974), a freedom fighter, a distinguished parliamentarian, and a Gandhian

²² Madbaiya, Kailash. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 26 Nov. 2016.

²³ “Kailash Madbaiya awarded Padma Shree, 2019.” *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, Jan. 2019, bundelkhand.in/kailash-madbaiya/padma-shree-award.

²⁴ Shah, Madhukar. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 10 Nov. 2016.

supported Hindi ‘as a national language’ but he counts Punjabi the only language in north India to have been able to escape from the influence of the Hindi language because its supporters have adopted the Gurumukhi script. In the Indian context, script then becomes an important marker to differentiate between a *bhasha* and *boli*. Although most north Indian languages use a modified version of Devanagari and most European languages use the Roman script, the association of script with *bhasha* has been a problematic in the Indian scenario.

Jagdish Rawat is a Bundeli essayist and poet. He was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award in Bhopal for his contribution to Bundeli poetry.²⁵ He belongs to Chhatarpur district (MP). Rawat points out that it has been a bold step for him to write prose in Bundeli. He has been criticized by Bundeli poets and Hindi intellectuals in the public domain. He writes about the debate between him and Hindi chauvinists in the preface to his book, *Athai ki Baaten* [Discussions at the Public Forum]. The book is a collection of essays in Bundeli. The essays were published in *Desh Bandhu*²⁶ from 1991 to 1998 (v). The editor of *Desh Bandhu* invited the local writers to publish columns and articles in Bundeli and Bagheli in 1971 (v). The expression of minor languages is usually opposed by mainstream academicians and intellectuals in the public sphere. A group of professors wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi requesting him not to recognize “dialects” of Hindi (Pathak). This points out many tensions among the Hindi elites who stand against the public relevance of the linguistic minorities in north India. In addition, it points to the anxieties of language-caste elites whose privileges stand to be questioned with the emergence of newer identities.

In its effort to counter the dominance of Hindi, the standard public claims that Bundeli is a “written” language or a prose language in the past. Safiya Khan is the founder of Bundelkhand ki Virasat at Orchha, a forum to document the archaeological sites in Bundelkhand.²⁷ She has a

²⁵ Rawat, Jagdish. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 20 Nov. 2016.

²⁶ *Desh Bandhu*, a Hindi newspaper was launched in April 1959 from Raipur, now capital of Chhattisgarh, by veteran journalist Mayaram Surjan. In 2008, *Desh Bandhu* started its National Edition from New Delhi, thus, becoming the first newspaper in central India to achieve this feat. Today, *Desh Bandhu* is published from seven cities: Raipur, Bilaspur, Bhopal, Jabalpur, Satna and New Delhi.

²⁷ Khan, Safiya. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 10 Jan. 2016.

Ph.D. in Archeology from Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. She has written three books—*Bundelkhand ke Dastavej* [The Documents of Bundelkhand I, II and III]. In the preface to her book, *Bundelkhand ke Dastavej Bhag I*, [Documents of Bundelkhand Part I] Khan reconstructs an important history of the Bundelkhand region.²⁸ She documents the letters which the princes of Jaipur state and Orchha state wrote in mutual exchange in the eighteenth century. This shows the widespread existence of Bundeli that was not limited to the contemporary linguistic boundaries. The script used in these letters of eighteenth century is in Devanagari. Khan holds a respectable position in social media. In a *Facebook* post made on 28th June 2018, Khan writes about Diwan Pratipal Singh.²⁹ She was awarded ‘Diwan Pratipal Singh Samman’ by Jitendra Singh Bundela, the Member of Parliament (MP) from the state of Madhya Pradesh.³⁰ The posts of her achievements in social media indicate the shared consciousness of Bundeli past among the local members of Bundelkhand or among people associated with Bundelkhand.

Dayal Shrivastav (1944-) is born in Damoh (MP). He writes both in Hindi and Bundeli. His writings are published online at kavitakosh.org. Shrivastav expresses his views on the standardization of Bundeli in the essay, “*Bundeli kau Manak Surup aur Karako ka Prayog*” [Standard Form of Bundeli and the Use of Determiners]. He makes a distinction between *hamaye vidvan* (our Bundeli scholars) and *Hindi ke vidvan* (The scholars of Hindi) (24). He claims that Bundeli was lost and it has been rediscovered now. He writes: “*vo to Bundeli ke vidvanan ne*

²⁸ In the preface to her book, *Bundelkhand ke Dastavej Bhag I* (Documents of Bundelkhand Part I), Khan collects *kharit jat* (the letters) from the Rajasthan State Archives (RSA) (13). The rulers of Orchha, Narvar, Datia, Chanderi and Panna of Bundelkhand shared political contact with the Kachhvaha rulers of Jaipur (13). They wrote letters to mutually address, respect and insist on correspondence for the security of their dynasties its environment (13). They resorted to help and seek advice from Jaysinh, the Kachhvaha ruler of Amer in Jaipur, who had been in alliance with Akbar, to meet the political gains (13). The cross-regional relation played an important role in the Mughal politics (14). Khan, Safiya. “Prastavana” [Preface]. *Bundelkhand ke Dastavej Bhag I* [Documents of Bundelkhand Part I]. Vikash Prakashan, 2013, p. 13-14.

²⁹ Diwan Pratipal Singh compiled twelve volumes on the history of Bundelkhand region. The volumes were presented to the Chief Minister, Shivraj Singh Chauhan at the state parliament. “Bundelkhand ka Itihas Presented to CM” [History of Bundelkhand Presented to CM]. *The India Post*, Sept. 2010, theindiapost.com/nation/madhya-pradesh/bhopal/bundelkhand-ka-itihas-presented-to-c-m/.

³⁰ Khan, Safiya. Diwan Pratipal Sing Samman. *Facebook*, 28 June 2018, [facebook.com/safiya.khan.77398/?ref=br_rs&fb_dtsg_ag=Adz6nfoqZlx97aJLQRDsF8YvqFK3hzf6cjCHn4xx7oFgFQ%3AAAdxLxJZXLY1x7i-kdlT6ghGKkfAiUkBDm2n9vNloKgnsSA](https://www.facebook.com/safiya.khan.77398/?ref=br_rs&fb_dtsg_ag=Adz6nfoqZlx97aJLQRDsF8YvqFK3hzf6cjCHn4xx7oFgFQ%3AAAdxLxJZXLY1x7i-kdlT6ghGKkfAiUkBDm2n9vNloKgnsSA).

khod khod ke gadhe murda nikar nikar ke Bundeli ki haddi kho(n) dho ponch saaf karo aur uko bhoot dikhao so logan kho(n) samajh me(n) aa rai ke Bundeli soi kachhu aay.” (The standard public has dug and taken out the remains of the dead body of Bundeli language which was buried in the land. It washed and cleaned the bones of Bundeli and showed its ghost to the people. People now realize that Bundeli too has some life in her) (24).

The above statement is addressed to the people who are outside the efforts of reconstructing Bundeli. It clearly marks the boundaries between Bundeli speakers and non-Bundeli speakers. It represents the Bundeli intellectuals of the standard public, who engage in a negotiation with the Hindi intellectuals in the public context of *sampreshaniyata* (communication) (24). The statement is also quite figurative as it personifies Bundeli into a human body with its bones and the possibility of life in it. The metaphor of the ghost is important to understand the relationship between the Bundeli language and the standard public (24). The definition of the ghost for Bundeli is suggestive of the views, aims, tendencies of the standard public. The standard public wants to publish its beliefs and opinions to materialize a shadow-like presence of Bundeli that can haunt the structure of the Hindi public sphere. The use of a supernatural metaphor suggests the standard public’s mode of practicing a language and engaging in the discourse around linguistic identity. It is emotive in tone. It embodies the subjective presence of the Bundeli language. Bundeli is not yet imperceptible completely because it owns a considerable past in the larger memory of the standard public.

Shrivastav works towards a collective attempt to highlight the visibility of Bundeli but confined to clear boundaries. He privileges the standard public to the act as the main agent in the representation of Bundeli identity. It is indicated that Bundeli is coming back to its life with a class identity, which is prototypically made of the upper-caste male members. This provides Bundeli with a symbol akin to some cult figure. The standard public uses this image of the standard public, ridden with caste, class and gendered privileges to counter the image of rural or ‘backward’ status attached to the Bundeli language.

Mahesh Katare (1954-) alias Sugam is popular for his Bundeli *ghazal* (poetry) in Bundelkhand. Rohit Porval notes the features and feats of Katare’s personality in the report

published by *Amar Ujala*.³¹ According to Katare, Bundeli is the language of resistance. He exposes the reality of poverty, starvation, and underdevelopment in Bundelkhand. He is known for his scathing remarks on the government and corrupt politicians. He belongs to the town of Bina Etawa in the Sagar district (MP). He is the first Bundeli writer to have been honored with Saha Bhasha Samman by Hindi Academy, New Delhi in 2017. He argues that Bundeli is stereotyped because it is used for producing jokes TV soap operas on brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law.

Katare advocates for the use of Bundeli on all social media platforms.³² In the absence of capital required for printing and publishing, he claims that Facebook is essential to represent the identity of Bundeli. He wants the standard public to be active on social media. He shares his experience of being opposed by a group of Urdu poets, who argue that he cannot use Bundeli to compose *ghazal*. The Urdu poets consider Bundeli a “dialect” and think that *ghazal* should not be used to express political views. They argue that *ghazal* poetry is apolitical. It belongs to a particular class alone. It is a medium of expressing personal feelings. Katare argues that the proponents of *ghazal* poetry cannot speak in Bundeli. They have no ground to disqualify him from using Bundeli in the supposedly superior craft of *ghazal*. He asserts his identity as a Bundeli *ghazal* poet. He invites the Urdu poets to counter him. He challenges them to speak Bundeli and prove him wrong in composing *ghazal*. Katare’s entry into public sphere indicates the reshaping of a literary tradition which is dominated by a particular class and theme in the literary sphere.

In the case of Katare, Bundeli becomes a means to represent the identity of the individual and of the community. In her book, *Language Emotion and Politics in South India*, Lisa Mitchell calls such a situation a historical moment. She notes that the “skill and wit” of traditional poets

³¹ Porval, Rohit. “Bundeli Kavi ko Hindi Academy ka Samman” [Bundeli Poet is Awarded by Hindi Academy]. *Amar Ujala*, amarujala.com/kavya/halchal/first-time-in-history-hindi-sahitya-akademi-to-honor-bundeli-poet-mahesh-katare-sugam.

³² Katare, Mahesh. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 9 Jan. 2015.

did not remain the central concern amongst the local speakers after the representation of mother-tongue took different forms by the end of the nineteenth century Telugu region (72).

When I met Shiromani Sinh, a short-story writer in Bundeli at the literary gathering in Orchha, I realized that though a ‘minor’, the presence of Bundeli writer from Schedule Caste (SC) background made some marks along with the other members of the standard public, who belong to the majority of Brahmin and other Savarna castes. Sinh belongs to Seondha (MP) and has taught at Jiwaji University as a temporary faculty. He authors an anthology of short-stories in Bundeli published by Madbaiya with the help of a grant provided by Shah in 2016.³³ The role of Sinh is important in shaping the standard public. He creates the discourse of sociality in Bundeli literature. Sinh is part of the standard public but he is different in his politics in relation with Bundeli. He writes short stories in Bundeli but does not use the standard language for the characters because they are based in the rural context.

Another Bundeli writer, Rajiv Namdev is recognized as a Bundeli satirist. His satirical work, *Luk Luk ki Bimari* [Disease of Caprice] is noteworthy in Bundeli literature.³⁴ It is available online at <http://kavitakosh.org>. He is active in the literary sphere of Bundelkhand. His activities can be observed in the public domain through his blog.³⁵

The members of the standard public mainly represent the districts of Madhya Pradesh in Bundelkhand. They constitute a propertied class holding important positions in the government sector. The standard public is led by the members belonging to the Brahmin and Savarna castes and its members claim a “secular” approach in the formulation of a standard Bundeli.

³³ Sinh, Shiromani. *Argani*. Manish Prakashan, 2016.

³⁴ “Luk Luk ki Bimari -Vyangkar- Rajiv Namdev Rana Lidhauri” [Disease of Caprice-Satirist-Rajiv Namdev Alias Rana Lidhauri]. May 2018, bundelkhanda.blogspot.com/2018/05/blog-post.html.

³⁵ Find the blog here, Rajiv Namdev Rana Lidhauri, <http://rajeevranalidhori.blogspot.com/2017/03/my-blog-up-date-1-3-2017.html>.

In his article, “The Great Language Debate: Politics of Metropolitan versus Vernacular India,” D.L. Seth argues that the language, mainly of Hindi, has become a political issue in the process of “democratization” (268). It allows the lately “ascendant elites” to radicalize their respective social and political space today (271). The major thrust of the standard public with the objective of standardization of Bundeli is to assert its linguistic identity against the discrimination for speaking the Bundeli “dialect” in the Hindi public sphere. The standard public rejects three main views perpetuated in the Hindi public sphere: Bundeli is a dialect of the village; it cannot be known as a public language, and it cannot function as prose or as the language of mainstream literature. The observation of Seth is relevant in the case of the standard public because it seeks validity from Hindi nationality but on the grounds of standard Bundeli.

The emergence of the regional writers and intellectuals, who form the standard public, with claims to a non-schedule language is a new development in the arena of cultural politics. It informs the rise of socio-political voices which thrive against the hegemony of Hindi. The standard public shares a consensus about the standardization of Bundeli. However, it diverges on the basis of their thematic focus and interest in writing. It enjoys recognition in the age of social media and the internet. Its members have been awarded honorable prizes by the state for the service to Bundeli language and literature in the public sphere. It attempts to authenticate a particular variant spoken in the districts of Madhya Pradesh. The ‘standard’ Bundeli variant is oriented to the cultural boundaries which are marked by the canons of Hindi literature. All this is marked by the standard public’s efforts to reconstruct a distant past to Bundeli, to claim a written tradition on the ground of Sanskritized manners and argue for desirable and respectable notion for Bundeli over the diverse forms of practicing identity in the array of human expressions.

In the following section, I try to know, understand, and critique the literary past claimed by the standard public in its genealogical reconstruction of Bundeli identity. It discusses the political theory of the standard public around their claims, arguments, metaphors, and symbols. It explains how they reinforce the idea of Bundeli language and identity. It is interesting to examine what entails the ‘newness’ of Bundeli.

From Folk to People

The standard public finds it necessary to standardize Bundeli because standardization can serve specific interests and public purposes. Madbaiya expresses his idea of a public language in the prefaces to his anthologies of Bundeli essays. He claims that Bundeli is mainly characterized by three virtues: *nike* (gentle) (“Nike Bol” 2), *mithe* (sweet) (“Apan se” 2) and *banke* (elegant) (“Apni” ii). According to him, these virtues accord Bundeli *darajja* (respectability) (“Apan se” 2). In the preface to anthology, *Nike Bol Bundeli ke*, [Gentle Words of Bundeli] he reveals the objectives of standardization of Bundeli:

Sabse saar ki baat ja kai lok kalyan ki, lok mangal ki, sab jan hitay sab jan sukhay ki jaun mansa bhaut gairai se hot baui lok bhasha kau nikpan ay so jau Bundeli me bharpur hai-hove mangal gan gurire chautaraf. So jei do gun darshave ke lane aur satyam, shivam, sundaram sarup ke Bundeli me ujar karve lane tisri pothi kau naav dharo-Nike Bol Bundeli ke.

The folk-language is quite gentle. The virtue of gentility coincides with the motive for public well-being, welfare, prosperity, and happiness. Such a motive is one of the most essential virtues of folk-language. Bundeli contains the motive of folk-language in abundance. It sings the song of prosperity and happiness in all directions. I entitled my third book, *Gentle Words of Bundeli* because I wanted to reveal this virtue of Bundeli in the form of *Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram* (Truth is Beauty and God 2).

The above statement marks a particular mode of practicing the language. Madbaiya speaks about the poetics of the Bundeli language and he applies norms and strategies of *nikpan* (gentility) in Bundeli categorizing it as one of the folk languages. He applies the norm of high status to Bundeli using the Sanskritic ideals of truth, god, and beauty. By synthesizing folk and classic, he attempts to persuade the standard public towards the standardization of Bundeli. He represents standardization as the prime cause that helps sing the glories of the Bundeli language. He calls the standard public to submit themselves to the service of Bundeli. It can be seen in the statement that Bundeli, once glorified, can by itself operate over its defenders. Madbaiya practices

language in a manner that can make the standard public pay attention to the issues of Bundeli language, catch the imagination of the beauty of Bundeli language and, most importantly, experience the moments of affect around the presence of Bundeli language. Secondly, Madbaiya chooses essay or prose as a genre to claim power and prestige. He authorizes two more anthologies of Bundeli essays in a similar vein, namely, *Mithe Bol Bundeli ke* [Sweet Words of Bundeli] and *Banke Bol Bundeli ke* [Elegant Words of Bundeli]. He claims that the *thasak* (pride) for Bundeli language is constituted by its three virtues: *nikpan* (gentility) *bankpan* (elegance) *mithas* (sweetness).

My aim, in this section, is to unpack the rhetoric of sweet, gentle, and elegant Bundeli. The bond between the standard public and Bundeli is established by propelling Bundeli into the public. The standard Bundeli language is cherished by the standard public as folkish in virtue and ‘high’ in normative and lexical status. Madbaiya insists that Bundeli is natural in carrying the folkish elements and social/classical in claiming a Sanskritic tradition. He finds the ancient tradition instrumental in purifying the social identity of the standard public. He counts on the folk elements as natural to its shared culture of value, ethics, and aesthetic. He seeks a cultural continuity in the proposal to Bundeli as a public language which is selective on many counts. The folk literature would bestow Bundeli as the public language of the standard public certain qualities that are ‘desirable’ in the elitist purview of truth. Madbaiya resonates with the romantic nationalism in his ideal of Bundeli as a public language.

In their book, *Voices of Modernity*, Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs discuss the linguistic ideologies in the historical contexts of Europe. Both illustrate how the dichotomy of folk and elite is played out in Hugh Blair’s linguistic ideology (130). It is illustrated in his comparison between “Gothic” and “Celtic” tradition (142-143). Blair viewed society in its “intermediary stage” (160). Johann Gottfried Herder, the eighteenth-century philologist further worked on it and gave Blair’s schema “the grander synthesis” (130). Bauman and Briggs further discuss Herder (163). Herder is “the populist” (191). He observes that society is not mature enough but it holds the traces of ancient poetic heights in the pursuit of progress. Herder conceptualizes language and its “communicative capacities” into a “reflexive” entity (172-173). His concept of language is “simultaneously natural *and* social” and such “hybrid” leads to

establish a common “national society” and to satisfy “human nature” too (190). The role of elites as a class is crucial to carve a distinct space for the raw knowledge and “sensory experience” (173). The latter is associated with folklore in the historical formation of “romantic nationalism” (195). The ancient source helps elite intellectuals mutually share a political thought and play an important role in the democratization of society (196). Though the dichotomy of folk and elite is founded on “intellectual and gender inequality,” Bauman and Briggs argue (185), Herder connects folk-language with the idea of a pure nation. In this sense, I move to place the standard public’s search for a ‘pure’ nation in its cultural context of combining ancient heights and the ‘natural’ folk.

In the context of linguistic minority in north India, the case of Bihar is interesting. In her article, “Conceptualizing Bhojpuri for a National Hindi Elite,” Asha Singh discusses the cultural politics of Bhojpuri elites. She argues that the conceptualization of language entails an ideological pursuit which shapes the people and the region but the categories of “people” and “region” are situated in histories. Language is a site of conflicts more than a simple documentation of linguistic practices (35). Singh shows that the ‘folk’ elements provide “raw-material” to the elites. It helps them construct the nation (39). She suggests that the elites claim nationality in a diachronic mode more than synchronic. Therefore, she calls their construction of the nation “timeless” (39). How do we understand this paradox in the standardization of Bundeli?

Bauman and Briggs highlight a system of references that brings the binary opposition between literacy/orality, elite/folk, self/other, etc. in contrast to the “social formations” of national identity (106-107). Both argue that this system is unequal because it is based on the “hybrid” “textual models” (312). The elites crystallize the oral/folk/Other elements to dominate the “particular practices of imagination” in the construction of language and identity (312). They also point out that the practice of imagining is “authentic” in the working class but the elites are “authoritative” in the practices of imagining itself (312).

In the contemporary context, Bundeli is reclaimed as a written language. It is presupposed that Bundeli can be accessed on the parameter of literacy, rationality, morality, and

ability to experience progress and, thereby, to claim legitimacy to represent the “natural” or “sensory” elements of *nikpan* (gentility), *mithas* (sweetness), and *bankpan* (elegance) in oral and folk languages. The dichotomy of oral and literacy is connected with the dichotomy of folk and elite. It is played out in the efforts of establishing legitimacy in the construction of a Bundeli tradition. The markers of rationality and progress in the dichotomies of folk/elite, oral/literacy and such binary oppositions demand a critical investigation of linguistic standardization.

In his work, “Vernacular Values,” Ivan Illich identifies the function of folk-language as a nourisher (79). He follows that the rationalization of language will hinder such human function of language in a capitalist society (79). He measures the future of vernacular communities on the map of the linguistic economy (93). In the case of the Maithili movement in Bihar, Mithilesh Kumar Jha divides the linguistic economy into three divisions: English as the language of ruling castes and class, the bilingual and trilingual groups who have historically dominated the vernacular public sphere, and the monolinguals who are the majority, as being outside the first two groups (Deller 3).

Illich finds the third group polyglot since it stands outside the market (95). He advocates vernacular as a language for which one does not have to pay and acquire but find as “homemade, homebred derived from the commons” or the third group (61). He offers a critique of capitalist society and argues for the term, “vernacular” against the commodification of social relations and values (87). He finds it more important to preserve the vernacular values in the sense of philosophy of life and epistemology.

The Bundeli standard public has come to question the dominant forces and demand opening up of specific spaces. It demonstrates a desire to institute a Bundeli community via the standardization of language. But this cannot be justified, according to Illich. The objective of standardization would suggest that the people orient their values and activities by rationalization of their motives in their respective society (52). Illich counts this rational pursuit problematic because it can lead to the unlimited expansion of productive forces in a rationalized form of domination. He alerts against the expansion of productive forces over nature and humans

themselves in his defense of the vernacular values (57). He indicates that such expansion is irrational in fact.

Illich is helpful to understand the flaw in the approach of the standard public. But the role of elites or intellectuals can be located in a different logic and context of expansion (I shall discuss this in Chapter 3). Madbaiya finds the Bundeli society disinterested in buying books.³⁶ He complains of its reading habit because it takes, in his view, a random reading of literature and reads books casually from anywhere and everywhere. He does not find it easy to circulate the anthologies of Bundeli essays because the Bundeli society is keen on popular literature. The popular form of “readership” varies based on various purposes (Orsini 49). Access to books and literature is a broader issue. In her book, *Waves in the Hinterland*, Farah Naqvi reads the notion of standard language in the context of marginalization of women in everyday life. She argues that readership is a part of the literacy movement. It can debunk the standard definition of literacy (28-29). Madbaiya symbolically intervenes in production of books which is particular to the “provincial” elites. Although it is the educated urban middle class who are his target readers, there is a tension between the cheap costs of print material available to the masses in Hindi as against his motive to standardize the literary market in a normative sense. Madbaiya aims at normative claims more than the preservation of Bundeli in print form. He wants the Bundeli community to learn and practice Bundeli writing in the “correct” grammatical forms. His dependence on dominant model renders Bundeli identity victim in its narrative of recognition. It can be argued that Madbaiya is “provincialized” by the Euro-American ideology of language.³⁷ I explain this paradox, by pointing out his manipulation of the regional code, in the next section. I draw upon the transition that occurs in the claim of Bundeli as written and literate language in the following section.

³⁶ Madbaiya, Kailash. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 26 Nov. 2016.

³⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty refers the concept of “deprovincialization” to argue for the “universally human” patterns of social, ethnic and cultural references against the elite categories that are anchored in a cartographic zeal of practicing language (Bauman and Briggs 266).

From Oral to the Written

Even though many languages are written, they survive only because they are oral and are spoken. But then, the values attributed to languages that have not required to be written down has been dismal in comparison to dominance of written traditions. Bundeli is largely an oral language. The standard public appropriates experiences of Bundeli speakers in the process of standardization, which has serious implications. I discuss the correlates of oral and written or print in the following section. I argue that certain qualities of Bundeli are rendered indeterminate in the context of Bundeli as “people’s” language. Madbaiya runs the council with the name of Akhil Bharatiya Bundelkhand Sahitya evam Sanskriti Parishad at his residence in Bhopal city.³⁸ He collects essays in Bundeli from members of the standard public and edits them for publication. He owns a publication, Manish Prakashan (Manish Publication) in the name of his son. He identifies his council as an autonomous institution. The council plays an important role in bringing the members of the standard public onto one platform. This highlights the normative construction of identity in the literary circle as the standard public wants to define its cultural identity in the ‘standard’ form.

In the present section, I ask: how does the standard public distinguish written tradition for Bundeli from the orality of the Bundeli language? I suggest that the standard public privileges Bundeli as the means to speak for folk-literature and the people in rural territory. However, it simultaneously relegates Bundeli on account of its orality. It suggests a temporal disjunction between the past and the present status of the Bundeli language.

The role of writing and print-publishing has played a dominant role in the politics of language in north India. In her article, “What Did They Mean by ‘Public’? Language, Literature and the Politics of Nationalism,” Francesca Orsini shows that the Hindi literary sphere was marked by a new change after the institutionalization of languages and culture and the spread of new ideas in the context of print-technology (409). In his essay, “*Bundeli Gadhya Gatha*,” [History of Bundeli Prose] Madbaiya appeals to the standard public to install *chhapkhane* (the

³⁸ Madbaiya, Kailash. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 26 Nov. 2016.

printing firms) in Bundelkhand (4). However, in the wake of subaltern historiography, the scholars critique the power-dynamics played out against the minor/oral communities.

In his article, “Writing, Orality and Power in the Dangs, Western India, 1800s-1920s,” Ajay Skaria shows that the colonial forms of writing and reading damaged the social and economic structure of the local scripts and reading practices in the Adivasi community. The colonial power introduced “the myth-models” in the attempts to extract revenue from the forested region (51). It reduced the significance of local trends to “magical” practices (51). Skaria argues that the social and political contexts (where language is practiced) were “altered” by the new instrument of technology and ideology in the colonial period (17-37). The script or writing can be seen as a dominant tool of the governing state. The British brought change. But it also damaged the literary environment in India at the same time. In his article, “Orality, Writing, and Texts,” James Scott calls the form of writing oppressive. He equates it with the surveillance practices of the state (220). He argues that the written genealogy has been an elitist enterprise in the hands of a few and oral communities remain outside of it (220).

In the context of Bundelkhand, Shah expresses his pessimism for the future of the Bundeli language in particular and the languages spoken by the tribes in the north and central India.³⁹ He blames the middle-class society for the exploitation of Adivasis in Bundelkhand. According to him, the Adivasi people were the indigenous rulers in Bundelkhand, but as he argues, “we,” the middle class has pushed them to the bottom of the socio-economic ladder and changed them into the proletariat class. The pauperization of Dalit and Adivasi communities would result in the deterioration of ethnolinguistic diversity in Bundelkhand. He opines that the smaller languages, including Bundeli, has been devoured by Hindi. He does not find any significant possibility of their survival. They exist in the most vulnerable state, he says.

Unlike Shah, the literary elites associated with the standard public exclude the working-class communities in their linguistic ideology. Madbaiya identifies Adivasi people as *jangali* (savage) (“Apan se” 1). He claims that the Chandela rulers forced them out of Bundelkhand (1).

³⁹ Shah, Madhukar. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 10 Nov. 2016.

He de-legitimizes the indigeneity of certain communities in the region. While one kind of orality is accepted and pushed further, other kinds are often dismissed. This points to how languages are intimately tied to the communities that speak them. This is more evident in the reconstruction of Bundeli past among the literary elites.

In his essay, “*Bundeli kau Mankikaran*,” [Standardization of Bundeli] Madbaiya appeals to the standard public to make use of *shabd sampada* (the Bundeli words) at the heart of *lok bhashae* (folk-languages) which are used in the villages (103). I attended the Bundeli Bhasha kau Rashtriya Sammelan, the literary gathering held during 9-10, January 2016 at Orchha in the presence of the standard public and tried to understand the process of standardization of Bundeli. I observed that the members were assigned by Madbaiya to bring the list of Bundeli words from their respective districts to the literary gathering. They were divided into different groups. Each group represented its respective district. It discussed the legitimacy of the inclusion and exclusion of Bundeli words based on their use in daily social interactions. One member of the group, which represents the Chhatarpur district, traced the origin of a Bundeli word, *ringbau* (to crawl) to Sanskrit but he wanted the inclusion of its local variant, *ningbau* (to crawl) since the latter word prevails in the region. It was alarming to hear statements such as “*ye koi shabd nai hai*.” (this is not a word at all) and “*ye ek vachan hai ya bahuvachan?*” (is this singular or plural?). The idea of respectability one can observe is of foremost concern in the process of standardization.

The folk-language is associated with the lives of the people living in the villages. The standard public defines the “hybrid” notion of the Bundeli language so that it can offer space to the local elements in the production of cultural texts. But it would be a case of caution for the standard public to determine “purity” and “respectability” in the production of knowledge, both concepts being associated with casteist ideologies prevalent among Hindus in India.

Bauman and Briggs argue that the notion of the “hybrid” is built upon the acknowledgment of the “women and the lower classes” in the making of language as a tradition (78). The “hybrid” thus denotes a relation between the past and the present of a language in a theoretical sense (78). The early modern figure was preoccupied with the antiques to assimilate

the local form with the grand epics in “the project of romantic nationalism” and the nationalist ideologies (160). Sheldon Pollock calls this change “vernacularization” (161). The latter implies the larger operations of power in the literary culture. It is an assimilation of the “regional code” with the “cosmopolitan” model (161). It earns “authenticity” to “primitive qualities,” associated with folk-elements (162). It positions the latter to the status of new models for “authenticity” in the claim of “national identity” (162). Pollock observes that the universal form of language and genre is replaced by the local form at a certain time. In this regard, my question is: can the standard Bundeli be mapped on the ground of, what Pollock suggests, the “local realization of cosmopolitan model”? (161).

The standard public dismisses the actual event of vernacularization in the literary history of Bundelkhand. Stuart McGregor, in his essay, “The Progress of Hindi Part 1: The Development of a Transregional Idiom,” notes the development of Braj in the background of vernacularization against the predominance of Sanskrit (914). Braj became popular as a prose language in the time of Keshavdas (1555-1617), the early literary figure in the patronage of Indrajit, the king of “Orchha (in Bundelkhand to the south of Gwalior)” (914-926). Keshavdas helped the latter compose “commentaries on Sanskrit texts in Braj Bhasha prose” under new “cultural circumstances” (928). He kept the community acquainted with both classical and regional traditions in a shared manner despite his inheritance of Sanskrit (914-937). It is a matter of paradox that the standard public claims inheritance of Sanskrit in the making of Bundeli in the footsteps of the dominant model.

Naqvi shows that there are “four regional standards classified under Hindi: “Bhojpuri in the eastern, Avadhi in the central, Braj Bhasha in the southwestern and Khari Boli in the northwestern districts” in north India (66). According to the linguist Mahesh Jaiswal, George Grierson does not identify Braj with the ‘loan’ category but as an independent literary language in his *Linguistic Survey of India* (1898-1927) (14). The poets known as Keshavdas, Surdas, and Tulsidas are associated with Braj and Avadhi in the pre-colonial period respectively. The standard public appropriates these literary figures and literary histories. It disregards the temporal location of the Braj language. The literary figures are fixed in the political boundaries of Bundelkhand in contemporary times.

In his essay, “*Bundeli kau Sarup*,” [Form of Bundeli] Ganga Prasad Gupt Barsainya observes a major consensus among scholars on Sanskrit being the origin of most languages in north India (10). He sets Bundeli in line with Sanskrit as a written language that excels above the status of Braj. Bundeli is claimed to be a written language in order to maintain a status quo over the spoken languages, Braj and Avadhi, the two literary languages in north India. But the spoken languages have enriched the written tradition. In his essay, “*Bundeli kau Pailau Mahakavya: Alhakhand*,” [The First Epic in Bundeli Literature: *Alhakhand*] Avadh Kishor Shrivastav advises the poets of Bundelkhand not to credit Braj but Bundeli for the medium of their poems. He finds the *atma* (soul) of Braj poetry in the Bundeli language (82). Madbaiya claims *Ramacharitmanas* to be a Bundeli text on the following grounds: it contains thirty to forty percent of Bundeli words; it is sung for hundreds of years in Bundelkhand and its poet, Tulsidas is a Bundeli figure (“Apan se”1-2). McGregor mentions that “*Ramcaritmanas* (Holy lake of the deeds of Ram)” is popular in the Avadhi language (“The Progress” 937). But Madbaiya advocates that the inclusion of Bundeli words is based on *tatsama* (Sanskrit words) and *tadbhava* (derivative of Sanskrit word) in the standardization of Bundeli (“Bundeli kau”103). Shrivastav finds the linguistic survey of George Grierson invalid on the ground of the latter’s race. He argues that *ek angrez* (‘one English man’) cannot survey a thousand to twelve hundred years old Bundeli past (24).

The use of metaphysical categories like *atma* (soul) is part of Sanskrit registers. The tendency to connect the origin of a minor language to Sanskrit is a prominent trope in the Hindi language movement. I argue that the standardization of Bundeli is inevitably connected to the Sanskrit manners of writing and speaking. The standard public conceptualizes the “hybrid” notion of standard Bundeli on the axis of Sanskrit to maintain a status-co with the dominant ideology in the literary sphere and in society at large. The connection between linguistic minority and Sanskrit manners of writing and reading language is also marked in the case of the Sindhi language.

In her article, “The Paradox of Linguistic Minority,” Rita Kothari discusses the reasons behind the inclusion of the Sindhi language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian constitution during the 1960s. She shows that Sindhi faced the baggage of minority status and a stateless condition after partition. She argues that the elites decided to carve space for Sindhi in the

‘Indian’ culture and, thus, were motivated to garner “symbolic recognition” for Sindhi (131-134). They established proximity between Sindhi and two other ‘non-regional’ languages, Sanskrit and Urdu by proving Sindhi to be an ally of Hindi. They connected Sindhi with the Indian languages to argue out its ancient root in the Aryan civilization and the Indus river (135). The attempt of binding Sindhi with ancient tradition and ‘national’ tradition is the hallmark of its constitutional recognition. The elites reinforced such a process by adapting an impersonal take on the script for the Sindhi language, which communally polarized the identity further (137).

Kothari informs that a large chunk of the Sindhi community spread in Gujarat after India’s independence. I come from a cosmopolitan village in south Gujarat. Among many other communities, the village consists of members of the Sindhi community. In my interaction with Vijay Sindhi, a local merchant, I find that the local Sindhis subscribe to the TV channels from Pakistan. They can write the Sindhi language in Urdu script. Ironically, the literature published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi is in the Devanagari script.

Madbaiya attempts to reconstruct a genealogy of Bundeli prose in the form of *bijak* (copper plate) *shilalekh* (inscription) *katha* (tales) and archival *chiththiya* (letters), *pothi* (religious book) of Jain religion of the Pranami sect, *Bundeli varta* (hagiographical texts), *puranan* (classical Sanskrit text), *vaidhak* (medicine) and *gyotishan* (astrology) (“Bundeli Gadhya” 4-6). This genealogy is described more as a stable entity (4).

Madbaiya does not highlight the predominance of lyrical genres. He finds them politically inconsequential. He refers to the seventh century Sanskrit prose writer, Banbhatta who wrote *Kadambari*. *Kadambari* is claimed to be one of India’s earliest novels (“Apni Baat” 1). He counters the idea that Bundeli is confined solely to poetry alone; he argues that it was a language of *raj bhasha* (administration); so, its potential should be acknowledged in the function of the official language (“Bundeli Gadhya” 3). He uses the archival letters documented by Safiya Khan in the context of the ‘national’ movement of 1857 against the colonial state. He argues that the letters were exchanged among the princely states of Bundelkhand in the background of national independence between 1842 and 1857 against the colonial state (3-4). What this brings to light is this: that poetry although an ancient form of art has been perceived largely as a genre that exists

in the oral realm. Although poetry belonged to the courtly traditions, it is prose that is understood as giving an official, standard status to the language.

The folk-literature provides the standard public a raw material to claim a genealogy for Bundeli tradition. The standard public draws upon the folk-literature of Bundelkhand. Madbaiya appeals to the standard public to showcase it in the modern practice of writing, reading and performing Bundeli language under the larger umbrella of *bachik parampara* (oral tradition) of Bundelkhand (“Nike Bol” 4). Bundeli is thus presented as an object of possession. This is evident in the domestication of folk-languages which are metaphorically given the image of a sensuous identity.

Avadh Kishor Shrivastav identifies *Alhakhand* with the first epic in Bundeli (81). He cites Grierson to argue that *Alhakhand* is *ek sutantra rachna* (one independent text) (82). He puts *Alhakhand* in the lineage of writing from the time of Vedas, the Hindu religious texts, and the Hindu epics to the bhakti period in the fifteenth century to the seventeenth century and *ritikal* (the scholastic period) which lasted till the nineteenth century (81). He argues that the trinity of *shakti* (power) *shil* (character) and *sundarata* (beauty) is preserved in a stable textual genealogy (81).

The standard public appropriates oral tradition by claiming that folk-literature of Bundelkhand inherits the standard of Bundeli language. In his essay, “*Bundeli ke Sirmaur Kavi: Isuri*,” [Isuri: The Pioneer Poet of Bundeli] Durgesh Dixit shows that the relationship between Isuri (1824-1909) and Bundelkhand can be observed in his *faag chuakadiya* (love songs made in quatrain) (46). He informs that Isuri is the first *manak kavi* (standard poet) of the Bundeli language (46).

In the introduction to the book, *Literary Cultures in History*, Pollock argues that it is difficult to make a distinction between print culture and oral culture because the manuscripts were meant for performance and oral recitation in south Asia (22). In their essay, “*Alha aur Uoo ki Prastuti*,” [Performance of Alha Songs] Dwarka Gupt and Sagar Kamta provide details of the performance of *Alhakhand*, the folk-songs which are sung in Bundelkhand. The epic takes place orally on stage with the recitation of songs full of *veer rasa* (effect of valor). Both Gupt and

Kamta count Jagnik, the poet of *Alhakhand* as a member of Bundeli society based on the latter's cultural roots in Mahoba (UP) and based on the setting of narration which is described in Mahoba (81). They share their memory of the oral tradition. The Alhait (the folk-singer), Sitaram Lodhi belonged to Simriya village of Narsinghpur district (MP); he sang *bavangarh ki ladai* (the episodes about the fights of fifty-two battlefields) in the costume of a warrior with a sword at the public spaces. He moved his arms to play the swords and sung simultaneously (84). Gupt and Kamta note the use of the folk-instruments *dholak-chamita* (tambour Cimta) in the performance. Both also count *Alhakhand* a part of *vachak parampara* (the tradition of reading) because first, it is characterized by *gatha parak* (ballad song) and *kathanak* (longer narrative) and second, it is meant to be read collectively on the bed at the warehouse, shop or tent of some rich landlord or reputed man in the season of monsoon (85). Gupt and Kamta note that the folk-singers are illiterate and are forced to migrate to cities for livelihood. They emphasize the preservation of the oral tradition in the changing time (85).

I met *chaukadiyakar* (the group of the traditional poets) and Alhait (the folk-singers) at Bundeli Bhasha kau Rashtriya Sammelan in Orchha. The poets were vocal in reciting *chaukadiya* (verse composed in the quatrain) during the poetry session. I noticed the critical attitude in their oral recitation. A recitation I can recollect goes like this: “*Ram ku maan rey pan Ram ki nai maan rey/Aur hum kai key rey tau hume ankhe dikha rey.*” (They believe Ram not the teachings of Ram/And if we say something, they threaten us). The couplet exposes the religious fanatics who worship the ideal of Ram but not his teachings. It criticizes the intolerance of fanaticism. It is remarkable for the wordplay in its composition.

Madbaiya invited the Alhait from a village to the literary gathering. The standard public is conscious of inviting the local singers and traditional poets at the literary gathering. It maintains certain literary continuities. It traditionalizes the discourse on the standard Bundeli at the same time. This shows that the standard public has recognized the connection between orality and performance. It can be argued that orality has survived via performance more prominently than via writing. But the standard public expresses its elitism in the objectification of the local folk-singers. It fails to acknowledge the hierarchy in the standardization of Bundeli. Cris Shore discusses the culture of elites in the introduction to the book, *Elite Cultures*. It should be noted

that the Marxist idea of the ruling class is both materialist and “its dominant *intellectual*” in force (2). However, the standard public cannot be categorized an absolute “power elite” (2) given the domination of Hindi in north India.⁴⁰

In the above section, I examined how the concept of Bundeli language is represented, reinforced, and naturalized through intellectual manipulation of resources based on the ‘folk’ lore and the literary figures in the socio-political context. The standardization of Bundeli plays a pivotal role in this political process and in the relationship of standard Bundeli to the idea of past. I explain the other determiners of Bundeli *manak* (standard) in the next section to examine whether and how the other determiners add to the politics of a claiming past for Bundeli.

Standardization of Bundeli: Some other Determiners

Madbaiya finds *mankikaran* (standardization) crucial for the constitutional recognition of Bundeli. He substantiates this collective objective with examples within and outside north India. The Khari Boli was a *boli* (dialect) but it is used as the administrative language after its standardization into a print language, argues Madbaiya. It is pivotal to the imagination of national identity (“Bundeli kau” 101). Madbaiya cites the view of the modern linguists: Maithiyat defines a standard language with an ideal or a model acknowledged by a linguistic community on certain common ground. Dr. K.C. Bhatiya recognizes it with the language of the educated middle class as part of the civil society. Wendy⁴¹ notes that the function of the standard is to poise a balance between the stability and development of language (102). Madbaiya uses bold texts to highlight such views (102). He invites the standard public to homogenize Bundeli *boliya* in one *bhasha* by publishing the anthology of Bundeli essays in standard form. However, Shrivastav expresses his frustration with the fact that the manners and accents of every *shetriya* (territorial) language differs at each mile (24). He describes this situation as a central *killat* (flaw)

⁴⁰ There is variety of interest groups or groups of elites. The category of “power elite” is proposed by C Wright Mills in social sciences (2). Shore, Cris. “Introduction.” *Elite Cultures*, edited by Cris Shore and Stephen Nugent, Routledge, 2002, p.2.

⁴¹ Madbaiya does not use the full name of the linguists.

of language because it is unfathomable to define the taste of the speaker who speaks his or her language; the taste of a Bundeli speaker is likely to be an exception or a case of difference to the standards of an imagined Bundeli (24).

Madbaiya claims that the standardization of Bundeli has never been done before but it is possible to trace the *manak* (standard) of Bundeli to its past (“Apni” i). Secondly, *sabai roop* (all forms) of Bundeli refers to the *asthan* (districts) of the members but can be consolidated into a political territory of the Bundeli language (i). Madbaiya plays out with the categories of language and land at the semantic level in his attempt to institutionalize Bundeli as the language of Bundeli society. He conflates the logic of territory and language in his formulation of the standardization of the Bundeli language. He shows that *riyasat* or *jagir* (the princely states) of Bundelkhand are scattered in the form of dialects (“Bundeli kau” 102). He cites the example of Chhattisgarh to explain the semantic of the term, “Chhattis-garh” (thirty-six states). He applies the idea of the unification of the princely states in Bundelkhand to the formation of a common linguistic identity of Bundelkhand. He argues that the linguistic integration and the territorial consolidation of Bundeli as princely states are two sides of the same coin (102). He brings in the question of land apart from language and script.

Belonging to a particular land or territory is an integral part of the politics of linguistic identity (Kothari 133). Madbaiya outlines the features of Bundelkhand. He observes that “*Hindi ki sabri boliyan me Bundeli kau shetra sabse jada hai.*” (the area of Bundeli speakers is larger than the speakers of the other dialects of Hindi) (“Apanan se” 2). Grierson marks, in his linguistic survey, the area of Bundelkhand larger than Switzerland and Belgium in Europe as it is spread in about “one lakh eighty-three thousands and four hundred seventy-nine square kilometers” (“Bundeli kau” 104).

Mitchell argues that the speakers of Telugu language experienced a shift in identifying the subjects of *desa* (land) to the subjects of *abhimani* (pride) in the process of the imagination of their mother-tongue (11-12). Madbaiya brings the Bundeli prose writers, poets, and legends of Bundelkhand together at one place. This draws attention to such a historical moment. The literary elites associated with the standard public are the new subjects of Bundeli language,

whose emotion for Bundeli is determined by the institutional growth (or the lack of it) of Bundeli language in the public domain. Madbaiya considers Bundeli region and Bundeli language *poorak* (complementary) (“Bundeli Gadhya” 3). He rejects the idea that both the region and language are *bapauti* (patrimony) of one caste (3). It is accessible to both *naichi jaat* (lower caste) and *unchi jaat* (higher caste) (3-4). He proposes the standard form of Bundeli irrespective of *jat pat* (caste and creed) (“Bundeli kau” 103). He externalizes Bundeli as a *sadhan* (democratic instrument) to express the thoughts in public (103). The development of the standard Bundeli depends on its institutionalization. The next section examines the institutional status of the Bundeli language.

Institutionalizing Bundeli

Madbaiya informs that his first anthology of Bundeli essays, *Banke Bol Bundeli ke* [Elegant Words of Bundeli] was much discussed in the universities of Bundelkhand in the 1990s (“Apan se” 1). The educated class realized the necessity to work for Bundeli prose (1). He notes the contribution of local intellectuals: the ‘eminent’ Bundeli folklorist, Narmada Prasad Gupta (1931-2003) established Bundelkhand Sahitya Academy in 1981 at Chhatarpur district (MP) and published the magazines, *Mamuliya* and *Isuree* for some time at the University of Sagar (“Bundeli Gadhya” 6). Madbaiya demands the inclusion of Bundeli in the syllabus at the local institutes such as the University of Jhansi, University of Reeva, University of Sagar,⁴² University of Jabalpur, and the University of Gwalior in Bundelkhand (6).

The universities are thought of as an important site for the development of Bundeli through archival documentation and textual production of Bundeli culture (“Apni” ii-iii). It offers the standard public the *vidhan* (generic) and *vejyanik* (scientific) registers to discuss their thoughts on knowledge about *purano maan* (ancient respect) and *puratan sanskriti* (ancient culture) (“Bundeli Gadhya” 6). The creation of institutional spaces helped the elites mark out

⁴² The Sagar University could have played a vital role in the politics. The university had 128 colleges in the 1980s. It included ten constituencies in the lower house of the Indian parliament. However, Chitrakant Jaiswal, the then Education Minister in Congress declared a prohibition on the student politics in Sagar University. See the interview published in Bundeli language (3:00-5:20). “Film Abhineta Ashutosh Rana ko jo Bundeli Interview, apko Jivan Badal de” [Film Actor Ashutosh Rana’s Bundeli Interview Will Change your Life]. *Youtube*, uploaded by Bundeli Bauchhar, 13 July 2019, youtube.com/watch?v=hX1g8YNJ3uk. Accessed 28 Nov. 2020.

“their social positions” in the early twentieth century in north India (Orsini 7). The appreciation of the standard public for the nationalist writers and the icons, who served the land, language, and people of Bundelkhand through Hindi literature, helps us understand the social position of the standard public. Following the role of upper-caste Hindi elites in the intellectual project, it is seen that the standard public claims a literary past for Bundeli, and its members share a common interest in the standardization of Bundeli. This binds them together but they diverge in their political views in relation to the state. In this regard, I try to know, understand, and critique their individual roles in the contemporary socio-political reality. I draw upon the negotiation of the standard public with the dominant forces in the next section. I will discuss my points around the following questions: how has the linguistic minority responded to the dominant force in politics since independence? What lessons can we draw to analyze the standard public’s investment in linguistic politics?

Politics of Bundeli *Chinar* (Identity)

A group of Hindi professors wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi (Pathak). It includes one hundred and thirteen Hindi academicians and writers who have signed the letter from across India. The academicians oppose the demand to include Bundeli, Braj, Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Magahi, Angika, Rajasthani in the Eight Schedule. They argue that Hindi would lose its numerical strength following the separate recognition of minor languages in north India. This is the current situation in the heartland of India. It shows that language plays a crucial role in reshaping the social structure of India, which is based on caste-hierarchy and overlaps with gender, religious, linguistic, institutional and other categories. The linguistic minorities share unequal relations with Hindi both on paper and off the paper. The institutional privileges accrued by academicians and writers for more than seventy years and the government’s institutional support for Hindi has largely been beneficial to the upper castes, until reservations were implemented since late 1990s. This anxiety is carried over to the linguistic hierarchies. Hany Babu, in his article, “Breaking the *Chaturvarna* System of Languages The Need to Overhaul the Language Policy,” shows that Article 14, Article 15 (1), and Article 16 (2) can charge it punishable to discriminate against Indian citizen based on caste, sex, religion, descent, residence or place of birth but not based on language (114).

Shah is of the view that the constitutional recognition for Bundeli is insufficient.⁴³ He observes that the differential treatment to Bundeli can be marked out by the differential institutional and societal support by the state. He considers the efforts of the standard public “a losing battle” though he has no issue in helping its members. He does not find any significant production of texts and cinema in the Bundeli cultural sphere. He argues that their attempt to develop the Bundeli language is in vain because the state has not provided any institutional support. According to him, Rajnath Singh, the Home Minister of India is himself a speaker of Bhojpuri but is not at all sensitive towards its conservation or development. Shah finds the nationalist claim on the ‘unity in diversity’ acting out in contradictory ways. He finds the hegemony of Hindi a classic case in north India. The standard public converges with the stand of Madhukar Shah but it diverges in its approach to the state’s stand. It responds to the hegemony of Hindi on the premise of representing linguistic diversity in north India. The *patrata* (qualification) of standard Bundeli to get *shasankiya sanrakshan* (state protection) is predominantly based on a representation of the sub-cultural identity and “saving” the folk-languages (Madbaiya, “Bundeli kau” 104) but not on terms of putting all languages (and thus people) on an equal platform.

Madbaiya considers the enemy of both the minor languages and the Hindi language as being common. He argues that some supporters of Hindi oppose the recognition of Bundeli because they tend to degrade the popular base of the Hindi language itself. He calls Bundeli a part of *gaonan ke janpadan ki lok sanskriti* (folk-culture in the rural constituencies) (“Bundeli Gadhya” 3). It is rich with *byakran* (grammar), *shabda kosha* (vocabulary), *kanate* (proverbs), *muhavare* (idioms), *sanskriti ko itihas* (cultural history) (“Bundeli kau” 104). He argues that the inclusion of Bundeli into the Eighth Schedule will mark the enrichment of Hindi. He uses metaphorical language to prove his point. He emphasizes on differentiating the Hindi subject. He writes: “*Hindi ke prayog me jab Bundeli jaisi lok bhasha kame lyai jat tau bhasha ki khoobsurati badhtai he, sahajta sou a jat, ek mithas, ek gurirupan sau ghoor jat.*” (When a folk-language like Bundeli is exercised in the use of Hindi, the latter grows into a beautiful and

⁴³ Shah, Madhukar. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 10 Nov. 2016.

spontaneous language mixed with sweetness) (Apanan se” 2). The statement makes a clear attempt at Bundelizing Hindi with its claimed virtue of sweetness. It aims to establish a compatible relation with Hindi because the latter symbolizes *mahasagariya sanskriti* (Oceanic culture) (“Bundeli kau”104). The representation of *lok anchalan ki sanskriti* (regional culture) defines the enrichment of the cultural diversity with several “dialects” or “folk-languages” joining in the enrichment of Hindi (104). The future of the Hindi language as a *ped* (tree) and a *samundar* (sea) depends on the inclusion of folk-languages as the *jare* (roots) and the *nadiya* (rivers) in the Eight Schedule (101).

Madbaiya and Shrivastav identify Hindi as being the ‘national’ language; they suggest that Hindi can unite the Bundeli speakers on a common ground of nationality (24; “Bundeli kau” 101). Madbaiya writes: “*apne rashtra ki ek bhasha jaruri hai.*” (our nation needs one common language) (“Apanan se” 2). He comments on the ‘unity in diversity’: “*...pai uoo rashtra bhasha Hindi ke bat vriksha ki jare(n) to Bharat ki lok bhashan mai(n) hai. Iee se agar jare(n) sookh je(n) to bat vriksha kono tikai? Ise Hindi apnavau un jaran kho(n) sinchvau baut jaroori hai.*” (...but Hindi is the national language. It is like a banyan tree. Its roots are grounded in the folk-languages. If the roots dry up, can the banyan tree survive? So, it is essential to nourish the roots to embrace Hindi) (2).

The relationship of the Bundeli elites with Hindi is revealed in the use of metaphors of tree and sea. The negotiation with Hindi is projected to acknowledge the cultural supremacy of Hindi. Madbaiya writes: “*nadiya kabhau samundar nai ban sakti, pai samundar kau ka huyai agar nadiya nai rai(n) tau?*” (the rivers can never be developed into a sea. But what would happen to the sea if the rivers dry up?) (“Bundeli kau” 101). The demand for recognition of Bundeli is projected as part of the linguistic fold within the nationalist framework. The standard public features these metaphors in the discourse of *asmita* (pride), *ekta* (unity) and *takat* (strength) of *sanskritik vividhta* (cultural diversity) (101). Madbaiya finds it urgent to conserve the folk-languages only to assert nationality (“Apanan se” 2). The extinction of folk-languages would cause erosion of Hindi (2); it is therefore argued that one needs to nurture ‘dialects’ only for a ‘larger’ cause, not for their own cause.

The standard public legitimizes one language policy (2). It argues that Hindi is evolved from Khari Boli, Bundeli, Braj, Avadhi, and Kanauji. It claims Hindi to be still in the process of standardization (Shrivastav 24; Madbaiya, “Bundeli kau”104). It applies a similar claim in the standardization of Bundeli. It holds dear both the assimilative tendency and nationalist tendency. It represents Bundeli as part of the whole which cannot be as grand as Hindi and functions happily from the subordinate position.

In his essay, “*Thaskili Bundeli*,” [Proud Bundeli] Sharad Sinh admires the significance of the Devanagari script (32). He notes that the script provides Bundeli *sarva bhaumikta* (universality) (32). Madbaiya writes further: “*Hamai mansa Hindi ki Thandi boli ko dhakyanvai ki nithuai naiya, na ham u ki birobari aur na sange Bundeli kau chalaun chaut.*” (It is neither our intension to threaten the status of Hindi nor can we ever earn the status for Bundeli in equal and parallel measure to Hindi) (“Bundeli Gadhya” 3).

The apologetic and inferior attitude of the Bundeli elites in relation to Hindi denotes, in the words of Sadhana Senthilkumar, their “cognitive enslavement” to the dominance of state institutions in Hindi belt (26). It is internal and psychological. The Hindi language is symbolic of a dominant caste-class. The standard public claims the privilege to represent the folk-languages, and thereby, play the role of saviors. The demand for the recognition of linguistic diversity is based on the practice of assimilation and co-option with the power-structure more than practices of resistances.

In his article, “The Politics of Recognition,” Charles Taylor helps us understand “the politics of equal recognition” in the “public sphere” (37). He is a defender of liberal democracy. He finds the politics of equalization of identities broader and more significant than the politics of claiming distinctness in identities. He finds it possible to justify the charges of homogenization and assimilation (51) and argues this is possible if the “new vocabularies of comparison” are developed in the multicultural context thereby broadening the mental horizon (67). But as he alerts, an individual being true to his or her self and culture does not mean he or she certainly gives up the tendency of defining himself or herself by his or her social positions in private or public space (31). Secondly, he shows that the act of defining one’s identity is not independent of

others. The others might want to see in the minorities the things which induce them to struggle against or negotiate with at the same time (33). Both the private and the public contexts are interlinked with each other in the politics of recognition.

The Bundeli writers associated with the standard public have been recognized by the state with awards for their service to the Bundeli language and literature. They share a common goal of national unity in their articulation of the relation between Bundeli and Hindi. But Shah is more conscious of the parochial outlook of the Indian state in its efforts towards safeguarding the rights of linguistic minorities. He seems disinterested in emulating the state in the name of advocating the nationalist motto of ‘unity in diversity’ on the one hand and demand the preservation of linguistic diversity and rights on the other.

The dichotomies between the roots (folk-languages) and the banyan tree (Hindi language) on the one hand, and the rivers (dialects) and the sea (national language) on the other are hierarchical; they enforce the structural culmination of the Hindu identity. It reflects a thought-process of the standard public. It is grounded in the inferiority of ‘standard’ Bundeli against Hindi. The standard public fantasizes Hindi from a subordinate position in the socio-political ladder.

Secondly, the cleavages of minority/majority, dominant/subordinate, and privileged/under-privileged are specific to the opposition between a class of the standard public and a class of the Hindi chauvinists in the polity. The standard public challenges the dominant tendency *in* the hierarchical structure of Hindi, but not the hierarchy *of* Hindi. Madbaiya compares the Hindi chauvinists with ‘*ghar ke kurva*’ (“Nike Bol” 3). It means that the latter is like the tiles used in the making of the roof of a house. Hindi stands for a roof that is constituted of precarious elements. Madbaiya finds the tiles or social elements harmful because they can fall on Bundeli speakers standing under the roof and break his or her head. The recognition of the Bundeli language is important. Taylor argues that the unrecognition of identity is oppressive and “can inflict harm” (25). It causes “self-depreciation” (26). In this regard, Madbaiya complains that the Bundeli speakers have internalized the low-image (“Nike Bol” 3). He calls upon the standard Bundeli public to invoke the emotion of *thasak* (pride) and *lalak* (desire) for their

mother-tongue in their writings (“Nike Bol” 1-2). He uses slogans like ‘Jay Bundeli’ and ‘Jay Bundelkhand’ to address the issue of cultural ignominy associated with their mother-tongue and resist against political marginalization of the Bundeli community (“Apnan se” 2). The use of slogans registers a call for a language movement against a particular section in the Hindi world. But in the larger Hindi world, the standard public negotiates for a power but hardly registers resistance against it. Madbaiya questions the future of *apni chinar* (our identity): “*kou kay apni chinar chhodvai aur phir ka(n) jay? Hindi ki abai kaunau(n) sanskriti nai(n) ay ee se(n) Bundelkhandi apni chinar agar hiraut tau ee se(n) bari murkhata ka huyai?*” (Is it possible for someone to lose identity? If so, where will he or she go? The Hindi language does not represent any culture of its own now. Is it not a great folly if the Bundelkhandi loses his or her collective identity?) (“Bundeli kau” 101-102)

The above statement indicates that Hindi is made of smaller or minor languages and identities. It becomes important for the standard public to respect the premises of Hindi and, on similar terms, claim a *bhasha* (standard language) made of Bundeli *boli* (“dialects”). The linguistic paradox of linguistic minority in the case of the standard public can be marked in its surrender to the words or metaphors more than their meanings. The standard public is not critical with the words or metaphors such as *ped* (tree) and *samundar* (sea) which it uses to denote the so-called liberal function of *bhasha* (standard language). It is less attentive to the political and intellectual costs accrued in its surrender to the dominant category. It defines Bundeli identity on the premises of language which are made of subjects belonging to a unilinear culture of Hindi, differentiated only by its subordinated position. This feature of standard public reflects in its relationship with English as well.

The standard public is against the imposition of English. Madbaiya gives examples of China, Japan, France, Soviet Russia, Germany to argue that English is not the medium of *tarakki* (progress) in India (“Bundeli kau” 104). He calls the English language a *sajis* (conspiracy) that is *laadve* (imposed) on the Bundeli speakers and one that results in *sanskriti bhrashta* (corrupted culture) (102-104). He emphasizes education in mother-tongue because it provides *apne hi tathan* (our shreds of evidence) and produces *vilakshan mahapurush* (intellectuals) (102).

The future of Bundeli *chinar* (identity) is predicated on its co-relation with Hindi in the centripetal sense. According to Madbaiya, the standard public needs to categorize minor languages within the category of *lok bhasha* (folk-languages). Madbaiya calls Hindi *apni rashtra bhasha* (our national language) and even goes to the extent of wishing that Hindi becomes one of the official languages of the United Nations (UN) (101). The current government of India wants Hindi to be recognized as one of the official languages in the UN (Kuttappan).⁴⁴

I argue that Hindi stands as a natural constituency to the standard public in the socio-cultural context of the caste system in India. The power-structure at various levels cannot be separated from the institutional hegemony of Hindi. The demand for constitutional recognition for the Bundeli language is only a means to the Bundeli standard public. Their desire for cultural recognition for language is an end in itself. The distinction between the constitutional and cultural status of language is maintained under particular ideological schema. The standard public seeks to prove its loyalty to the state by accepting the influence of writers and poets in Hindi literature and in its unwavering pride in Hindi as the ‘national’ language. The standard public demands institutional support for the development of Bundeli. In this case, I extend my focus to Bundeli calendar produced as a text by the standard public and examine how Bundeli literature creates newer spaces for its members.

Representation of Bundeli *Chinar* (Identity), Culture and History

The standard public launched the ‘Bundeli Calendar’ on 9th January 2016 at the literary gathering held in Orchha (See Fig.5). The calendar is published online with the name ‘New Year Bundeli Calendar 2016’.⁴⁵ It marks all dates that are significant to Bundeli language and history.

⁴⁴ Experts criticized the efforts of the government in pushing Hindi as one of the languages of UN by calling it “anti-democratic” and “waste of public money.” Kuttappan, Rejimon. “Hindi as Official UN Language: Experts divided on Center’s move on and spending Rs 5 cr.” Mar. 2018, *The News Minute*, thenewsminute.com/article/hindi-official-un-language-experts-divided-centres-move-and-spending-rs-5-cr-78002.

⁴⁵ Madbaiya, Kailash. “New Year Bundeli Calendar-2016.” *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, bundelkhand.in/bundelkhand-and-calendar-2016.

Madbaiya started the literary council on 25th June in 1990.⁴⁶ The standard public celebrates Bundelkhand 'Divas' (Bundelkhand Day) annually on 25th June; 'Hindi Divas' (Hindi Day) on 14th September and so on. The calendar provides a visual reminder of meanings across nationalist icons and events in Hindi literature.

अखिल भारतीय बूंदेलखंड साहित्य एवं संस्कृति परिषद्			
75 चित्रगुप्त नगर, कोटरा, भोपाल 462002 म.प्र. मोबा. 09826015643 bundelkhand.sahitya.parishad@yahoo.in			
दिनांक	दिन	तिथि	आयोजन
1 जनवरी	16 सुक्रवार	फूस बदी 7	ईस्वी सन् नव वर्ष
9 एवं 10 जन.	सनीचर, ऐतवार	फूस बदी 14/30	औरछा में बूंदेली सम्मेलन एवं डॉ. मुन्दावनलाल वर्मा जयन्ती
13 फरवरी	सनीचर	माव सुदी 5	बसंत पौर्णिमा — सरसुती पूजन
27 फरवरी	सनीचर	फागुन बदी 5	चन्द्रशेखर आजाद शहीद दिवस
20 मार्च	ऐतवार	फागुन सुदी 12	रानी अवन्तीबाई बलिदान दिवस
23 मार्च	बुधवार	फागुन सुदी 15	होरी/धुलेडी (फागुन पुते की रात मंगल की होरी जारे)
15 अप्रैल	सुक्रवार	चैत सुदी 9	राम नीमी, कवीन्द्र केशव जयन्ती
16 अप्रैल	सनीचर	चैत सुदी 10	लोक कवि ईसुरी जयन्ती
18 अप्रैल	सोमवार	चैत सुदी 12	सात्या टोपे बलिदान दिवस
19 अप्रैल	मंगलवार	चैत सुदी 13	तीर्थकर महावीर स्वामी जयन्ती
25 मई	बुधवार	जेठ बदी 4	वीर आल्हा जयन्ती
7 एवं 8 जून	मंगल, बुध	जेठ सुदी 3, 4	छत्रसाल जयन्ती पर भी हिन्दी बूंदेली समारोह
18 जून	सनीचर	जेठ सुदी 13	वीरांगना रानीबाई बलिदान दिवस
22 जून	बुधवार	अषाढ बदी 2	शहीद प्रमोद बाँटिया ग्वालियर बलिदान
24 जून	सुक्रवार	अषाढ बदी 4	रानी दुर्गावती बलिदान दिवस
25 जून	सनीचर	अषाढ बदी 5	बूंदेलखंड दिवस/परिषद् स्थापना दिवस
22 जुलाई 16	सुक्रवार	सावन बदी 3	1857 केशहीद मर्दनसिंह बानपुर बलिदान दिवस
23 जुलाई	सनीचर	सावन बदी 4	चन्द्रशेखर आजाद जयन्ती
3 अगस्त	बुधवार	सावन सुदी 1	राष्ट्रकवि मैथिलीशरण गुप्त
10 अगस्त	बुधवार	सावन सुदी 7	महा कवि तुलसी दास जयन्ती
16 अगस्त	मंगलवार	सावन सुदी 13	अवन्तीबाई जयन्ती
17 अगस्त	बिस्पतवार	सावन सुदी 15	विदुषी पत्नी देवी स्मरण दिवस—बानपुर
14 सितम्बर	बुधवार	भादो सुदी 13	हिन्दी दिवस, हरि प्रसाद हरि जयन्ती
18 सितम्बर	ऐतवार	कुंआर बदी 2	शहीद शंकरशाह—रघुनाथ शाह जबलपुर बलिदान
29 सितम्बर 16	बिस्पतवार	कुंआर बदी 14	शहीद बख्तबली बलिदान दिवस शाहगढ़
5 अक्टूबर	सुक्रवार	कुंआर सुदी 4	रानी दुर्गावती जयन्ती
11 अक्टूबर	मंगलवार	कुंआर सुदी 10	दसहरा/ कवि बिलारी जयन्ती
19 नवम्बर	सनीचर	अगन बदी 5	लक्ष्मीबाई जयन्ती
6 दिसम्बर 16	मंगलवार	अगन सुदी 7	लोक कवि ईसुरी का 107वां पुण्य दिवस
16 दिसम्बर 16	सुक्रवार	फूस बदी 3	बूंदेल कंसरी छत्रसाल पुण्य दिवस
(उपर के अलावा स्थानीय विभूतियों की जयंतियों आदि से जोर सकते हैं)			
अखिल भारतीय बूंदेलखंड साहित्य एवं संस्कृति परिषद्, भोपाल (म.प्र.)			

(Fig.5 Bundeli Calendar-2016)⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Madbaiya, Kailash. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 26 Nov. 2016.

⁴⁷ Madbaiya, Kailash. "New year Bundeli Calendar-2016." *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, bundelkhand.in/bundelkhand-calendar-2016.

For instance, the standard public subscribes to the thoughts of Maithili Sharan Gupt (1886-1964), the ‘national poet’ in Hindi literature and Vrindavan Lal Verma (1889-1969), the Hindi novelist and playwright. These figures are important to the standard public as their roots are in Bundelkhand. Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (1907-1979)⁴⁸ held as an icon by Shrivastav quotes from Dwivedi’s essay, “*Parampara Banam Adhunikta*” [Tradition versus Modernity] and notes: “*parampara kau arth atit naiya. Varan ek gatishil prakriya aay. Ek panv pe thare rai ke dusro panv age nikaro jaat.*” (The meaning of tradition is not past. But it is one continuous process. It demands us to keep one step outside progress) (23). Shrivastav advises the standard public to use a similar scale in the standardization of Bundeli. He argues that tradition is a modern invention. It is imperative to modernize tradition with one foot in tradition and the other in the experience of progress (23). Bundeli is represented as a tradition against the modern experience of Hindi. Shrivastav is quite formal in his approach. He brings the urban/rural hierarchy in his conceptualization of a standard Bundeli. He does not consider Bundeli’s “dialects” compatible with Hindi and English because the Bundeli is spoken in the urban sphere (27). He explains, further, the necessity to discipline the behavior of Bundeli speakers and advocates the development of grammar of Bundeli language. He writes:

Bhasha ko anushasan byakran se chalat he. Motar gadi me steyring hot, chaka hot, injan hot, eekho indhan ke sahare jab chalao jaat toiee gadi chalat. Teuoo anushasan ko aay. Steyring kahu(n), chaka kahu(n) aur injan kahu(n) to gadi ne chal pehe. Tanga me ghoda joto jaat. Uoo ghoda lagam jab hath me ne rehe to tanga kahu(n) ko kahu(n) jehe.

The discipline of language is maintained by its grammar. The car is maintained by steering, the wheels and an engine. It can be used with nothing but by fuel. To discipline the language, the same logic is required. If the steering, wheels and

⁴⁸ He was a staunch scholar in the Sanskritization of Hindi as he even countered Grierson against the conservation of Braj and Avadhi (Gupta 4294). Gupta, Charu. “The Icon of Mother in Late Colonial North India ‘Bharat Mata’, Matri Bhasha’ and ‘Gau Mata’.” *EPW*, vol.36, no.45, Nov. 2001, p.4294

engine are not fixed in order, the car cannot work. A horse is tied to the cart. If the horse is not bridled, the cart will go astray (27).

The above statement refers to the rules of building a compatible relation with Hindi. It indicates the domestication of Bundeli identity more than its representation in a democratic mode. The metaphor of car and horse animate the notion of Bundeli language in a vertical hierarchy. Shrivastav claims a need to civilize the people of Bundelkhand who use ‘low’ forms of Bundeli (27). He observes that the ‘low’ standards of language are sowed in the minds of Bundeli speakers for a long period and it will take time to reform their minds (27). He advocates pro-urban Bundeli. He finds the influence of English greater on the Hindi speakers in cities. He blames the influence of English for the ignorance of Hindi words in society (26). His use of metaphor is grounded in the governing nature of the state. It represents the Bundeli speakers as the subjects of culture more than the citizens of the state. Shrivastav also diverges from linguistic intimacy. He prioritizes the rules of grammar. He acknowledges that the definition of Khari Boli Hindi is too broad. He shows, for instance, nine ways of framing a question in Bundeli (24-25). He accepts one of them as the standard form of a question while, the other eight forms of the same question, is found unsuitable (24-25). The binary of elite and folk is clear in his approach.

Madbaiya proposes that standard Bundeli will carry forward itself as a *sahitya ki bhasha* (the language of literature) and as a *sutantra bhasha* (independent language) (“Bundeli kau” 104). It represents the nationalist idea of *unnati* (progress) and *azadi* (freedom) in the context of Bundelkhand (103). Madbaiya gives the references of Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-1885) and M.K. Gandhi for whom Hindi and nationalism could not be separated. Gandhi was for a commoners’ Hindi or Hindustani, not for Sanskritized Hindi. He also wrote in Gujarati and English. However, in his article, “Gandhi and the Standardization of Gujarati,” V. Sebastian illustrates how Gandhi systematically advocated Sanskritized Gujarati through the Gujarat Vidyapith in his home state in the 1920s (94).⁴⁹ Madbaiya advocates that the inclusion of Bundeli

⁴⁹ In the same article, Sebastian shows that Gandhi chose *tatsama* and *tadbhava*, the lexical categories in Sanskrit for preparing Gujarati dictionary (99). Both his linguistic model and the Gujarat government show indifference to the alternatives proposed by “a group of Gujarati language scholars, lexicographers, writers, and teachers” in All Gujarat Orthography Convention held during 9-10 January in 1999 (99-100). According to Sebastian, such

words should be based on *tatsama* (Sanskrit words) and *tadbhava* (derivative of Sanskrit word) in the standardization of Bundeli (“Bundeli kau” 103). His proposal is similar to Gandhi, who was keen to promote a Sanskritized Gujarati.

The standard public advocates that the representation of *lok anchal* (sub-region) cannot be successful without the standardization of Bundeli. Bundeli represents a *vani* (speech), *vahak* (medium), and *avaj* (voice) of the culture in the *lok anchalan* (sub-region) across the range of issues such as *samaj* (society), *itihās* (past), *bhasha* (standard language) *vijyan* (science) *khel* (sport), *parampara* (tradition), *natak* (play) *anuvad* (translation) *kissa* (tales) *sahitya samiksha* (literary criticism), *bhoogol* (geography) apart from *lok kathayen* (folk-tales) and folk-songs (*lok-geet*) (101). As each of the terms mentioned above needs elaboration, I discuss them in their relationship to the reconstruction of Bundeli culture and history with a focus on a play performed by the standard public.

I attended a performance of a play in Bundeli Bhasha kau Rashtriya Sammelan on 10th January 2016 at Orchha. The standard public invited folk-actors and dancers to the event. They performed a play on the glory of Veer Singh, the king of Orchha (See Fig. 6). The Bundeli elites played the characters in Bundeli with the traditional actors, singers, dancers, and musicians. Omprakash Tiwari, a doctor by profession played the role of Veer Singh. His son was part of the play along with others. Dhanraj, son of Omprakash Tiwari, who played the role of Veer Singh’s son, narrated the plot to me: Veer Singh is known for his ethics of social justice in his kingdom. His son Pravin Rai is an angry young man. He believes in freedom; prohibitions do ire him. Once, he sets out for hunting in the forest. He meets a hermit who informs him that hunting is prohibited in the forest. On this, Pravin Rai commands his soldiers to bury the hermit half in the soil and feed him to the wild dogs. Veer Singh gets the news. He sets out to the forest to investigate himself. He finds that his son is responsible for the killing. By punishing his son, Veer Singh sets an example of love for justice.

domination alienates not only the larger public but also the students and the professors belonging to minorities in present Gujarat (99-100).



(Fig. 6 Omprakash Tiwari playing the role of Veer Singh with the Folk-actors)

In her article, “Boundaries Blurred? Folklore, Mythology, History and the Quest for an Alternative Genealogy in North-east India,” Sohini Ray notes that religion cannot be accepted as “a monolithic entity without political significance” (249). She argues that the rise of “modernization” and the decline of “religiosity” cannot be seen working at the same time (249).

This idea is very evident in the play, *The Veer Singh*, which demonstrates Bundeli ethics of religiosity tied to justice, in supposedly modern times. The idea of justice is supreme and it can cost a life in the imagined kingdom of Veer Singh. The play comprised of a folk-song accompanied by a Rai dance popular in Bundelkhand. It celebrated Veer Singh as an ideal king like Raja Ram, the Hindu king in the epic of Ramayana who sends his pregnant wife to in the name of justice to the people of Ayodhya kingdom. The Hindu ethics of justice, as mentioned above, for one’s community is achieved at the cost of personal sacrifice and often the personal sacrifice is borne by people low in the hierarchy of caste and gender structure.

Madbaiya attempts to erase the gap between Bundeli language and Bundeli land. In his essay, “Bundelkhand: Ek Asliyat,” [Bundelkhand: One Reality] Madbaiya appeals to the readers to love *janam bhoom* (mother-land), *matri bhasha* (mother tongue), and inculcate *apnepan* (sense of community) (56). He conflates both the meanings to create the discourse of belonging. He calls Bundeli language *apni mati ki matri bhasha* (the mother-tongue of our mother-land) (“Apanan se”¹). He reconstructs the geography and language of Bundelkhand interchangeably. The politics of belonging is performed in the interchangeability of the terms of region, language, and people.

Mitchell argues that it is difficult to determine the relationship of people with the land and language (35) and one can see this clearly in the case of Bundelkhand and its people. In her article, “Politics of Language,” Sadhna Saxena and Kamal Mahendroo explain their experience of running literacy programs in Bundelkhand (MP). They find that Bundeli is a rich language being influenced by “Gondi and Korku tribal languages” (2445). In his articles, “Politics of Language” and “Transformation of Tribes,” Virginius Xaxa presents counter-arguments to the mainstream logic of linguistic identity. Xaxa argues that integration of Adivasis into a linguistic, and, thereby, into a regional community is an attempt of the state to homogenize them into a heterogeneous caste society (“Transformation” 1522). But many Adivasi communities identify themselves with the land/region with no prior condition of identification with and a common membership in a linguistic community. They stand outside the process of Hinduization in some or the other way. They cannot embody a tribe and a caste simultaneously. Influence of the Brahminical structures do not necessarily transform the tribes into a caste-linguistic community (1367) but they are appropriated by the caste-linguistic communities in the political formation of regions in India (“Transformation” 1522). The tribes identify themselves with the region, which being at the center of their existence, determine the form of tribal expression. The elite classes dominate the regional politics by means of the standard language (Sebastian 95) in the market and institutions of the state (Xaxa, “Politics of Language” 1367). Mitchell marks a major shift in the experience of Telugu identity. It is historical. But it is unequal in the case of standard Indian languages.

The standard public employs the categories of region in romanticized manner. In the preface, “Hame Kachhu Kene hai,” [I Want to Say Something] Madbaiya appeals to the standard public to love *apni jamin* (our land) in various forms, to hold a positive vision for its *janam bhoom kho, bap-dadan ki dharor ko* (birth land and the ancestral heritage) and never see the land in *halke artha* (an inferior sense) (1). It is suggested that the true meaning of life is found in belonging to one’s land. He writes: “*So Bundelkhandi bain bhaiya ja jan laive(n) kai unki Bundeli matri bhasha unki apni jamin ay, uyai pakre raiyo.*” (Therefore, the sisters and brothers of Bundelkhand should know that their mother tongue Bundeli is their land, they should hold it so always) (1).

Madbaiya describes the status of Bundelkhand as a territorial, linguistic and cultural unit. In his poem, “Hamari Maati Bundeli,” [Our Land Bundeli] he delineates the geographical picture of Bundelkhand. Bundelkhand is surrounded by the mountains of Vindhya and Satpura and the rivers of Narmada, Yamuna and Tauns (1). He uses the name, *Bundeli Maati* (Bundeli Land) for Bundeli language. The song is also published online with the title, “Bundelkhand Rajya Geet” [Song of Bundelkhand State].⁵⁰ In Bundeli, Hindi and English, the noun ‘Bundelkhand’ is used for a place and ‘Bundeli’ or ‘Bundelkhandi’, with an alteration, for a person or people as an adjective. However, when the adjectival noun is used with ‘Maati’ (land), it becomes ambiguous and thus difficult to identify the adjective ‘Bundeli’ or ‘Bundelkhandi’ by simply referring to the land. Instead, it may carry the reconstructions of a separate history, culture and territory marked by the language.

Madbaiya refers to the term, ‘*Vindhyatavi*’ (“Apan se” 1). He claims that when the Chandela kings ruled Bundelkhand in the ninth century, the term ‘*Vindhyatavi*’ was replaced by the name of the Chedi janpad (Chedi kingdom) for the Bundelkhand region (1). Bundelkhand came to be known as ‘*Vindhyeli*’ and the term ‘*Bindeli*’ was derived by the people to suggest a linguistic territory subsequently (1). He notes another term for Bundeli land, ‘*Vindhyavani*’ (the voice of Vindhya) (1). It suggests *Bundeli ki puratanta* (the archaic quality of Bundeli land or

⁵⁰ Madbaiya, Kailash. “Bundelkhand Rajya Geet.” *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, bundelkhand.in/poem/bundelkhand-ka-rajya-geet-by-kailash-madbaiya.

language) (1). He cites two different names ‘Pulind’ in *Ramayan* and ‘Darshaan’ in *Mahabharata* for the area where Bundeli is spoken (3). The standard public relates language and region in an anachronistic way. Madbaiya plays with the semantic of the term used for territory and language. He applies an equation between *Vindhyl* (the land of Vindhya mountain) and *Bindhyl* (the land of Bundeli language) (3). The former stands for Bundelkhand across the Vindhya mountain. He replaces it with *Bindhyl*, a linguistic category to represent the region.

In the case of Telugu, the elites, in the early twentieth century, were inclined to write “a continuous history, culture, and identity” for both the place and the people (Mitchell 37-38). It draws our attention to their search for Sanskrit texts from the start of the second millennium onward and before it (48). Mitchell marks the historical shift from the language of *desh* (territory) to the language of the ‘people’ under a single umbrella of the ‘linguistic’ community (36). The identification with the land is shifted to one’s membership in the common linguistic community. Mitchell notes the emotion for one’s mother tongue “as natural and an inalienable features of individual subjects and of collectivities of subjects” in the process of democratization (53).

In the case of Bundeli, I find the process of connecting land and language by the standard public ridden with unequal relations. I explain the inequality in the codification of standard Bundeli. I show that a class of few enjoys the privilege of claiming language as a democratic tool. The question of language and identity is not dealt in its relationship to institutional indifference. I explain the inequalities with different examples in the socio-cultural context and socio-political contexts. In this regard, I deal with (a) the binary of soul and body as it plays out in standardization and (b) the demand for separate statehood in Bundelkhand in the next sections.

Implications of the Standard Bundeli *Chinar* (Identity)

The standard public envisions a Bundeli that can construct the Bundeli identity of the ‘cultured’ upper-caste in imagination. It is built upon many imagined relationships between culture and language. This calls for an examination of the internal features of identification.

Madbaiya argues that there is an inherent *ekrupta* (uniformity) in Bundeli folk-literature (“Bundeli kau” 103). He finds Bundeli folk literature an important source to argue for an *ekrupta* (uniformity) in standard Bundeli across a range of actors such as the political leaders, the professionals, and the farmers (“Apan se” 2). The idea of standard Bundeli is proposed on the ground of the separation of Bundeli soul and Bundeli body. Madbaiya conceptualizes *Bundeli ki atma* (soul of Bundeli) to conflate Bundeli’s “dialects” into a common Bundeli language (“Nike Bol” 1-2). His concept of the authenticity of Bundeli is interesting. He argues that Bundeli is the *taksali* (authentic language) (“Bundeli Gadhya” 3) because it is built on sameness (“Apan se” 2) and *up-boliya* (the sub-dialects) or *up-rupan* (the sub-forms) of Bundeli language denotes difference (“Apan se” 2). Such a distinction can be analyzed in his concept of the soul of Bundeli. He further writes: “*Sabai upboliyan ke kaye chaiye Bundeli ki sabre up rupan ne milken, rang-virango guldasta bhar banau tau. Jab inme antar atma ikai to. Ha boli me antar tau chalat hai pai bhasha me nai.*” (Consider all the sub-dialects or the sub-forms of Bundeli, all constitute a colorful bouquet in unity. The soul in all of them is the same. Yes, the difference in the dialects is acceptable but not in a standard language) (2).

I argue that the caste position of the Bundeli elites is obscured in the liberal-secular framework of the ‘standard’ public. Standard Bundeli alienates the Dalitbahujan (‘lowest’ in caste-hierarchy) who also speak Bundeli and are at the margins of the Hindi public sphere. Given the contradictions in the liberal nature of Bundeli as a public language, it can be argued that the notion of public itself is an organized revelation. The notion of public is built upon the condition to safeguard certain privileged stakes of caste and class. The standard public privileges the notion of the soul over the notion of bodies of the majority of working-class/caste people who embody the “dialects” or difference of *dehat ki boli* (the language of the villages). The claim on standard Bundeli is rooted in the ideology of purity and desire for a great cultural past over the material bodies of Dalitbahujan who embody *dehat ki boli*. Bundeli as public language is conditioned not only by the rules of grammar but also by the essence of one soul. That the idea of a soul is superior and foremost while the idea of body is secondary and that the latter is sanctioned to subordination is an acceptance that has wide currency, especially among members of standard public. Madbaiya argues: “*sabai me antar atma to ikai hai.*” (there is only one inner soul in all dialects) (2). This difference between mind and body or between soul and body is

casteist in itself. The mind is Brahmin, intellectual and the toiling body is of the Dalitbahujan. The soul is counted as the foundation of intellect or mind and is valued over the materiality of the toiling body.

Naqvi identifies the use of Bundeli as different in the districts of south UP from that of the districts of north MP (71). One form of Bundeli is standardized in the districts of north MP (71). However, the form of Bundeli in south UP stands apart (71). Naqvi shows that the non-standard Bundeli, which is spoken in the districts of south UP, is used by the members of marginalized communities in the rural sphere (71). I ask: does standardization of Bundeli help in the unification of Hindus who are divided by caste? Most people, including Ambedkar, argue that Hindus are divided (unlike Muslims) precisely because of their caste. In his “Thoughts on Linguistic States,” Ambedkar argues that it is good to organise ourselves on a linguistic basis because that is one identity that can overcome caste and religious divisions (143-145). He makes his point against the reversal of power equation between state and language in the north Indian states. He writes: “As I have shown one language, one State can never be categorical imperative. In fact one State, one language should be the rule” (152).

Like many sects in the fold of Hindu, the minor languages have been assimilated in the fold of Hindi in north India. The standard public finds the majoritarian ideology of the Hindi language superior to the languages that constitute this group. It is committed to Bundeli but only in a relationship that is subordinate to Hindi. The oral identities represent the differences in the anthropological context of the Bundeli language. But the standardization of Bundeli is grounded in the principles of a metaphysical design. It suggests, in the words of Senthilkumar, the “deathless” and “transcendental” aspect of the soul (16). The implications of a larger linguistic consolidation can be analyzed in the separation of the *bhasha* and the *boli* alongside the separation of the soul and body. The device of separation to claim a unity reduces the value of language, which is spoken by the minorities in the margin. In this case, the visibility of the standard public is reinforced by obscurantism. The standard public does not recognize the hierarchies within the language. It also suggests a non-recognition of hierarchies among people who speak Bundeli in Bundelkhand. The cultural politics of standard public, at the micro-level,

proves what Ambedkar said, “caste had killed public spirit...[and] made public opinion impossible” (Scott and Ingram 63).

Shiromani Sinh’s anthology of short-stories, *Argani* [Strip] in Bundeli was published by Madbaiya with a grant from Shah. Sinh uses rural Bundeli in his writing. His stories are based on the themes of social fragmentation and religious orthodoxy in the villages of Bundelkhand. In one of his stories, “*Bhabhoot*,” [Ashes] the character of Gopal is portrayed as a young man educated in the city. Gopal believes in *sachai* (reality) and *sidhant* (conviction) (87). He appeals to the people to give up their blind faith in god and rituals. However, Sinh does not write in the anti-caste frame but uses the Bundeli language in a secular context. He reforms social practices in his politics of vegetarianism which is embedded in the context of religiosity. For example, he refers to the message of lord Krishna who believed in *jeev daya* (kindness towards the animals) according to the modern character, Gopal (85). Gopal advises Raghuthiya, a ‘superstitious’ man to avoid *sharab maas* (drink and meat) and abandon the practice of animal killing. He is appreciated by the character of Kishor *kakka* (uncle), an elder figure in the village for speaking in the local language; for holding both the *kitavan* (textual) and *samajik* (social) knowledge and for teaching the existence of *manas dharma* (religion of humanity) to all (89).

Sinh advocates for a certain kind of sociality in his narrative; whereas, Madbaiya is inclined to legitimize the celebration of identity and social relations in the context of *vaishvikaran* (globalization) (“Hame Kachhu” 2). He writes: “*Apni bhasha kau chino kay kai badar kod ham kittau upar paunch jaye pai apni jaran se, dharti se, na kat pave.*” (Build our language. We may progress high in the sky but we cannot cut off from our roots, our land) (“Nike Bol” 4). He expresses his tension with the question of nationality in the experience of progress. It becomes important for the upper caste members to prioritize a high-cultural identity over sociality in Bundelkhand.

In her article, “Language and the Nationality Question,” Sadhna Saxena argues that Hindi, “the link language” dominates and controls “the other linguistic groups and nationalities” in Bundelkhand. It forms “conflict between the state and the people” (268). She observes that the regional elites justify the question of language and identity by constructing an “exalted cultural

history” or “purity of form” (268). The naming of language with the term, ‘standard’ reduces the spoken languages to the markers of ‘backward’ identities (Saxena and Mahendroo, “The Politics” 2446). The Telugu poet, Varvara Rao identifies standard language with the language of Brahmin and dialect with the working class people (2447).

The standard public primarily asserts the cultural difference. It holds back from addressing the poverty in the region. The negotiation of the standard public with the dominance of Hindi does not highlight the conflict between Bundeli and Hindi and between the material conditions in which people of Bundelkhand live. It highlights the emulation of Hindi as the master language in the politics of recognition. The master and slave relation is reflected in the self-mirroring of the standard public in the public sphere. How do we then understand the discourse of Bundeli selfhood? I discuss it in the concluding section.

Construction of the Bundeli Self and Other

The chapter argues that the Bundeli language is celebrated by the provincial elites, called here as the standard public, for its written *tradition*, which carries certain markers of identity. Situated in the interplay between the ‘high’ and the ‘low’ forms in the written culture, Bundeli is reproduced or reinterpreted as the tradition, that is, as a crucial component to understanding the cultural politics of the standard public in Bundelkhand. It indicates that the standard public is an extension of Hindi identity, which can be understood as the Hindu/Hindi upper-caste male identity.

Madbaiya uses the category of *shetriya boliyan ke bhin theth gavai shabda* (different authentic rustic words of the local dialects) (“Bundeli kau” 102-103). Shrivastav also identifies the similar category of *theth boli ke gavai shabda* (rustic words of authentic dialects) (24-25). He identifies the rural location of Bundeli language with the adjectives such as *ganvaru* (slang), *ghina* (disgusting), and *faltu* (useless), *kharab* (bad), *karay* (bitter) and *tikhe* (harsh) (25-26). He cites Victor Hugo and Shakespeare to note how the ‘low’ form of Bundeli is like *ghaas* (grass) while the ‘high’ form of Bundeli is like *madhur pushp* (sweet flower) respectively (27). The standard public disqualifies the rustic words of dialects finding them politically inconsequential. What are the implication of maintaining the stigma associated with rural Bundeli?

In this background, Alok Rai argues that the newly emerging Hindi elites in the late 19th and early 20th centuries started to register their difference “beyond linguistic ramification into culture, community and finally nation” under complex but a significant process of democratization (30). He discusses the role of Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, one of the key figures in Hindi literature. But Dwivedi too was a “novice” when it came to form a “correct” Sanskritized Hindi (79-80). This idea of Hindi as embodying a Hindu nation becomes inevitable for the Bundeli elite while arguing for a Bundeli that is distinct but of a lower order in connection to Hindi.

In her book, *Untouchable Fictions*, Toral Jatin Gajarawala writes about how Gandhi did not neglect the colloquial language. She argues that the emergence of *anchalik sahitya* (regional literature) owes the influence of Gandhi in the 1950s and 1960s in Hindi literature (99-106). However, she makes a distinction between Premchand (1880-1936) and Panishwarnath ‘Renu’ (1921-1977) in the production of regional literature. She argues that the former revealed sympathy for the exploitation of the ‘lower’ caste community in a mode of condescension (6-7). She cites the burning of the Premchand novel *Rangbhoomi* (The Stage, 1925). The members of Bharatiya Dalit Sahitya Academy publically burned the novel (5). Gajarawala discusses the event in line with Ambedkar’s burning of Manusmriti in 1927 (8-9). On the other hand, she discusses Renu’s *Maila Anchal* (The Soiled Border, 1954). She finds it a breakthrough for its documentary vision in the *anchalik sahitya* (110-111). She understands *anchal* (region) thus:

“the related *anchal* literally refers to the sari border, specifically the portion that covers a woman’s breast. As such it is responsible for a number of associations with femininity, proper behavior, and motherhood. *Anchalik* as regional, therefore, connotes several things, not least a particular type of region—marginalized, impoverished, and primitive, certainly, but also pure, clean and nourishing. The word *maila* means “dirty” or “soiled,” but has less literal connotations: polluted, foul, offensive” (123).

This has far-fetched ramifications for languages like Bundeli thought to be *maila* which strive to be pure and standardized and simultaneously hold up the sanctity of Hindi’s pure *Aanchal*.

Chapter 2 will show that the standard public reiterates a solid association between the gendered *anchal* of *Bharat mata* (Mother India) and *Mother Bundeli* (Bundeli mata) in urban space which is her truest representative. The ‘self’ of the Bundeli language as ‘mother’ is situated in the urban sphere against its ‘other’ in the village.

Gajrawala discusses regional novels in the theoretical context of realism. Unlike her, McGregor distinguishes the standardization of early Hindi prose in the nineteenth century and from the debates that occurred in the 20th century. He notes that the emerging authors of Hindi prose exercised the traditional prose genres in the formation of a new avenue, a new literary market. It did not show a large and deep impact of English ways (MacGregor, “The Rise” 121). The modern novel, *Theth Hindi ka Thath* [Luxury of Rural Hindi] was very effective in its use of colloquial and dialect (129). The standard public refers to *lok anchal* (regional) and *lok sanskriti* (cultural) as the markers of a new avenue for identity production. However, the question of “linguistic capital” moves hand in hand with linguistic competence (Rahman 104).

Standard Bundeli is marked by ethnic identity. Ethnicity is largely determined by the culture of folk-songs popular in the region and as identified by the standard public. However, the nature of ethnicity is not much appreciated by the Indian state, says Rawat.⁵¹ Rawat expresses a desire of the standard public to establish a compatible relationship between its ethnic membership and the membership in national polity. He says that the standard public cannot resolve the nationality question without building a compatible relationship with the Indian state. He explains the reason behind the indifference of the state to the development of Bundelkhand. He mentions that the Bundeli ethnicity is not found compatible in the eye of the state. Rawat finds the people of Bundelkhand vengeful and intensely aggressive by nature. He indirectly blames the oral narratives based on the legends of valor and battles in Alha songs. Because the government is skeptical, the material condition in Bundelkhand is not paid attention to. Rawat is apologetic for the cultural difference he has experienced in the region. He does not locate it in an aesthetic context. He locates it in the context of social etiquette. He reduces the cultural context

⁵¹ Rawat, Jagdish. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 19 Nov. 2016.

of valor to the stigma of Bundeli identity. He experiences tension against the pulls and pressure of nationalism in the Hindi public sphere. Bundeli identity can play a subversive role in the ethnic context. The linguistic ideology of the standard public is determined by what Rawat explains in his perspective of ethnicity. Therefore, there is a possibility of a shift from citing ‘nature’ to ‘character’ in the narrative of identity, which almost appears to be a naturalized category.

I argue that the loyalty of Bundeli intellectuals toward the state is betrayed in the Hindi public sphere. I discuss the betrayal of the demand for separate statehood in Bundelkhand. The standard public experiences the pressure to resolve the perception of (in)compatibility of their ethnic identity against the exclusivity of national identity. There is a tension between claiming roots on the one hand and claiming nationality on the other. The standard public’s association with the ethnic identity is embedded in its relation to the oralities across communities of Bundelkhand. It identifies with the Bundeli language in a larger socio-economic context.

Madbaiya expresses the injustice done to the people of Bundelkhand in their demand for a separate state for Bundelkhand. He claims that there was a proposal put forth for a separate state of Bundelkhand. However, it went unheard by the States Reorganization Commission in the 1950s (“Bundelkhand” 56). He reports that there are five main divisions that constituted the territory of the proposed Bundelkhand region: Jhansi Division (UP), Chitrakoot Division (UP), Gwalior Division (MP), Sagar Division (MP), Vidisha (Bhopal) Division (MP).⁵² The two divisions of UP comprise seven districts while the other three divisions of MP comprise ten districts. Madbaiya complains that a package of eight thousand crores was declared for the development of the Sagar division alone. He complains of the State’s indifference to the development of the entire region by both the states.

⁵² Madbaiya, Kailash. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 26 Nov. 2016.

Bharat Dogra submitted a survey report based on the drastic impact of the severe droughts in the region.⁵³ He finds it ironic that Bundelkhand is popular for singing the songs of valor in the memory of the local legends, Alha and Udal but the region suffers due to low indicators of development and poverty.

A political party, Bundelkhand Mukti Morcha (BMM) started to put political pressure on the contemporary governments since its foundation in 1989.⁵⁴ Raja Bundela, the current president of BMM attended the literary gathering, which was organized by the standard public in 2018 at Orchha, and attended programs on the Bundeli language movement in Bundelkhand.⁵⁵

A local activist, Tara Patkar has had a sit-in protest at Alha Chowk (square) in the town of Mahoba against the central government since August 15, 2016 (See Fig.7).⁵⁶ He showed me a leaflet. The leaflet explains his demands for the institutional development of Bundelkhand. It includes the demands for the establishment of institutions of health, education, and culture in Bundelkhand. It also expresses his demand for the procurement of the only *pandulipi* (manuscript) of *Alhakhand* from the British Museum of London. The manuscript was prepared by Ghansiram of Mahoba. Patkar pointed out that Bundelkhand is dominated by *khadan mafias* (the mining criminals) in a nexus with the local politicians. He suspected that it would leave the region in the hands of exploitative forces.

⁵³ Dogra, Bharat. "Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh: From Valour to Hunger." *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, May 2008, bundelkhand.in/REPORT/Bundelkhand-From-Valour-to-Hunger-By-Bharat-Dogra.

⁵⁴ Raja Bundela claimed that, under RTI Act, he collected "a copy of the treaty" signed by 32 princely states with the government of India for the separate state of Bundelkhand in 1948. He informed that he decided to approach the Supreme Court with the document to demand the promised statehood for Bundelkhand. "Statehood demand based on India's promise to princely states, says Raja Bundela." *Indian Express*, Dec. 2009, archive.indianexpress.com/news/statehood-demand-based-on-india-s-promise-to-princely-states-says-raja-bundela/554300/.

⁵⁵ Raja Bundela argued that if the development of Bundeli language had become the agenda, Bundeli speakers would take pride in their language. Soniya. "Bundeli log kare apni bhasha ka samman tabhi hoga Bundeli ka vikash: Raja Bundela" [Bundeli Speakers Respect their Language for its Development]. *Univarta*, Feb 2020, univarta.com/bundeli-people-will-respect-their-language-only-when-bundeli-develops-raja-bundela/lokpriya/news/1902637.html.

⁵⁶ Patkar, Tara. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 16 November. 2016.



(Fig.7 Tara Patkar sitting on an indefinite fast with his supporters at Alha Chowk, Mahoba, UP)

However, in a *Facebook* post made on 31 August 2018, Patkar declares that he is on an indefinite fast under the banner “*Bundelkhand Rajya Chahiye*” (We Demand a Separate Bundelkhand State). Patkar notes that the population of America is lesser than that of India. However, America has been reorganized into fifty states, which is much more than the twenty-nine states of India. He points out that the Indian population is about one thirty-four crore living in a small number of twenty-nine states. He argues that India can never become a superpower.⁵⁷ The line between the language movement and movement for separate Bundelkhand is thin given the low indicators of development in Bundelkhand. It resonates with the support of public voices across different variables of movement.

⁵⁷ Patkar, Tara. Bundelkhand Rajya Chahiye. *Facebook*, Aug 31, 2018, facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2579039948776527&set=a.606719762675232&type=3&theater.

Conclusion

The chapter discussed the macro and micro identities in the asymmetrical relationship that forms different publics in Bundelkhand. The social groups strategically apply meaning to their identities. As a relatively young Bundeli Other, I experienced a motive of parental enculturation and a conditional membership in the standard public at the literary gathering. The levels of identification differ between groups across contexts. Identification depends on circumstances and situations in the enactment of identity.

I attempted to unpack Bundeli and Hindi as imagined cultural foundations and thereby, critique the standard public. I mark two shades of language ideology: the one informs a sense of activism to shed off the image of linguistic stigma; the other, caught with the same form of stigma, subscribes to the hegemonic normative power structure. Both ‘political’ positions or trajectories are different but they overlap with each other. Also, the standard public works with two different processes: one is popular while the other is more formal in approach.

The epistemological foundation of the Bundeli language can be traced back to the genealogy and typology of the Hindi public in the early twentieth century. The internal polarization between the ‘high’ domain and ‘low’ domain in the reconstruction of Bundeli owes to caste based tensions. The Bundeli self is imagined to be able to cope with Hindi in urban space where its ‘other’ carries the image of an oral or an ethnic identity. The latter is grounded in rural Bundelkhand. The standard public discards the rural forms of Bundeli and counts them as politically inconsequential. It produces the new ‘differences’ in the support of its pro-urban Bundeli.

In her book, *Women and Girls in the Hindi Public Sphere*, Shobna Nijhawan argues that Partha Chatterjee’s distinction between “spiritual” and “material” is not adequate to articulate the linguistic difference in the public sphere (9). It downplays the subjective or the “private” domain of the women writers and editors in the early twentieth century Hindi movement (9). It presents the visibility of the male as ‘objective’ and ‘impersonal’ in its approach to public affairs (9).

The upper caste male produces and dominates the ‘difference’ of Bundeli *chinar* in the regimes of representation. The standard public is constituted by a majority of upper-caste male in a prototypical fashion. The standardization of Bundeli is urban and casteist in imagination. This is revealed in its compromise with the aesthetic and romanticized construction of ethnicity. It is based on the cultural foundation of the Hindi language. It is also expressed in the binary of Bundeliness versus *Angreziyat* (Englishness).

Madbaiya discusses the questions of *apni moosar* (our plow) and Bundeli *pani* (water) (“Hame Kachhu” 1). He argues that the progress of the Bundeli language is constituted by the elements of vegetation such as *badar* (clouds), *hava-pani* (winds and water), and the *beej-khad* (fertilizer for seeds) (1). He counters the English language based on his notion of Bundeli *pani* (Bundeli honor) (1). He finds that the standard public should not be *garjvant* (dependent) on the English language (1). What does the standard public mean by the notion of a cultural plow? How does the standard public conceptualize the latter? What do Bundeli water and other elements of nature provide to the standard public to counter the English language? What does it imply?

The standard public aims to achieve a cultural visibility for the Bundeli language. Bundeli language represents *sanskriti* (culture), its *achar-vichar* (conduct and thought), language, *bhasha-bhoosa* (attire), *bhajan-bhojan* (worship and food) (1). Bundeli identity is conceptualized by its language, manner, attire, food, and friendship.

Madbaiya makes a distinction between *saunjai* (friendship) and *mer jor* (socialization) with the beholders of Anglo-culture (1). He indicates *dushta sangat* (an evil friendship) in the contact with the latter (1). He refrains from replacing Bundeli *moosar* (plow) with the English plow because the latter represents the Anglo-culture (1). He defines Anglo-culture with *paschim ki jhoothan* (the scraps of food left on a plate, destined for garbage or animals) (1-2). He finds it *adhunikta ki andhi* (symbolic of the storm of modernity) (2). It cannot provide the cultural orientation to his or her mother-land and mother-tongue (1). It will only make the Bundeli speakers *pachtat* (repent) and *latyay jai* (disrespect) (1). He appeals to them *tane raiyo* (to stay proud) and *chhaye raiyo* (to stay visible) in the public sphere (1).

The Hindi intellectuals were “sensitive both to the dangers of cultural colonization and to the effectiveness of a centralized system of education” (Orsini, “Hindi Public” 89). Madbaiya demands *asliyat* (authenticity) of Bundeli *chinar* to his conception of Bundeli language (“Bundeli Gadhya” 5). R.S. McGregor defines *asliyat* as: reality; essential quality; originality and genuineness or *purity*, in his dictionary (68).⁵⁸ Madbaiya blames *paschim ki sabhyata* (the civilization of west) that has led a *khichri* (mixture) *asar* (influence) in the culture of Bundelkhand (“Apnan se” 2). He points out that the cultural *khichri* (mixture) is the result of *Angreziyat*. It is subject to *khan pan* (food and drink practice) and *ahar vihar* (way of living) (2). The latter can *milauni* (impure) Bundeli *chinar* (identity) (2). Bundeli and Hindi having undergone a cultural mixture, he finds both as preys of English (2).

Madbaiya blames the local opportunist politicians who betray their mother-land and mother-tongue due to their ignorance of *sanskar* (Bundeli custom) and *pani kau swabhimani* (the self-respect of Bundeli water) (“Bundeli Gadhya” 4). They do not work towards demanding a separate state of Bundelkhand in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh and pursue only their self-interests (“Bundeli kau” 104).

It can be said that the standard public is a group of elite subjects of Bundeliyat or Hindiyat. Its engagement with the progress of Bundeli reflects the love, labor, and life for mother-tongue and culture which simultaneously constructs mother tongue in a hierarchical relationship that is framed by the idea of the Hindi-Hindu nation.

⁵⁸ McGregor, R. S. *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*. Oxford UP, 1993, p.93.

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Chapter 2

Mapping the Socio-Political Change in Bundelkhand: The Discourse on *Apni Mata (Bundeli mata)*⁵⁹

Introduction

The standard public engages in the project of self-identification with the Bundeli language that simultaneously attempts to establish a particular version of Hindi nationality. It deals with the question of Bundeli language within the boundaries of linguistic nationalism. The standard public is pre-occupied with the cultural image of language and region from a normative point of view. In this case, it experiences a tension between the claim to a Pan-Hindi nationality and in its representation of local Bundeli elements, martyrs, and warrior figures. This tension arises because the standard public sets the popular discourse on the cleavages of hegemony-pluralism, unity-diversity, etc. We can say that the experience of such tension provides the standard public a source of stimulus to stabilize its activities in an enactment of cultural identity since it is always uncertain as to which direction the common people may perform their role in the cultural-political space of Bundelkhand. The common people experience poverty and the culture differently in Bundelkhand. It is not a priority for them to engage in the politics of belonging from a normative perspective against the immediate contexts of their everyday lives. For instance, the issue of forced migration draws attention to the material reality of Bundelkhand.⁶⁰ It is necessary to understand the contradictions and conflicts between the claim to a nationality and the representation of Bundeli identity in a socio-economic context.

⁵⁹ All translations are mine unless otherwise mentioned.

⁶⁰ The Bundeli speakers suffer with material issues of water crisis, heat wave, drought, fund cut by the center, lack of awareness of the schemes, corruption in the local schemes for food and employment etc. Nanda, Rupashree. "Bundelkhand famine: 18 lakh people migrated to Delhi alone in 1 year." news18.com/news/india/bundelkhand-famine-18-lakh-people-migrated-to-delhi-alone-in-1-year-1225421.html.

The uneven socio-economic circumstances and the psychological state of mind both are inseparable in the politics of identity. People are forced to live with the status of a second-class citizen in Bundelkhand because the region is underdeveloped. The underdevelopment of the region hinders communication. The act of engaging in the discursive space with the agenda of writing a cultural identity is a matter of privilege. It is enjoyed only among a few. I should make this clear: I argue that the Bundeli language movement under the banner of the standard public is divorced from the everyday struggle of the people, who survive against a range of crises in Bundelkhand. The Bundeli language movement carries quite a bourgeois class outlook that overlaps with their caste privilege.

Chapter 1 discussed the assertion of the standard public. It examined the discourse on the standardization of Bundeli in alliance with Hindi, which is structured upon caste, class, and gender relations. The present chapter focuses on the politics of personification of the Bundeli language by the members of the standard public into the gendered image of *Bundeli mata* and into the image of a young girl. It also focuses on the deconstruction of linguistic motherhood by the people in the margins. It takes *Bundeli pani* (Bundeli honor) as the entry point in this case.

In the preface, “*Apnan se Apni Baat*” [Our Message to Our Community] to his book, *Mithe Bol Bundeli ke* [Sweet Words of Bundeli], Kailash Madbaiya constitutes a narrative of cultural autonomy against the idea of *angreziyat* (Englishness) (2). In this background, he discusses the idea of *Bundeli pani* in the preface, “*Hame Kachhu kene hai*” [I have to Say Something] to his book, *Dagar Bundeli: Najar Bundeli* [Bundeli: Destiny and Vision] (1). He aims at the preservation of purity in the formation of Bundeli identity against an all-encompassing globalization. The chapter speculates the possibility of a future for Bundeli identity by experiencing *Bundeli pani*. The next section elaborates this term *Bundeli pani*.

***Bundeli Pani* (Bundeli Honour)**

The idea of *Bundeli pani* is significant. R.S. McGregor defines *pani* in his dictionary as following: water; rain; fluid; juice; alcohol; brightness; *reputation, honor, sense of modesty*,

shame, vigor, manliness (emphasis mine) (622).⁶¹ In the present chapter, I choose to gloss *Bundeli pani* as well as other similar sentiments that the Bundeli speakers express towards their language and land. I argue that the notion of standard Bundeli corresponds to the idea of *Bundeli pani*. The emotion of *thasak* (pride) (Madbaiya, “Apan se” 2) for *Bundeli mata* is structured around the idea of *Bundeli pani*.

The politics of the standard public experiences a dilemma in the image of *Bundeli mata*. The standard public asserts their cultural roots in Bundelkhand in their representation of a single linguistic identity, community, and history. But, for the people, who attribute and embody different meanings to the notion of linguistic identity, community, and history, to survive in Bundelkhand, this seems like a far-fetched ideal. Interestingly, the members of the standard public, who share a consensus on standardization of Bundeli, diverge in their stance on the question of language and identity.

I argue that *Bundeli pani* has different implications for the present and future of the Bundeli language in its relation to the Indian state. It allows us to discuss the profile and ideology of Bundeli subjects across a range of issues and meanings for Bundeli identity. *Bundeli pani* inspires its subjects to practice the writing of histories of Bundeli language in more than one way. It suggests that the question of linguistic identity resonates with moral, ethical implications. I illustrate this aspect of *Bundeli pani* in the Bundeli subjects’ challenge to the dominant force from their respective source of dis/location in the political thought.

The standard public is constituted by various positions. Madbaiya offers the idea of *Bundeli pani* in the discourse of honor (“Hame Kachhu” 1-2). Madhukar Shah expresses his idea on the future of minor languages against the question of institutional support from the states.⁶² In the preface to her book, *Bundelkhand ke Dastavej Bhag I*, [Documents of Bundelkhand Part I] Safiya Khan emerges as a mouthpiece of Bundeli language and its heritage (1-2). In his essay,

⁶¹ McGregor, R. S. *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*. Oxford UP, 1993, p. 622.

⁶² Shah, Madhukar. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 10 Nov. 2016.

“*Bundeli kau Manak Surup aur Karako ka Prayog*,” [Standard Form of Bundeli and Use of Determiners] Dayal Shrivastav emphasizes the reform or ‘civilizing’ Bundeli speakers (22-32). Jagdish Rawat advises Bundeli speakers to move away from the ethnic nature of Bundelkhand and adapt a social etiquette to establish a compatible claim on nationality.⁶³ He asks for a shift in behavior that complies with the state. Shiromani Singh creates the discourse of sociality in his short-stories.⁶⁴ Mahesh Katare represents Bundeli as the language of resistance in his poetry.⁶⁵

These subjects of *Bundeli pani* express different positions for the development of the Bundeli language vis-à-vis the region. There is a presence of multifaceted voices in the vision for a *Bundeli mata*. The linguistic practices also vary in the experiences of *Bundeli pani*. The plurality in the standard public may help us counter the dominance of Hindi nationalism in north India. I map the resistance practices in the diverging views shared among the members of the standard public. However, as *Bundeli pani* indicates fluid boundaries for its signification, I do not limit it to the standard public. I contextualize it in the larger material context of Bundelkhand. I move beyond the texts produced by the standard public and look at the film, *Bandit Queen* (1994) to illustrate the paradox of the linguistic community in a socio-cultural and socio-political context.

The present chapter departs from Chapter 1 that did not focus on the practice of identity. The present chapter is focused mainly on the analysis of identity. Here, I try to explain how the various subjects of *Bundeli pani* make sense of their activities, and experiences around the notion of identity in Bundelkhand. It is to be noted that both aspects of doing and thinking identity-politics overlap. Having highlighted the multifaceted constructs of the ideal behind *Bundeli mata*, I deal with the following questions in this chapter:

⁶³ Rawat, Jagdish. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 20 Nov. 2016.

⁶⁴ Singh, Shiromani. “Bhabhoot” [Ash]. *Argani* [Strip]. Manish Prakashan, 2016, pp. 85-89.

⁶⁵ Porval, Rohit. “Bundeli Kavi ko Hindi Academy ka Samman” [Bundeli Poet is Awarded by Hindi Academy]. *Amar Ujala*, amarujala.com/kavya/halchal/first-time-in-history-hindi-sahitya-akademi-to-honor-bundeli-poet-ma-he-sh-katare-sugam.

Research Questions

- What are the different ways in which Bundeli language has been imagined with a life of its own?
- What are the different ways of writing the histories of Bundeli?
- How do we understand the Bundeli subjectivity vis-à-vis its political identities?
- How does Bundeli language as a living subject perform its gendered identity?
- What is the role of new media in the representation of the subjects of *Bundeli pani*?

To answer the questions above, it is important to highlight the issue of caste in the context of social and linguistic movements in India. The following section consists of the observations around this issue.

Review of Literature

Bundelkhand is one of the main linguistic constituencies in north India. The bridge between standard Bundeli and Hindi is built on an ideological paradigm. The standard public represents Bundeli language and *Bundeli mata* in a subordinate position standing behind the “cartographic aura” of the Hindi language or *Bharat mata* (See Fig. 1).



(Fig. 1 Bharat Mata)⁶⁶

I use the phrase, “cartographic shape of India” from Sumathi Ramaswamy’s observation in her article, “When Language Becomes a Mother/Goddess.”⁶⁷ She shows that the scientific tools like maps and globes were used to counter the hegemony of Bharat mata embodied by Hindi. She pinpoints a clear challenge to the hegemony of *Bharat mata* in the image of *Tamilttay* (Tamil mother). She discusses the comparison between *Tamilttay* and *Bharat mata*. *Bharat mata* is portrayed sitting on the defined map of post-independent India or as a “body filling up the map, her limbs and head blurring the fraught boundaries of state cartography.”⁶⁸ But *Tamilttay* is portrayed sitting on the map of Tamil India, entire India, and even all over the map of world or

⁶⁶ Ramaswamy uses the image from the elementary Tamil schoolbook, 1958. See, Ramaswamy, Sumathi. “When a Language Becomes a Mother/Goddess.” *Tasveer Ghar*, tasveergharindia.net/essay/language-mother-goddess.html.

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Ibid

globe in pre-partition India (89). The subjects of Tamil devotion counter the “appropriation of land” by the dominant group in the territories of several other linguistic communities (90). Besides this, the representation of Hindu *Tamilttay* is explained by Ramaswamy using many other forms and how devotees of *Tamilttay* have been mobilized in Tamil history around these forms (78). Hindu *Tamilttay* is “a goddess of language, learning and literature” and “a mistress of territory and polity” (“When Language”). She is also acknowledged as a mother language with a concrete image of her own (See Fig. 2).



(Fig.2 A Statue of *Tammilannai* or *Tamilttay* installed at Madurai, 1991)⁶⁹

Similarly, in his book, *Nationalism Without a Nation in India*, G. Aloysius shows that the smaller states struggle to claim nationalities based on regionalism, development, and linguistic identity against the dominance of “one powerful state system” (2). This is a global phenomenon (3). The liberal and secular nationalisms are being challenged by the rising ethnic identities in

⁶⁹ Ramaswamy credits Rich Freeman for the photo. See, Ramaswamy, Sumathi. “When a Language Becomes a Mother/Goddess.” *Tasveer Ghar*, tasveergharindia.net/essay/language-mother-goddess.html#lg=1&slide=8.

England, Canada Spain, etc. (3). Aloysius identifies this situation as “internal colonialism” in the heartland of India (3). The debate on the federal structure of India is still in its unresolved state. The discourse of development is one of the prominent aspects in this regard besides regionalism and the politics of linguistic identity (2). The smaller states also have to face the “Multinational” companies and the “world finance bodies” (3). Aloysius moves beyond this. He is critical of the social movements in India. He finds the ideals of “citizenship”, universal education, and “social mobility” at the center of the liberal-secular movements. But he marks the absence of caste in the mentioned ideals (87-90). He argues that nationalism has failed to build a collective identity in “the subjective consciousness” of the historically oppressed communities such as Dalit, Adivasi, OBC, and religious minorities in Indian states (138).

Ramaswamy traces the roots of exclusion of Dalitbahujans to the “Orientalist and colonial knowledges” (“Passions” 37). She shows that the Dravidians and the Tamil language were counted inferior to the Aryans and Sanskrit/Hindi (37-38). She notes that the inferior treatment to the Dravidians recuperated a need for mobilization among the non-Brahmin upper-castes, the “lower-caste” members, and Muslim leaders to assert their ethnic-linguistic self-respect against Hindi (175). She does not find the Dalitbahujans interested in considering Brahmins as Tamilian due to their caste consciousness in “DMK rhetoric” (194). In her work, *Language Emotion and Politics in South India*, Lisa Mitchell explains this in terms of the class mobility of the Telugu middle class against the social dynamics of caste and gender relations with Hindi nationalism. Though the standard language was confined to the dominant caste groups in coastal Andhra, the political mobilization of Telugu speakers took place in the context of economic exclusion (26). The demand for the inclusion of Telugu and Tamil also had, in the background, the fear of the institutional establishment of Hindi and the subsequent deprivation of Telugu and Tamil speakers from university admissions and government jobs (26). Mitchell argues that the Telugu language movement was not purely a middle class one. It also followed the large scale participation of the members “from lower-class and non-dominant-caste backgrounds” (28). But then Dalitbahujans received very “little from a new state” (30). She marks their invisibility structured in the dialectic relation between Prakrit and Sanskrit (120). For example, the “minor” languages were assigned to the characters of “women of low birth” as a “natural” entity against the upper-caste male heroes, were fixed in a “reified” position in the

literary sphere (120). It therefore becomes important to address the dynamics of caste and gender in language question.

The blend between science and nature shrinks in the manifestation of Hindu nationality in the case of north India. In her book, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community*, Charu Gupta argues that the issue of Hindi is very much intertwined with the politics of religion and land (202). The icon of *Bharat Mata* (the mother of India) looms large. There is no concrete idol of mother in north India like it is seen with the image of *Tamilttay* and *Telugu tally* (See Fig. 3) in south India.



(Fig. 3 The Statue of *Telugu tally* at Secretariat Road, Hyderabad)⁷⁰

There is a watershed image of “a political and geographical body” of *Bharat mata* (212). It clearly shows the dominant form of Hindi nationalism in India. In her book, *The Social Space of Language*, Fatima Mir argues that it is difficult to find Hindi as a symbol of empowerment of

⁷⁰ The image of *Telugu tally* was captured by me during a visit to the place on secretariat road in Hyderabad.

people in the north Indian states. She points out that the personification of the Telugu language and Tamil language draws our attention to “the state-centric” image of the linguistic states (183-194). It presents a positive consonance between the public institutions and the political leaders and parties. The bond between Hindu religion and the Hindi language predominates in the cultural politics of the north Indian states. The diverse ethnolinguistic groups challenge the dominance of Hindi in north India. However, I argue that the logic of language movement under the banner of the Bundeli standard public has been Hindu and beneficial to select elites alone.

Against the hegemony of Hindi or *Bharat mata* and the ruling castes and class in north India, the Dalitbahujan community imagines the idea of motherhood on different terms and in different contexts (Gupta, “Sexuality” 203). In her book, *The Gender of Caste Representing Dalits in Print*, Gupta discusses the meanings of a goddess in the margins. She argues that the Dalitbahujan expressions of the meanings about the construct of “goddesses” have been deconstructive to upper-caste intellectuals’ discourses on purity, past, nation, and social reforms of the Hindi language and literature (208-209).⁷¹ The Dalitbahujans have been able to break away from the prejudices of the upper-caste male Hindu intellectuals in the public sphere. They de-brahminize the so-called “popular” discourse on cultural “goddess” and the elitist “ideal of tradition and meaning” (209). The construct of motherhood is significant in the cultural history of Dalitbahujan community. The lower-caste traditions of worship of the “goddess” is distinct from “the monolith of Brahminical Hinduism” (210). For instance, in his book, *Why I am not a Hindu*, Kancha Ilaiah describes the features of Pochamma, the goddess of “Dalitbahujan”:

⁷¹ According to Ilaiah, the construct of goddess exists outside the claim on ownership in the gender ideology of Dalitbahujan community. He shows the anti-caste features of the image of Dalit goddesses in its cultural context. Ilaiah, Kancha. *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, Samya, 2002. *Library Genesis*, library.lol/main/F1B714B0029294C6CAE67BF98F2D0BC3. PDF download. But both Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana argue that the “subject” of Dalit woman is impossible in the public sphere (234). They point out that the upper-caste feminists opposed the implementation of reservations to Dalitbahujan men and women in 1990s out of the fear of losing their upper-caste notion of sexuality (238-241). Tharu, Susie, and Tejaswini Niranjana. “Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender.” *Subaltern Studies IX*, edited by Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, Oxford UP, 1996, pp. 232-260.

Pochamma is independent. She does not pretend to serve any man. Her relationship to human being is gender-neutral, caste-neutral and class-neutral. She is supposed to take care of everyone in the village. She herself relates to nature, production and procreation. The closeness of the relationship that exists between Pochamma and the people is evident in the belief that she understands all languages and all dialects (92).

Ilaiah argues that the Dalitbahujans worship their goddesses in the context of everyday human affairs and materialist needs (92-93). They do not create any extra-ordinary design around her. The above statement implies the difference of gender ideology in the lower rungs of caste-hierarchy. Pochamma inspires the Dalitbahujan women to exercise their opinions from independent positions. This stands them apart from the Hindu middle class women who seek opinion of their male from subordinate positions and conform the ‘high’ social status competitively with the fellow women (Gupta, “Gender” 210-211). Dalitbahujan women define identity in their productive relations with indigenous resources. They are more close to nature (in terms of materiality) than it is found with the urban middle-class women (or men) in the mainstream society, who largely see goddess and nature from a cultural-idealist and cultural-supremacist position.

It is true that the number of rapes of Dalitbahujan women and them being considered sexual property is all over the place in our patriarchal society. I focus on the narrative about experience of god and goddesses to contextualize the difference between the lives of Dalitbahujans and of the upper-castes. The practice of imagining goddess or mother in Dalitbahujan community entails a democratic language as long as it is embedded in the shared culture and collective labor system. For instance, the temple of “Dalit Goddess English” in Bankagaon village, UP stands for wellness of the community and its dignity against lack of opportunities in education and unemployment (220).

Both Ilaiah’s and Gupta’s observation leave a scope for new perspectives and reasons to counter the mainstream construct of linguistic iconization and motherhood/goddess. It helps understand the socio-political reality of Dalitbahujan women and of the smaller regions in post-

independent India. I explain, further, how the question of identity has always been a factor of tension among the provincial elites after the rise of the Dalitbahujan community in the political landscape of electoral politics.

Methodology

I examine the network of actors, who are the subjects of *Bundeli pani*, and their vision for Bundeli language and Bundelkhand through the lens of caste, class, and gender. I do not have the visuals of *Bundeli mata* in its connection to the symbolic apparatus of the Hindi language because the standard public has not produced a concrete or abstract image/photo/idol of *Bundeli mata* except a poetic description of the *mata* in writings. I take up the writings of the standard public and its divergent views to critique the construct of *Bundeli mata*. I depend on the voices circulated in print-culture, internet, and social media, cinema, news-reports to connect the dots around the construction of *Bundeli mata*.

I find it necessary to address the issue of caste in the discourse on Bundeli language. I demonstrate this dimension by focusing on the film, *Bandit Queen* to discuss the implications of caste purity and imposition of a ‘majoritarian’ language on a linguistic minority. I juxtapose the construct of *Bundeli mata* with the idea of *Devihood* by taking up the representation of Phoolan Devi, a Bundeli speaker from the Chambal region in Bundelkhand. I look at the discourse on *devi* (goddess), a cognate for *mata* (mother) concerning the identity of the Dalitbahujan women. I focus on the representation of Bundeli in Hindi cinema to delineate the material reality of the Dalitbahujan as a ‘minor’ and a non-elite group in the Hindi public sphere.

I observe that the resistance practices around the construct of *devi* are rooted in bodily experiences. I argue that the construct of *devi* in connection to the life of Phoolan Devi stands in clear contrast to the upper-caste construct of *Bundeli Mata* vis-à-vis *Bharat Mata* and also, *Tamilttay* and *Telugu tally*. Among the standard public, the love expressed for the Bundeli language is manifest as casteist and gendered. The construct of *devi* helps us analyse the gendering of the Bundeli language in a caste-society. My focus on the discourse on linguistic motherhood is about the socio-economic and socio-cultural context in the so-called Hindi belt.

The love for *Bundeli mata* is expressed to define the identity of middle-class women with the broader demand for a separate state of Bundelkhand. I situate this in the stateless condition of the Bundeli language. It is important to examine what language politics means to different identities given the several linkages to identity politics in post-independent India. The following section focuses on the film, *Bandit Queen* to explain the construct of *Devihood* in contrast to the construct of *Bundeli mata* and *Bharat mata*.

The Discourse on *Devihood*

In his work, *The Coming of the Devi Adivasi Assertion in Western India*, David Hardiman introduces the discourse on *Devihood* as offered by the Adivasis⁷² in the Dang region of south Gujarat. He argues that the Adivasis are agents of their version of history which challenges nationalist historiography and Gandhian ideology (6). Adivasis derived meanings of ideal life in the *Devi* movement without being simply inspired by Gandhi (7). Hardiman argues that they are not “collective ‘lump’ to be ‘leavened’” (8) but their faith in *devi* (goddess) inspires them to bring change with a distinct social consciousness (10-11). In this feature, *Devi* corresponds gods “as the Earth Mother who gave fertility to the soil and assured abundant harvests, but who also brought disease” (55). The “awe and respect” that the *devi* would come and curse Adivasis for composing liquor and such supposedly ‘sinful’ activities leads them to organize themselves (55-65). Hardiman calls this “revolution in thought” against upper-castes (154-155). It can be seen in the event of Adivasis’ getting possessed with *devi* and her commands. Hardiman describes a linguistic dimension to this thought:

The human mind has the ability to unearth buried possibilities in a manner at once accidental, creative and irresistible. ‘It is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know’. Inspired verbal outbursts do not occur in a vacuum. They relate to the history of the group in an intimate matter, sounding a chord which resounds in the

⁷² Hardiman uses the category of ‘Adivasi’ in his book because it helps him contextualize the subjugation of Adivasi community since the nineteenth century in colonial times (15). He neglects the use of the category of ‘tribal’ because he finds it reductive (13). I use the category of ‘Adivasi’ in the broad circle of Dalitbahujan subjects.

minds of all those who have shared in this history...It was only when the commands were interpreted as being a call for a permanent change that they represented a radical way of looking at the world (154).

The Dalitbahujans faith in *devi* can change their life style and help them organize. This calls for their participation and calls for a care among them as intimate subjects shaping their history. The coming of Devi also signifies an event of becoming a *devi* for one's community and its affect around the question of linguistic identity. The present section is focused in this particular direction. It aims to elaborate the relationship between the Dalitbahujans and the construct of Devihood in the context of a socio-political change.

In the case of Bundeli, there are some considerable works in Hindi cinema that use Bundeli language as an important source to represent the ground reality in the region. Among these are *Bandit Queen* (1994), *Pan Singh Tomar* [The Life of Pan Singh Tomar, 2012], *Kadvi Hawa* [Bitter Winds, 2017], *Sonchiriya* [Golden Sparrow, 2019]. Except for *Kadvi Hawa*, the other three films narrate the lives and resistance of 'dacoits' who are victims of the corrupt system and the domination of upper caste Thakur landlords in rural Bundelkhand. *Kadvi Hawa*, a drama genre, is based on the suicides of local farmers and forced migration in the background of climate change.

Bandit Queen, a political drama is based on the biographical narrative of Phoolan. Phoolan is from the Mallah caste, a fisher folk community. The Mallahs are Dalits, the 'untouchable' community. Phoolan is married in her early childhood because her parents were afraid of the local Thakur men. Due to domestic violence at an early age and caste-discrimination, she escapes her in-laws' home and village. She returns back to her village. At home, she grows into an adult and faces sexual abuse by the Thakur boys. The son of the village head attempts to molest her. On her refusal, she and her father both are beaten by the Thakur men. She demands justice. On contrary, she is banished from the village by the members of Panchayat. She stays with her cousin, Kailash for a while in Behmai village. When she faces issues at Kailash's home, she is forced to leave his home. She visits the police station to request the police to lift the ban on her entry into her village. She is raped in police custody and

imprisoned in a false case. She gets bail but unknown to her is the fact that the bail was offered by Thakur Shri Ram, the boss of Babu Gujjar's gang of bandits. Gujjar wants to seek sexual favours from her. Vikram Mallah and many others belong to Phoolan's caste but they are part of the gang too. Vikram Mallah is aware of Phoolan's condition through Kailash in the village. He is sympathetic to her. Gujjar abducts Phoolan after her bail from the jail and keeps her in control. Vikram chances upon Gujjar raping Phoolan. He shoots Gujjar for his act of violence and Phoolan joins the gang of local bandits, who turn against the oppressive regime in the region. She is declared by Vikram as a 'devi' (goddess) of 'lower caste' Mallahs. Phoolan Devi emerges as a popular figure in the eyes of the oppressed and as a symbol of fear for the upper-caste landlords. She takes revenge upon her husband who abused her in childhood. On the other side, Thakur Shri Ram, who was jailed, is released. He takes cognizance of Gujjar's death. Shri Ram successfully plans the assassination of Vikram. Vikram is killed and Shri Ram kidnaps Phoolan, torments her, and along with his gang, rapes her for raising equal in status to him. To seek her revenge later, the gang of Phoolan with Vikram's close friends kills the Thakur men of the village. The notoriety of Phoolan becomes a national issue. She is warned by the state to surrender. The movie ends with Phoolan's struggle to survive and her final surrender to the state.

Bandit Queen is made in a variety of local Bundeli and with English subtitles. It is based in the 'dacoit belt' of Bhind and Morena, the two districts of Bundelkhand, MP. I focus on some important scenes in the film to discuss the relationship between caste and gender. The first scene is based in Astha, a village of Mallahs. Vikram Mallah visits the village with his gang. He introduces himself to the people. He greets them. He informs them that his gang is neither a police force nor a representative of upper-caste Thakurs. He asks them not to fear them because his gang is made of Mallahs. He tells them that he is pro-Mallah and has come to offer money to the goddess Bhavani for the prosperity of the village. He calls them to the temple in the village. People and children gather behind his gang at the temple. He pledges to protect Astha village and expects people to protect them in return. He asks his gang members to bow their heads to show respect to the goddess. The children identify Phoolan to be a woman with long hair on bowing her head. It creates a question on the identity of Phoolan as a dacoit. Vikram manages the local norms to reintroduce Phoolan in a new manner in this scene. The scene draws attention to the

moment of transformation. Vikram speaks in Bundeli to the people of Astha village about Phoolan:

Devi hai ye, Devi! Phoolan naam hai jyako. Phoolan Devi! Gaon valo ke raksha ke liye paida hui ye. Durga devi ka naam janat ho? Veyi hai ye. Durga ka avatar. Bolo, Durga maiya ki jai!

She is *devi*, the goddess! Her name is Phoolan. Phoolan, the goddess! She is born to protect the people of this village. Do you know Durga, the goddess? This is the same one, the incarnation of Durga. Speak, hail Durga! (takes a holy cloth of red color and asks Phoolan to tie it on her forehead against a public hail in the background) (*Bandit* 00:41:53-00:42:34).

Vikram establishes Phoolan's identity symbolically. He provides Phoolan resources within the boundaries of religion. He attempts to heal the wounds on her identity which is tormented by daily sexual abuse, discrimination, and molestation at the hand of the system and society. He appropriates the patriarchal norm that a woman cannot be part of the gang of dacoits. He offers Phoolan a new identity as the goddess of Dalit community. The principle of the traditional institution is re-signified in this scene. Phoolan is enabled to step into the male-centric regime. It marks a symbol of empowerment of women. The declaration of Phoolan as a goddess takes place in a collective spectacle. The modern notion of love and care is reconfigured by Vikram's companionship with Phoolan and the declaration of his membership with the Mallah (Dalit) community against the experience of caste-atrocity in day to day life.

The second scene reveals the fate of an 'ex-untouchable' (Dalit) in the caste-system of India. It shows that the Dalit body of a woman is sanctioned to be punished for the violation of laws inscribed by Brahminical patriarchy.⁷³ After Phoolan is kept a captive in the barn of Thakur

⁷³ "Brahminical patriarchy refers to the system under which the caste and gender hierarchy come together to uphold the Brahminical social order, in which upper-caste men exert control over people, especially women, from marginalized castes." See, FII Weekly. "Dear Savarnas & men, can you be a silent anti-caste ally?" Message to Dipak Barkhade. 9 Oct. 2020. E-mail.

men who rape her for four days, she is taken by Shri Ram Thakur and his men to the square of the village. Phoolan is asked to fetch water but is stripped naked by Shri Ram. She is forced to use the pot made of brass to fetch water from the well at the square. Phoolan reaches the well and before she could fetch water, Shri Ram Thakur stops her and humiliates her in public. He parades her naked at the village square. He reminds people that she abused him for his revenge on Vikram. He asks them to notice the punishment a ‘lower-caste’ woman deserves in society. He makes fun of the adjectives of *devi* (goddess) and *rani* (queen) which are used for her identity by the locals in the ravines of Chambal. He declares in Hindi:

Dekho logo! Ye hai bihad ki rani, Chambal ki rani. Phoolan Devi naam hai iska. Kya naam hai? Phoolan Devi! Dekh lo shakal iski. Ye hai Phoolan Devi. Mereko gaali di thi isne. Kaha tha, Madarchod! Ye hai Phoolan Devi. Dekho logo dekho. Aisi randiyo ka yahi hasra hota hai.

People, look at her. She thinks of herself as the queen of the ravines, the queen of Chambal. She is known with the name, Phoolan ‘Devi’, some goddess! Look at her face. She abused me. Look at her now. The ‘lower-caste’ goddess-whores deserve such punishment (*Bandit* 1:17:15-1:19:54).

The words of the upper-caste male mentioned above points to the sanctioned notion of caste and gender in Brahminical patriarchy. In *Bandit Queen*, the symbolic expression of forming a new identity is established with the replacement of the caste name of Phoolan Mallah with the suffix ‘Devi’. However, it results in a serious backlash with Vikram’s murder and the brutalization of Phoolan’s body. Phoolan is handed the pot made of brass by Thakur Shri Ram but she is stopped from using it. Thakur Shri Ram takes back the pot made of brass right before Phoolan can take water in it from a public well. In the movie, it is shown that the pot made of brass is particularly used by the Thakur women on the right side of public well while the pot made of clay is used by the Dalit women on the left side (*Bandit* 00:06:30-00:06:50). This analogy is used to demarcate the economic disparity between the upper-castes and the Dalits. It is also used to draw attention to the vulnerability of Dalit women in a casteist and patriarchal society. This transfers a symbolic message about the marginalization of Phoolan, who is economically unable and also socially

barred from using the pot made of brass unlike the upper-caste women. The intersectional relation between caste and gender can be decoded in the “sub-texts” of the film.⁷⁴

In another scene in the initial part of the movie, Phoolan is shown fetching water with the pot made of clay at her in-law’s village. It reveals the caste of her gendered identity. She is harassed by the local boys for marrying an old man. They break her clay pot into pieces with a stone. She is rebuked by her mother-in-law for the broken pot. She replies to her mother-in-law in Bundeli, full of anger and partly in angst: “*tut gao to tut gao. Ome mohe ka galti. Pittal ko gharo rakho jaise Thakurain ke.*” [What can I do if it has been broken? Keep a brass pot like the Thakur women do] (*Bandit* 00:7:45-00:7:52). Phoolan is shown as an outspoken woman in the film. The young girl Phoolan distinguishes the pots used by her and the upper-caste women of the Thakur caste in the village. She introduces herself as *Chambal ki beti* (the daughter of Chambal) in reply to Vikram who thought she was ignorant of his gang (*Bandit* 00:21:41-00:21:45). The clay pot signifies her social position for herself and for others. She draws her self-definition in closeness to nature in the region.

There is also an important reference point to Dalit women’s sexuality. In the another scene, both Phoolan and Vikram are shown while engaged in an act of physical intimacy without uncovering the body. Vikram expresses his desire to watch Phoolan naked. He forces her to take off her cloth. Phoolan gets angry. She pushes Vikram back in a counter-attack (*Bandit* 1:00:42-1:01:26). Phoolan’s perception of nudity is shaped in the context of her survival against caste-patriarchy. It is rooted in her experience of the upper-caste male gaze on her body.

The character of Phoolan Devi cannot be placed in the discourse of cynicism completely. This can be observed in Phoolan’s surrender to the state. She represents the possibility of social change and empowerment of women. She demands the security of her family and the welfare of her community in return to her surrender. The movie ends with Phoolan’s witness of her popularity as the *devi* of the region and the community. There are instances in the movie where

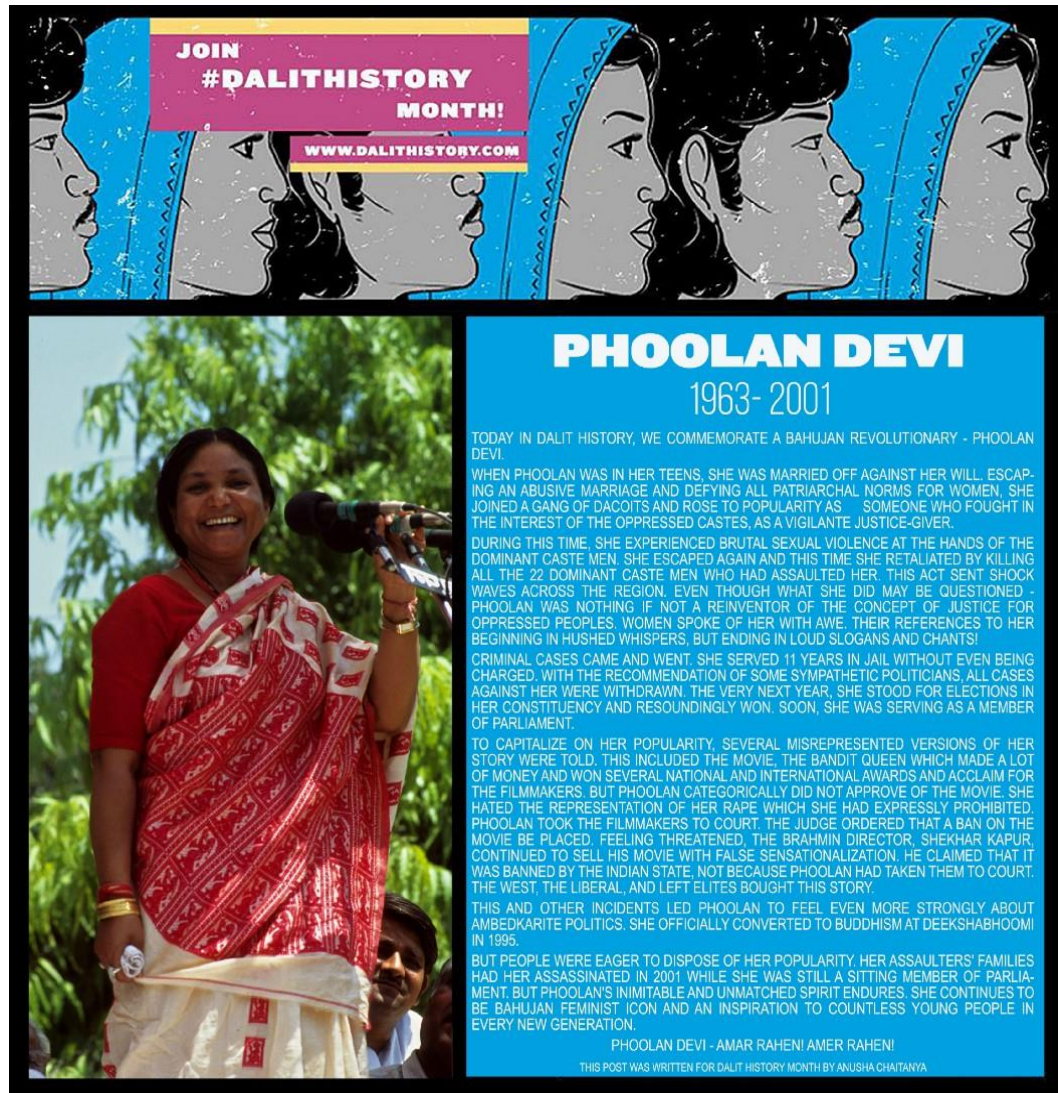
⁷⁴ Sethi, Sunil. “Bandit Queen: Film on Phoolan Devi Wins International Acclaim.” *India Today*, 15 July 2013, [india today.in/magazine/society-the-arts/films/story/19940831-bandit-queen-film-on-phoolan-devi-wins-international-acclaim-809556-1994-08-31](http://india.today.in/magazine/society-the-arts/films/story/19940831-bandit-queen-film-on-phoolan-devi-wins-international-acclaim-809556-1994-08-31).

the upper-caste male is anxious about the popularity of Phoolan as *devi* (mother) in the media. The governing state decides not to kill her but ask for surrender given the possibility of damage to the vote bank politics in the election (*Bandit*: 1:43:28-1:43:35). After charges of crimes were lifted and her subsequent release from jail in 1994, she was elected twice to the Lok Sabha as a candidate of the Samajwadi Party from Mirzapur seat in UP.⁷⁵ She was shot dead at the gate of her official bungalow in 2001.⁷⁶ Today, she is celebrated as a legend in the Dalit History Month (See Fig.4).⁷⁷ The following poster helps us understand the Dalitbahujan politics of identity against the upper-caste constructs.

⁷⁵ Vachhatani, Jitesh. "Before 1981 Behmai Massacre Verdict, All About Main-accused 'Bandit Queen' Phoolan Devi." *Republic World*, 18 Jan. 2020, republicworld.com/india-news/general-news/a-tale-of-phoolan-devi-the-main-accused-in-behmai-massacre-of-1981.html.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Dalit History Month is a project modelled on Black History Month. It aims at the documentation of the historical icons belonging to the Dalit, Adivasi and Bahujan movement. Chaitanya, Anusha. "Celebrating Dalit History: The Power of Phoolan Devi." *Dalit History Month*, 4 Apr. 2018, medium.com/@dalithistorynow/celebrating-dalit-history-the-power-of-phoolan-devi-9b07c515cfc8.



(Fig.4. Chaitanya, Anusha, “Celebrating Dalit History: The Power of Phoolan Devi!” 2018)

The Dalit History Month group published the poster on Phoolan in her memory as the feminist icon for the Dalitbahujans. It rejects the narrative of Phoolan’s victimhood in *Bandit Queen*. It counts the narrative in the movie a “false sensationalization” of caste-atrocity on her body (Chaitanya). The story of Phoolan published by the Dalit History Month is important. It depicts Devi as an inspiration. It shows that Phoolan officially converted to Buddhism in 1995. She was active in the organization of her community from an Ambedkarite perspective against the tyranny of Brahminical patriarchy in the so-called “Hindi” belt. In the background of the rise

of Dalitbahujan voices in the political and cultural sphere, I discuss the contradiction between the construct of *devi* and the upper-caste model of *Bundeli mata*, *Bharat Mata*, *Tamilttay* and *Telugutalli*.

In her article, “Reading India’s Bandit Queen,” Leela Fernandes locates the account of Phoolan Devi’s life in a postcolonial context because Phoolan represents the voice of the voiceless (132). The standard public casts the account of *Bundeli mata* in terms of the glory of regional and national culture. *Bandit Queen* represents *devi* as an individually rebellious but a collective identity against social hierarchies (133). *Bundeli mata* is marked by a common membership in the linguistic community because it promises the inclusion, awareness, and progress of different castes and communities within the secular-liberal frame. *Devi* represents a substantial minority against the corrupt and violent system. It substantiates the failure of the western notion of progress and democracy in Bundelkhand (134). A substantial minority is determined by the linguistic, social, and gender hierarchy structured upon the caste system. The discourse on otherization is not a power-neutral category in Indian academia.⁷⁸ In his article, “Cultural Elites and Disciplining of Bhavai,” V. Sebastian examines the inclusion of tribal actors in NGOs which are run by ‘progressive’ scholars who belong to the Brahmin and savarna castes. He argues that the members from historically oppressed groups are subject to otherization even in the enterprises of social change run by the elites in post-colonial times (60-64). Fernandes argues that the otherization of Dalitbahujans is a means to silence their voices in the politics of knowledge production (134) but it is seen that the relation between Dalitbahujans and the public institutions stands as one of the significant spaces where the Dalitbahujans counter the misrepresentation of their reality by the upper-castes in the public discourses.

In the preface to his book, *Banke Bol Bundeli ke*, [Elegant Words of Bundeli] Madbaiya finds the roots of Bundeli in *Bhavishya puran* to claim a distant past on the one hand (i), and on the other, he refers to the observation of Noam Chomsky on the present (“Nike Bol” 4). He

⁷⁸ The debate on the relation between “particular” and “universal” has been a long standing one. It is based on the inquiry about the sociological categories and the practice to find whether these categories can be helpful to understand the cultures across the world. But it is Edward Said’s *Orientalism* which gave rise to the post-colonial scholarship since 1990s.

appropriates Chomsky's statement that there are languages alone and no "dialects" (4) but he applies the very opposite of this concept when he discusses his idea of "standard" Bundeli. He constructs a genealogy of the Bundeli language in line with the Sanskritic tradition. I argue that Phoolan can grasp the contexts of culture in a more critical way on the ground of her subject position than the dominating subject position of the standard public. She was able to grasp the tension between the "particular" and the "universal." For instance, in another scene of the film, Phoolan visits Man Singh, a close friend of Vikram. She takes his help to seek support from Baba Mustakim, the leader of another large gang of bandits in Chambal. Baba Mustakim is from the Muslim community. He realizes that Phoolan wants to establish herself as a *devi* (leader) of the 'lower-caste' bandits with Man Singh and avenge Vikram's murder against the upper-caste Thakurs. Phoolan cries out her pain and she tells him that she has suffered severe humiliation and brutal violence as a woman in particular due to the toxic nature of a caste-system. Phoolan universalizes her identity as a woman in the caste-society. Baba Mustakim tells her that he is a Muslim and a Muslim bandit does not believe in a caste-hierarchy. He reminds her of his advice which he gave to Vikram for not joining the upper-caste bandits because they connive with the police (01:23:00-01:23:48). Phoolan agrees with Baba Mustakim but argues: "*Tumare sang jyada tar Musalman hai, Baba. So uch-nich nahi mante. Par kal tak dekhna sare baagian me bhed-bhav ka jher felego, khoon kharaba hoyago.*" [You have got the support of Muslims, Baba. So, your gang does not believe in a caste-hierarchy. But you will see in future for sure that the entire bandit kingdom will be affected by the poison of caste norms and this will turn it violent against itself] (01:23:49-01:24:02). Baba Mustakim takes cognizance of her supporters and declares his support to Man Singh and Phoolan in their mission (01:24:18-01:24:59). In this scene, Phoolan plays out the tension between gender and caste identity. She radicalizes her experiences against the dominant system. This kind of tension between the "particular" and the "universal" is also proved in Phoolan's conversion to Buddhism in 1995 (Chaitanya). She locates the roots of equality in Buddhism. Unlike the standard public, her conversion to Buddhism indicates her political move from the pastness of being Dalit to the present of being Buddhist. The standard public reads the meanings of Bundeli identity in past to perform its politics in the present.

The elite devotees of *Bundeli mata* reproduce the differences between elite/folk, literate/oral, soul/body, and rural/urban binary oppositions in the conceptualization of standard language. The standard Bundeli erases the reality of Dalitbahujans. The ‘lower-caste’ members associated with *devi* demand justice against the epistemic injustice or the inequalities embedded in such a form of language. The construct of *devi* cannot be limited to the role of ‘folk’-heroine against the oppressor in the ‘hinterland’. The Dalit History Month represents Phoolan Devi as “a reinventor of the concept of justice for oppressed peoples” (Chaitanya). *Devi* emerges as a mainstream construct at the same time. The Dalit History Month is instituted and celebrated by Dalitbahujans themselves whereas the film, *Bandit Queen* is made by Shekhar Kapoor, a savarna male from elite background. But it is a fact that Phoolan carried extra clout after release of the film in the realm of electoral politics.⁷⁹ The film fetched her publicity, glamour and money not to mention a certain dignity in the public sphere. The Dalitbahujans too contributed to the making of the film in various capacities.⁸⁰

Devi expresses different perspectives and contexts to the construct of *Bundeli Mata*. It is set in the context of survival, both individual and collective. In her article, “The Subaltern, the text and the critic: Reading Phoolan Devi,” Anuradha Ramanujan notes in *Devi*’s testimonial that Devi wanted to see the poor people of her community at the time of her public surrender to the state because she fought not only for herself alone but also for them (378). She expressed her desire to be *devi* once again for her people (369). The standard public expresses its desire to celebrate the existence of *Bundeli mata* under the aegis of the state. Unlike this, the construct of *devi* is embedded in the public sphere, in the spirit of a counter public that addresses itself to the oppressed majority.

⁷⁹ Malhotra, Inder. “‘Bandit Queen’ who represented the lower castes in Parliament.” *The Irish Times*, 28 July 2001, [irishtimes.com/news/bandit-queen-who-represented-the-lower-castes-in-parliament-1.320054](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/bandit-queen-who-represented-the-lower-castes-in-parliament-1.320054).

⁸⁰ In an interview, Gajraj Rao, who came from a small village and lower-middle class in Rajasthan, played a minor role in the film during shooting *Bandit Queen* in MP. Rao recalls his experience with Shekhar Kapur and finds him a down to earth person. He says that he was an ordinary actor then and had a minor role in the film. Kapur shot a complete scene following his observation on the caste Panchayat in village. “Jab naushikiye Actor Gajraj Rao ne Shekhar Kapoor ko salah di, aur unhone man bhi li” [When a novice actor, Gajraj Rao Advised Shekhar Kapoor and the Latter Followed it]. *YouTube*, posted by Lallantop, 29 Oct. 2019, [youtube.com/watch?v=-bFPENDyr5w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bFPENDyr5w). Accessed 8 Jan. 2021.

The experience of the standard public can be explained in terms of Partha Chatterjee's formulation of spiritual/material and inner/outer binary oppositions. In his article, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India," Chatterjee shows that the upper-caste intellectuals maneuvered the spaces under the condition of colonial modernity and proposed a new gender ideology in the formulation of 'Indian' culture (622). The upper-caste gender ideology revolves exclusively around upper-caste women because it binds the latter to materialize her voice in pace with the upper-caste notion of 'Indian' tradition (623). It is typical for the provincial elites to claim the life of the mind in consonance with the superiority of meta-concepts such as "spiritual", "inner", "soul", etc. over western forms of self-dignity and justice (624).

The enactment of linguistic identity by the standard public is marked in the enclosed spaces like Bundelkhand Riverside Hotel, a five-star venue to hold literary gatherings at Orchha. The venue is occupied by the 'encultured' participants who represent the ideal notion of 'family'. The standard public enjoys a privilege to access and engage in the "private" domain. It aims at the representation of a desirable and respectable form of Bundeli in the public sphere. Among the members of the standard public, the manifestation of love for motherhood takes place in the dichotomy of private and public domain.

The construct of *devi* challenges "the gendered ideology of separate spheres" (Ramanujan 370). Phoolan Devi as an 'untouchable' woman experienced violence in the public space because of her identity. The public space is determined by a thin difference between the private and the public domain, particularly in the everyday cases of sexual violence against the Dalit women. Devi finds rape against poor women a daily phenomenon in the village society because their social position in the caste system determines the control over their bodies and sexuality (370-371). Ramanujan identifies the private space as "a sign of middle-class" position, which is inaccessible to the "Dalitbahujan women" (370). This renders the lower-caste bodies 'available' to the upper-caste men. Thus both the constructs of *devi* and *Bundeli mata* are caste specific. Phoolan Devi made use of the historical conditions neither to challenge the western form of womanhood nor to maintain the status quo with the women who are oppressed by caste. She inversed the dichotomy of culture/nature, material/spiritual, inner/outer by surviving in daily

existential conditions that are embedded in the material/outer/nature domain. She suffered from poverty, humiliation, and was reduced to be the object of sexual desire. But she registered her entry as a Member of Parliament in the Lower House of the Indian parliament. The construct of *devi* is nominative of a Hindu idea but it is also subverted by Phoolan's challenge to the edifice of knowledge built on the dichotomy of private/public space.

Based on this contrast as highlighted above, between the upper-caste construct of *Bundeli mata* and the Dalitbahujan construct of *devi*, I move on to explain the gendered nature of the Bundeli language in the next section. I argue that the gendered nature of the Bundeli language follows the masculinist idea of motherhood or womanhood as a subject to be protected, owned, and so on, in the territory of men of Bundelkhand.

The Discourse on *Bundeli mata*: Historical and Institutional Frame and Features

The relationship between the Bundeli standard public and the Hindi elites can be explained in terms of Aloysius's perspective on power. According to Aloysius, the social groups are occupied in a competition for the accumulation of economic, political, and cultural resources (25). He argues that "social power" is common to all societies (25). The competitive approach to seek a recognition of identity can be observed in the case of Bundeli. To demand recognition for the inclusion of Bundeli in the Eighth Schedule, Madbaiya claims that "six crores of Bundeli speakers" outnumber the speakers of Bodo and Santhali, the two Scheduled Languages ("Bundeli kau" 101). He admires the people of West Bengal, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu for asserting pride in their mother-tongues ("Apan se" 2). The section, however, will show that the struggle to achieve recognition for *Bundeli mata* is marked by different stand points of the standard public against poor institutional conditions in Bundelkhand. The stand points of the standard public resonate with the upper-caste advocates of Hindu/Hindi identity in the early twentieth century. For instance, Hindu supremacy was reinforced by several registers across the disciplines of geography, linguistics, science, religion, art, culture, and economy in the early twentieth century (Gupta, "Sexuality" 198). She suggests that the Hindi elites built a Bharat Mata temple at Banaras to signify a fixed mapping more than the "different moods" of the nation (198). There is no concrete idol of mother in north India like we see in the form of *Tamilttay* and

Telugu tally in south India. It remains strong as an imagined entity often expressed in different ways, especially in Hindi Cinema. The cartographic influence on the standard public is evident in Madbaiya's approach to define the territory of Bundelkhand.⁸¹

In his essay, "*Bundeli Gadhya-Gatha*," [The History of Bundeli Prose] Madbaiya notes that Bundelkhand is spread between "twenty-three to twenty-six north latitude and seventy-seven point five to seventy-nine point five eastern latitude" (3). He is conscious of the geographical boundaries of Bundelkhand. In his essay, "*Bundeli kau Mankikaran*," [Standardization of Bundeli] he claims that Bundelkhand is spread over "one lakhs, eighty-three thousands and four hundred seventy-nine" square kilometers (101). He pinpoints the exact location of Bundelkhand using the global coordinate system. This suggests his territorial consciousness which is shaped with a blend of science and culture, a similar trait among the early twentieth century elites, not to mention contemporary nationalists.

The projection of one's mother-tongue into a personified image of the mother is one of the prominent features in the politics of linguistic identity to mobilize the emotions of common people. Madbaiya introduces Bundeli into the image of *apni mata* (Bundeli mata/mother) and Hindi as *Bharat mata* in the cultural realm ("Apan se" 2). He defines the position of *Bundeli mata* (Bundeli) with *Bharat mata* (Hindi) in the following words:

Apni chinar apni sanskriti aur apni bhasha se hai. Agar ja boliyan me bat gayi tau uyai manikaran hara hara karke bhasha kau sajau saroop banaune kay kai ja apni matribhsha ay. Ei se raj bhasha bani Hindi so apni desh ki ekta ko lane Hindi kho(n) savarne. Ee me kachu badha nai parat jaise(n) *apni mata* aur *Bharat mata*

⁸¹ Mrinalini Sinha discusses Katherine Mayo's book, *Mother India* (1927) which was controversial because it argued that Indians were not fit to govern themselves given the poorest status of women in backward regions of the country (1). Sinha maps the productive relationship between the event as a controversy after the publication of *Mother India* and its impact on the social structure in the political space of the empire and the nation both (259). Mayo's intervention constituted Indian women into a central focus of their collective mobilization and visibility on the political map of India (49). This shows that the question of cultural identity entails local and global implications for political discourses in a historical sense. Sinha, Mrinalini. *Spectres of Mother India*, Duke UP, 2006. *Library Genesis*, library.lol/main/4D283D71C6103ED6BFACD5C4CDDF49A0. PDF Download.

doi poojaniya hai. Matri bhasha aur raj bhasha doi hame pranan se pyari hain, jaruri hai.

Our identity is based on our culture and language. If it is divided into dialects, we should standardize it and form it into an appropriate language because Bundeli is our mother-tongue. This way Hindi, the official language came into existence and we should save it for the unity of our nation. There is no obstacle in this; it is like simultaneously worshipping our mother and mother India. Both, our (Bundeli) mother and (Hindi), the official language, *are* adorable to us more than our lives (“Bundeli kau” 102).

Madbaiya calls the mother-tongue of the standard public *apni mata* (*Bundeli mata*). He makes it clear that both Hindi and Bundeli are *poojaniya* (worthy of worship). Hindi is considered primarily superior. It is described as the unifying language in India. Both Bundeli and Hindi are described similarly with the necessity of standardization, development, and subsequent representation of the cultural identity of *Bundeli mata* and her children. Madbaiya appeals to the fellow writer to choose Bundeli as a means of progress by protecting the *chinar* (identity) of *Bundeli mata* and the community. The trend of writing the life of language is enacted in the project of standardization and personification of the Bundeli language in the image of a young woman and *Bundeli mata*. The standard public finds it necessary to protect, praise, serve, and commit to the cause of the Bundeli language as *Bundeli mata*. What exactly is the biography of the standard Bundeli in this case?

Shah complains: “the state patronage is zero,” to hope for any future for Bundeli language.⁸² He remembers the role of Vitthal Patel (1936-2013), from Sagar district, MP. A popular face in Hindi cinema for his lyrics, and for his politics in Bundelkhand, Patel raised the question of the Bundeli language in the Indian parliament. Shah equates the loss of a leader with the loss of Bundeli language. On the other side, he mentions the name of Seth Govind Das

⁸² Barkhade, Dipak. “The State of Bundeli Language: Interview with Shri Madhukar Shah Joo Deo by Dipak Barkhade.” *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, bundelkhand.in/state-of-bundeli-language-madhukar-shah-joo-deo-interview.

(1896-1974), who was a prominent promoter of the slogan, “‘Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan’” (Aneesh 101). Das’s dream to establish the dominance of the Hindi language is still pursued by the dominant in contemporary times.

Shah indicates that the life of a Bundeli poet/writer would determine the same for the Bundeli language. It is more than simply speaking for and writing about one’s mother-tongue in an essay, poetry, tweet, post, etc. It can determine the pathways for writing the history of Bundeli language and culture in an objective realm. Shah engages with the discourse on cultural violence. He expresses his dismay at the present state of Bundeli and other minor languages in north India. The minor languages are vulnerable. They are struck by the violence in the culture of the linguistic dominance of the Hindi language. They live when the people live. Shah finds the conditions of tribal communities on the verge of extinction in central India. He does not find any hope for linguistic minorities. He claims himself to be an old aged supporter of the Bundeli language, in vain.

Shah’s discourse on the Bundeli language does not tell the story of a language that can signify the biographical narrative of poets in the chronological stages. It departs from the history of language movements in southern India. It is set in the context of survival of the minor languages. I discussed this crisis of the present state of Bundeli with Madbaiya.⁸³ Madbaiya argues that Shah has not lived the life of a writer. He does not consider it legitimate to accept the pessimist claims of Shah. He believes that the writer always possesses a literary sensibility and the writer’s literary sensibility is marked by a narrative of optimism.

Mitchell elaborates on how the narrative of both life and language came to be structured upon “the linear” development (82). The Telugu writers departed from the pre-colonial genre of “*charitra*” since they experienced a cultural “break” across the continuities and discontinuities of literary traditions (78). The search for “coherence” against this sense of fragment inspired them to portray ‘modern’ protagonists in the prose narrative (79). The attempt to reveal the life events of protagonists in “chronological” order came to be the hallmark of the identity of literature and

⁸³ Madbaiya, Kailash. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 26 Nov. 2016.

language (79). This implied a centering of the subject of protagonist and language in new “simple” and “natural” structuring of life (80-82). This mode of political thought emerged to be a dominant feature in the autobiographical narrative of mainstream language (81). It produced the new receivers of the Telugu language and vice versa. In this background, Mitchell builds upon the larger network of communication in the Telugu public sphere.

It can be argued that the standard public is not a monolith group of voices in the public sphere. It is multifaceted. Madbaiya asserts a class relation with Hindi in terms of literary sensibility. Shah indicates that the Bundeli subject is impossible. But in all cases, it is difficult to ascertain the visibility of Bundeli language and culture. In contrast, Madbaiya finds that optimism is the key to the progress of Bundeli language. His view indicates that it is possible to share power with the dominant structures. Mitchell argues that the association of the subjective experience of “a people” with the subjective experience of a language is an undeniable fact in the modern outlook (89-90). What assertions of gain and loss are then associated with the life of the Bundeli language in the public sphere? To answer the question, I discuss Mahesh Katare, another important subject of *Bundeli pani* in the standard public. I analyze his posts made on social media and his views from a personal interview in the next section. Katare personifies the gendered image of the Bundeli language in poetic detail.

Katare elaborates his vision for *Bundeli mata* in his post made on Facebook on 9th January 2018. In his poem on Bundeli language, he personifies Bundeli into a young woman. He publishes the poem in Bundeli. It is entitled, “*Bundeli Ghazal*.” The poem is as follows:

Everyone now loves Bundeli very much.

Bundeli is laughing and smiling now.

Bundeli is travelling in the world now.

Bundeli is becoming popular in all directions.

New identities come together to hold new meetings.

Bundeli has started to shake hands with all.

All listen to her through ears and she has won the hearts of all

by the time she started to sing the *ghazal*.

Bundeli has reached Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata.

She is found to be sweet like sugar in taste.

She has stood forthright and started to fight against the government.

The leaders say that she is causing an uproar.

She is openly abusing

the thieves, the cheaters, the leaders, the merchants now.

Sugam,⁸⁴ she is loving the people who

are with her from the beginning.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Sugam is a suffix which Mahesh Katore uses in his name on Facebook account. He uses it in his poems too. Here, he uses the same in the mentioned poem.

⁸⁵ The poem is a literal translation by me. Find the original here,

बुंदेली गज़ल

सबखों खूब पुसान लगी है बुंदेली

हँसन और मुस्कान लगी है बुंदेली

घूमत फिर रई है अब तौ दुनिया भर में

सबइ दिसन में छान लगी है बुंदेली

नई चिनारें, नए नए मेल मिलाप करत

The above poem represents a personified image of Bundeli language in a gendered paradigm.

सबखों खूब पुसान लगी है बुंदेली (Bundeli has become an object of love for all): Katare suggests that the Bundeli speakers are pleased with their mother-tongue; they look well with Bundeli and it suits them. Katare expresses his *pusan* (love) for Bundeli as its object of representation. McGregor defines *achha lagna*, a synonym of *pusan*: to be pleased with; to look well; to suit (16). The choice of the verb connotes the fascination among Bundeli speakers to use Bundeli in the public space. It suggests that the Bundeli speakers love to acknowledge Bundeli as their mother-tongue. This attributes visibility to the Bundeli language. The emotion of love for her is conveyed in contrast to the use of the term, *thasak* (pride). Madbaiya uses the term, *thasak* to ignite a sense of ostentation in the standard public so that the latter can wane the sense of linguistic *hinta* (lowness) (“Bundeli kau” 101). He appeals to the standard public to write in standard Bundeli and, thereby, invoke the emotion of *thasak* for Bundeli (“Nike Bol” 1-2). He expresses a competitive relationship with the dominant class in the Hindi public space. Katare

सबसे हाट मिलान लगी है बुंदेली
कानन से घुस के जा बैठी सबके दिल में
गजले जब से गान लगी है बुंदेली
दिल्ली, बम्बई, कलकत्ता तक जा पोँची
मिश्री सी गुरयान लगी है बुंदेली
तन के ठाँड़ी सरकारन से लड़ रइ है
नेता कत खरयान लगी है बुंदेली
चोर, उचककन, नेतन, साहूकारन खों
खुल के अब गरयान लगी है बुंदेली
सुगम पैल से जो कोउ ऊखों जानते

अब उनसे लड्यौन लगी है बुंदेली Katare, Mahesh. “Bundeli Ghazal.” *Facebook*, 9 Jan. 2018, 09:54 a.m., m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1137640596372326&id=100003791886023. Accessed 8 Jan. 2021.

does not appeal or use rhetoric like Madbaiya. He observes the re-emergence of Bundeli since the people are themselves accepting it now.

The use of the terms, *thasak* (pride) and *pusan* (love) suggest specific things to do with Bundeli. Katare emphasizes that there is a pleasure in the use of Bundeli. Madbaiya specifies an appeal to nourish self-pride for her. He out rightly claims *Bundeli mata* in alliance with *Bharat mata*. Katare personifies Bundeli language into a living body of a woman but does not explicitly categorize her in the image of a mother. Thus Bundeli is represented as a single language that divides the concept of *Bundeli pani* as a separate entity.

In southern India, the Telugu speakers followed “the passionate commitments, labors of love, and self-sacrifice” (Mitchell 17) in their “affective attachment to language” in the twentieth century (73). In the heartland of India, the “linguistic difference” is not found to be a necessary foundation for political mobilization in the new states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand since 2000 in the twenty-first century (214). It is important to note that there are different meanings possible in the expression of emotion for one’s single mother-tongue (15). The response of linguistic identity among the members of the standard public to the dominance of Hindi is expressed at different levels and in different contexts.

हँसन और मुस्कान लगी है बुंदेली (Bundeli is laughing and smiling) (Katare, “Bundeli”). Bundeli has a particular mood of her own. Katare uses the nouns *hasan* (laughter) and *muskan* (smile) in verb form to attribute them to the image of Bundeli. He departs from the narrative of victimhood and abandonment by the state unlike Shah, who finds Bundeli on the verge of extinction. The struggle for the recognition of Bundeli language is not called a “losing battle” (Shah). Katare does not apply any serious conceptual schema or political thought. In his vision, the existence of *Bundeli mata* is not determined by the immediate reality. She faces deprivation of the basic needs in life but Katare detaches himself from emotional excess. He chooses to describe her happy. The metaphor of happiness is not alien to *Bundeli mata* in the context of identity. Katare explains the factors behind the mood of *Bundeli mata* further.

घूमत फिर रई है अब तौ दुनिया भर में (Bundeli is traveling all over the world) (Katare, “Bundeli”). Bundeli is described to be an upwardly mobile entity. She is born local but lives a global life. Katare indicates the migration of Bundeli speakers from Bundelkhand to the metro cities in India and abroad. The mobility of the Bundeli language is a sign of material progress for the upwardly mobile sections from Bundelkhand. In his perspective, the experience of mobility among Bundeli speakers lifts them and *Bundeli mata* together above the stigma of belonging to the village society, a marker of backwardness. Secondly, Katare does not express the tension of losing his collective identity in a multicultural space. His approach stands in contrast to Madbaiya’s perspective on the mobility of Bundeli language and identity.

Regarding mobility of Bundeli, Madbaiya’s travelogue, *Dagar Bundeli: Najar Bundeli*, [Bundeli: Destiny and Vision] is noteworthy. In the preface to the book, he shares his experience of travelling to Nepal.⁸⁶ He compares Bundeli with *saun chiraiya* (the golden sparrow) in a cross-cultural context (2). He advises the members of the standard public: “*so Bundelkhandi bain bhaiya jaa jaan leven kai unki Bundeli matribhasha unki apni jamin ay uyai pakren raiyau.*” (Dear sisters and brothers of Bundelkhand, never forget that your mother tongue Bundeli is your land. You should hold the roots of your land) (1). He defines the mobility of *Bundeli mata* in the politics of rooted belonging. In an interview, “Splice Low-Res 5: Diversity-Khabar Lahariya,” Disha Mullick informs that *Khabar Lahariya* reported “the plight of migrant labourers coming back” to Bundelkhand during the lockdown period. The reports were seen by the migrants on their way in various states across north India and south India. The migrants were facilitated with help-line numbers by the reporters of *Khabar Lahariya* so that they could share their painful experiences in the time of unprecedented crisis. Though Bundelkhand is a small region, its status as one of the highest producer of migrant labourers has made *Khabar Lahariya* “quite broad-based,” being available in Bundeli language to a larger working class community (1:7:10-1:09:01).

⁸⁶ As described in the preface to his travelogue, Madbaiya organized ‘Bundeli Bhasha ko Antar Rashtriya Sammelan’ in Nepal on 3rd and 4th November, 2014 (1). The sammelan was organized in the presence of Ramvaran Yadav, the President of Nepal, Ranjit Re, the Ambassador of Nepal, Gangaprasad Upraiti, the chancellor of Nepal Academy, Madan Krishna Sharma, the President of Pranami sect and Pankaj Jain, the President of Jain sect (2).

Madbaiya suggests that both *matri bhasha* (Bundeli language) and *jamin* (Bundelkhand) are mutually identical. He uses a proverb: “*garra ken ghar se gaye so bayre arra ne, aur ghar se arra ke gaye so bayare garra ne.*” (If one abuses her/his mother-land and leaves her, she/he loses a source of inspiration in mother-land. If one leaves her/his mother-land with gratitude, she/he is inspired to deal with the abuses in the world outside her/his mother-land) (“Hame Kachhu” 1).

Bundelkhand is underdeveloped. It lacks opportunities. This frustrates the local youth. The youth might tend to retain this hostility towards their own region in this sense. Madbaiya indicates that it is more important for the youth to diversify the space outside their region than succumbing to cynicism against material conditions in the region. He finds the source of identity in Bundelkhand’s cultural roots to foster Bundeli selfhood. He argues that the act of looking back at mother-tongue or mother-land in anger is consequential to the difficulties in life inside and outside Bundelkhand. He defines ‘true’ mobility and progress of the linguistic community in conjunction with certain values; it is embedded in the private space; it should manifest in the representation of *Bundeli mata* on the ground of certain values in the public sphere. He invests in the values of humility, hope, helpfulness, and tendency to pay back for *Bundeli mata* in his definition of progress. He experiences the dilemma between claiming his roots in Bundelkhand and the pursuit of mobility outside Bundelkhand at the same time. He chooses to represent his cultural identity by affirming his roots in the mother-land. Unlike Katare and Shah, Madbaiya is quite patriotic in his approach.

In his Bundeli essay, “*Bundeli kau Manak Surup aur Karako ka Prayog,*” [Standard Form of Bundeli and Use of Determiners] Dayal Shrivastav uses a metaphor of *Bundeli kau jhanda* (flag of Bundeli language) (23). He finds Madbaiya carrying the flag as a symbol of Bundeli nationalism. He admires Madbaiya’s contribution to the recognition of a linguistic identity. Madbaiya along with fifty experts participated in the Hindi Divas celebrated by Sahitya Akademi in Delhi during 13-14 September 2009. He also participated at the ‘Antar Rashtriya Kavita Sammelan’ in the Commonwealth Games held at Delhi in 2011. He introduced the nationality of the Bundeli language at a global level. The state for the first time announced a national award for the service of the Bundeli language from 2010 owing to the leadership of Madbaiya (23). Unlike Madbaiya, Shah expresses the stateless image of *Bundeli mata* with no

institutional care and support. He embodies Bundeli with no sense of enthusiasm and feels distressed with the policymakers of the state. It is suggestive in his use of the terms, “losing battle” and “zero state patronage” (Shah).

Unlike Shah and Madbaiya, Katare portrays the happy and laughing face of *Bundeli mata*. He transcends the statist lines in his embodiment of the Bundeli language. This implies his particular outlook for addressing the aspirations of the linguistic community in Bundelkhand. He does not define *Bundeli mata* with an ideological schema to establish a relation with political boundaries. He represents *Bundeli mata* differently. He does not represent linguistic identity on the ground of social pressure or obligations. For Katare, the meaning of belonging to Bundeli language as the Bundeli land are implied in a different context. He writes a poem in his post made on Facebook on 29th October, 2018 and expresses his commitment to the *dharti* (land). He writes:

...What is my business

Except telling the truth?

This land is hell

But brother, I choose to stay here.

Misery is part of life.

Let us bear it with happiness.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ का लेनें है का देनें है

बात मनौ साँची केनें है

ई धरती खों नरक जिन करौ

भैया हमें इतई रेनें है

Katare identifies himself as a poet who should speak truth to the power or state. He reflects on his *lene dene* (concern and contribution) as a Bundeli writer in Bundelkhand. He calls *ee dharti* (Bundelkhand) *narak* (a hell) due to low indicators of development in the region. He expresses his self-determination to live in Bundelkhand, that is, his moral stand against the misery. But he accepts the local conditions as part of life and informs that he is ready to bear it with happiness. He does not describe Bundeli in terms of Shah's narrative of victimhood and Madbaiya's narrative of patriotism against humiliation. He asserts his will to survive in uneven conditions. He creates a discourse of resistance in his embodiment of positive expression and celebration of identity beyond the provincial limits. He breaks the gendered stereotypes of Bundeli too. He rejects the image of Bundeli language. In an interview with Rohit Porval, he argues that she is not limited to the portrayal of domestic women characters who quarrel with each other and create laughter in popular series on TV.⁸⁸ He contextualizes *Bundeli mata* in terms of global recognition. He writes:

सबइ दिसन में छान लगी है बुंदेली (Bundeli is becoming popular in all directions) (Katare, “Bundeli”). Both as a scholar and as an insider to my ethnic group, I shared the details of my linguistic identity with Shah.⁸⁹ I informed him that my ancestors migrated from Bundelkhand and settled in the districts of north Maharashtra and south Gujarat. Shah agreed to the popularity of Bundeli beyond its geographical borders. Bundeli speakers settled all over India and Pakistan in the history of migration from Bundelkhand. The discourse on the life of Bundeli language is conveyed from one generation to another even in the condition of migration. This offers different notions of linguistic identities.

दुःख तौ है जीवन कौ हिस्सा

हँस हँस के दुःख कौ सेनें है Katare, Mahesh. Mahesh Katare's Poem About his Moral Stand. *Facebook*, 29 Oct. 2018, 08:14 a.m., m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1361162510686799&id=100003791886023. Accessed 8 Jan. 2021.

⁸⁸ Porval, Rohit. “Bundeli Kavi ko Hindi Academy ka Samman” [Bundeli Poet is Awarded by Hindi Academy]. *Amar Ujala*, amarujala.com/kavya/halchal/first-time-in-history-hindi-sahitya-akademi-to-honor-bundeli-poet-mahesh-ka-tare-sugam.

⁸⁹ Shah, Madhukar. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 10 Nov. 2016.

According to his post made on Facebook on 30th October 2018, Tara Patkar was sitting on protest in Mahoba with his supporters with a demand for a separate state of Bundelkhand.⁹⁰ Patkar argues that one thirty-four crores of people cannot be managed within twenty-nine states in the federal structure of India. In his post made on Facebook on 14th November 2019, he expresses his gratitude to Shraddha, a computer engineer based in San Francisco, for visiting him and standing in solidarity with him. In the age of social media, the growing Bundeli consciousness can be marked at such moments of solidarity. It can be said that the migrants from Bundelkhand identify Bundeli speakers in a broad sense.

Mitchell discusses the case of Telugu migrants, who have settled abroad. They use the term of the region, “Andhra” “much more broadly” (44). They refer to all areas in Andhra Pradesh and to all people who speak “Telugu as their mother-tongue regardless where they live today” (44). But after the formation of the new state, they equally identify Telangana as a Telugu region. The question of linguistic identity is always in the process of formation connected to the socio-political conditions of the elites and the political units in the sub-regions of India. Katare proposes a similar condition in his poem.

नई चिनारें, नए नए मेल मिलाप करत/सबसें हाट मिलान लगी है बुंदेली (Bundeli is shaking her hand with new identities in the process of social change) (Katare, “Bundeli”). Katare places Bundeli in a network of *nai chinare* (the new identities). The new identities are engaged in the process of *mel milap* (a social change) in the politics of building alliances. The presence of Bundeli is marked by the expectation for new possibilities in politics. Katare applies the logic of agency and independence in his construct of *Bundeli mata*, who can make choices on her own. I wonder where Katare locates *Bundeli mata* in the network of new identities.

In his book, *Riddles of Hinduism*, Ambedkar counts social change in terms of a shared fellowship, a pre-requisite to a democratic environment as far as it is consistent with equality and

⁹⁰Patkar, Tara. “Bundelkhand Rajya Chahiye.” *Facebook*, 30 Oct. 2018, facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2579039948776527&set=a.606719762675232&type=3&theater.

liberty (283). He argues that the feeling of fellowship sustains the value of equality and liberty and not “the maintenance of separate class consciousness” (284). The definition of Bundeli society in Katare’s poem calls for an understanding of Ambedkarite critique of class consciousness. In his essay, “The Construction of Peoplehood: Racism, Nationalism, Ethnicity,” Immanuel Wallerstein follows that the “pastness” is a democratic tool to maintain solidarity across racial, national and ethnic groups (78). He finds that these groups are constitutive of “peoplehood” (78) or “nationhood” (81) and distinguishes them from “classes” (84). He shows that the “statehood” is structured on the logic of expansion and accumulation of wealth (82). It precedes “nationhood” in the history of the modern world. He argues that the capitalist system produces racial categorization across labels and not the other way round (82-84).

Bundeli language carries the categories of ‘difference’ as one of the political subjects in the network of new identities. By the logic of statehood as noted above, Katare calls the standard public for attributing some meaning or value to the categories of ‘difference’ in the construct of *Bundeli mata*. Cosimo Zene, in his book, *The Political Philosophies of Antonio Gramsci and B.R. Ambedkar*, discusses marginality of collective identity in a comparative framework. Zene defines the relation between the subjects and the shared ethnicity in a broader sense. It is related to “our own nakedness” (28). It “refers to the whole of humanity” (28). In this sense, Katare suggests that *Bundeli mata* has a capacity to respond to other identities as one of the members in the larger political network. His point implies the success of plurality. It is interesting to examine the system that recognizes difference in identities but binds them together at the same time.

I observe that the new identities that come together and form a network of solidarity are production of peripheries in the larger global state. The political network reveals the relation between the cause and the participants who represent the new identities. The relation is contingent upon the experience of linguistic identity in particular contexts. It helps us tell the story of what *Bundeli mata* is becoming in the network of new identities and in a social change. In his post made on Facebook on 29th October, 2018, Katare mentions the socio-political status of *Bundeli mata*. He writes:

...Bundeli, Avadhi, Braj, Maithili

All are sisters of Hindi.

Sugam, it is a matter of short life to cover

this quilt, which has to be put aside in the end.⁹¹

Katare biologically conditions *Bundeli mata* in building an alliance with the new identities. The above poem can help discuss Katare's views on the relationship between Bundeli and Hindi in north India. Katare calls Bundeli, Avadhi, Braj, and Maithili as sisters of Hindi in gendered kinship. He compares Bundeli with a quilt as a metaphor for linguistic identity. Madbaiya also uses the same metaphor in the following words: "*hum to Bundeli naav ki chadar din raat orte aur bichate hai.*" (we spread and cover the shawl of Bundeli language day and night).⁹² Both Katare and Madbaiya's voices resonate with the discourse on service to *Bundeli mata*. Madbaiya describes "*Bundeli mata khand khand saroop nyari*" (adorable in each form) ("Apnan se" 2). He elaborates the complete image of *Bundeli mata* in the following words:

Bundeli Vindhyaachal ki bitiya ay. Kai kai Vindhya se Bundeli au ai se Bundeli kawai...aur ba Vindhya/Bundeli jab apne nana ke gharai mane Himalaya ki oli me, kachhuai dinan pail hm sahityakaran ke sange gai tau uye kaisau nauno lago, ja tau bau jan sakat ji ne apne mamavare ja ke bela me dood-bhat masko huie.

Bundeli is the daughter of Vindhya mountain. Her name originated from 'Vindhya' and came to be recognized as 'Bundeli'...and when she went to her

⁹¹ बुंदेली अवधी ब्रज मैथिलि

सबरी हिंदी की बेंनें है

सुगम ओढ़नें चार दिना तक

जा चादर फिर धर देंनें हैं Katare, Mahesh. Mahesh Katare's Poem About his Moral Stand. *Facebook*, 29 Oct. 2018, 08:14 a.m., m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1361162510686799&id=100003791886023.

⁹² Madbaiya, Kailash. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 26. Nov. 2016.

grand-father's lap (house) in Nepal in the Himalaya mountains, she must have felt very good. Only those who have experienced the love of maternal uncle's home and had potful of milk and rice can claim to have experienced the pleasure of home-land ("Hame Kachhu" 1).

Bundeli mata is personified into a *bitiya* (a young daughter) of Vindhya mountain (Bundelkhand) and a grand-daughter of Himalaya mountain (Nepal). She is happy and pleasant owing to her maternal background. She is privileged to enjoy her growth in the early age. By using Vindhyas and Himalayas, she is at once inscribed on the map of Bundelkhand at the regional level and also at the national level. The status of local and global attributes her a separate identity in the landscape of cultural politics. This implies the demand for an upbringing of Bundeli language in Bundelkhand. There are different points of view on the relationship between Bundeli and Hindi vis-à-vis the gender ideology of the standard public and its literary ideals.

The nationalist icon of the standard public, Banarasidas Chaturvedi gave an interview to the National Radio in 1981.⁹³ Chaturvedi did not compare Bundeli with *saut* (rival/co-wife), *behne* (sister) or *bitiya* (grand-daughter) of Hindi. In contrast to Madbaiya, Chaturvedi identified *boliya* (dialects) including Bundeli with *mata* (mother) of Khari Boli (Hindi). According to him, Hindi *nikli hai* (had got her birth) from the local "dialects" which is historically true. Madbaiya considers Hindi a foundational category for *desh ki ekta* (the integration of nation) ("Bundeli kau" 103). He counts Bundeli as an enriching source that strengthens Hindi as its political and cultural foundation from a subordinate position (103).

Gupta refers to the letter which George Grierson sent to Ayodhya Singh Upadhyaya, one of the Hindi intellectuals in the colonial administration during 1915 ("Sexuality" 210). Grierson supported Braj, Avadhi, and other minor languages of north India. He was in support of Hindi which should have been "written in a simple style, without Sanskrit words" (210). He identified

⁹³ "Hindi Divas Per Vishesh: Boli aur Bhasha Vivad ke Bich Hindi" [Special on Hindi Day: Hindi in the controversy between Language and Dialect]. *Opinion Post*, opinionpost.in/dispute-between-dialect-and-language-hindi6102-2/.

Sanskrit with “a grandmother” of Hindi and did not want Hindi to dress “herself in the grandmother’s clothes” (210). The icon of the Hindi standard public, Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi opposed Grierson as he was an enthusiast of standard Hindi and a staunch advocate of Sanskrit in the development of Hindi (211). Dwivedi corresponded with Grierson. He found Grierson not aware of the fact that Hindi was instrumental in the advancement of society as the language of poetry and prose in the public sphere (211). The context of such correspondence is gendered. The nationalist scholars of Hindi were tensed because they perceived Braj, Avadhi, and other languages erotic (211). They identified Hindi *khari* (standing forthright) signifying a masculine language against the perceived notion of “femininity” in the poetry of Surdas and Keshavdas, the Braj poets (211).

The similar feeling is reflected around the imagined figure of *Bundeli mata* in the representation of linguistic identity among the supporters of standard Bundeli. But it is not same when seen in the circle of Hindi intelligentsia in the early twentieth century. In Bundeli’s case, Katare expresses the masculine outlook against the stateless condition of the region. Madbaiya too overlaps with Katare but he contextualizes masculinity of Bundeli in the rhetoric of martyrdom. It is manifest in the duty of the standard public to represent and protect Bundeli’s female body in a shared commonality of gendered ideology.

The next section discusses how Bundeli carries patriarchal ideas of mother/female as a subject to be protected, owned and so on. It explains how masculinity becomes a discursive condition for the subjects of *Bundeli pani*.

Masculinization of *Bundeli mata*

Katare chooses to compose Bundeli *ghazal* on social media. He is famous for his poetry in the region. He attributes a masculine image to *Bundeli mata* in his poem on mother-tongue as a living subject. He writes:

तन केँ ठाँड़ी सरकारन सेँ लड़ रइ है (Bundeli stands forthright) (Katare, “Bundeli”). Katare departs from the usual conventions among the Bundeli elites and the Hindi intellectuals. He does not classify masculinity of Bundeli in the form of a cultural anxiety with the “erotic” nature of

Avadhi and Braj. He conceptualizes masculinity of Bundeli in the present against the mediators of *sarkar* (government). This can be counted as the newness of Bundeli. It marks an opposition against the utter indifference shown by the state to the issues of development in Bundelkhand. This is not just an extension to the normative claim on Hindi identity. Bundeli is represented with the promise of a new possibility in the civil society.

Nivedita Menon, in her book, *Seeing Like a Feminist*, discusses the relation between the colonial laws and the production of male and female sexual bond (95). She analyzes the stigma attached to the homosexual identity at the center of the formation of nation (96). She points to how nation, family, and body is built on Hindu upper-caste ideals. She shows that the proposal for the emancipation of women is made on the Victorian norms of “heterosexual, patriarchal and monogamous family unit” since the nineteenth century (96). In the case of *Bundeli mata*, it is also based on the upper caste, largely north Indian norm of family. It is about the practices and the codes which are historically inscribed on the body of women (60) and languages in the public sphere. It is about reproduction of femininity and masculinity in various contexts. She points out, for example, that “woman” as a category is represented to be “self-evident” and “natural” but it is determined by the caste of woman or gender (171). It is not enough for the Bundeli speakers to speak Bundeli. It is required for them to speak it in certain ways and in certain contexts. Therefore, the practice of language does have different implications.

Katare imagines Bundeli as a dominating figure but against the state. He describes her further: नेता कत खरयांन लगी है बुंदेली/चोर, उचककन, नेतन, साहूकारन खों/खुल कें अब गरयान लगी है बुंदेली (Bundeli is resilient against a range of forces) (Katare, “Bundeli”). Bundeli lambasts the *neta* (political leaders) and openly abuses *chor* (thieves) *uchakka* (swindlers) and *sahukaran* (merchants). Katare defines her mood in a mutative form; he does not romanticize her. *Bundeli mata* is happy; she does not respond to the state in the language of victim and humiliation. But she teaches a lesson to the intermediaries who are responsible for the misuse of government funds allotted for development. She counters the state against a dark reality of Bundelkhand. Katare has been an active attacker against the policies of the BJP on the social media and off the

social media too.⁹⁴ He is popular for his aggressive style of writing against the ruling parties in the states of UP and MP and in the center.

In a Facebook post made on 8th November, 2018, Katare acknowledges the appreciation of Manoj Jain, who appreciated Katare for his contribution to Bundeli poetry.⁹⁵ Jain discovers in Katare “a shooter with a loaded gun” because Katare has criticized *netan* (the political leaders) and *poonj patiyan* (the capitalists) with all the bullets in *noni* (a good) Bundeli language. He calls Katare *apne bhaiya* (a cultural leader) of Bundelkhand. He calls him a gardener who takes *matha* (the buttermilk) and pours it in *jad* (the roots) of the viewers’ cultural identity regularly. Katare conceptualizes Bundeli into a potential agent to address the material poverty in the region. He challenges the functionaries of Indian democracy and the institutions. In his perspective, Bundeli speaks out against the events of subjugation at the hands of political leaders and capitalists. The viewer defines “good” Bundeli in terms of power to criticize the system and, thereby, nourish the roots of cultural identity. The standard public cherishes the brave image of *Bundeli mata* both at the individual and collective levels in different contexts. Madbaiya tends to nationalize *Bundeli mata* in the narrative of anti-colonial struggle against the British rule. He masculinizes *Bundeli mata* in the network of heroic images of local women figures of Bundelkhand. I explain his politics with a focus on the Bundeli Calendar (See Fig.5). In this case, I elaborate on the gender ideology and its contradiction of masculinizing a female figure and simultaneously protecting her in the context of popular culture of Bundelkhand.

The standard public launched the ‘Bundeli Calendar’ on 9th January, 2016 at the literary gathering held in Orchha. The calendar is published online with the name ‘New Year Bundeli Calendar 2016.’⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Katare, Mahesh. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 10 Jan. 2016.

⁹⁵ Katare, Mahesh. Appreciation of Mahesh Katare’s Ghazal. *Facebook*, 8 Nov. 2018, 11:09 a.m., m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1368249996644717&id=100003791886023. Accessed 8 Jan. 2021.

⁹⁶ Madbaiya, Kailash. “New year Bundeli Calendar-2016.” *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, bundelkhand.in/bundelkhand-calendar-2016.

अखिल भारतीय बुंदेलखंड साहित्य एवं संस्कृति परिषद्			
75 शिवगुप्त नगर, कोटरा, भोपाल 482003 म.प्र. मोबा. 99826015643 bundelkhandasahityaparishad@yahoo.in			
बुंदेली आयोजना तिथि दर्पण: 2016 नये साल में अपन सब सुखी रखें			
दिनांक	दिन	तिथि	आयोजन
1 जनवरी	16 सुक्रवार	फूस बदी 7	ईस्वी सन् नव वर्ष
9 एवं 10 जन.	सनीघर, ऐतवार	फूस बदी 14 / 30	ओरछा में बुंदेली सम्मेलन एवं डॉ. मुन्दावनलाल वर्मा जयन्ती
13 फरवरी	सनीघर	माव सुदी 5	बसंत पौर्णिमा - सरसुती पूजन
27 फरवरी	सनीघर	फागुन बदी 5	चन्द्रशेखर आजाद शहीद दिवस
20 मार्च	ऐतवार	फागुन सुदी 12	रानी अवंतीबाई बलिदान दिवस
23 मार्च	बुधवार	फागुन सुदी 15	होरी / धुलेडी फागुन पूने की रात मंगल को होरी जरे।
15 अप्रैल	सुक्रवार	चैत सुदी 9	राम नीनी, कवीन्द्र केशव जयन्ती
16 अप्रैल	सनीघर	चैत सुदी 10	लोक कवि ईसुरी जयन्ती
18 अप्रैल	सोमवार	चैत सुदी 12	तात्या टोपे बलिदान दिवस
19 अप्रैल	मंगलवार	चैत सुदी 13	तीर्थकर महावीर स्वामी जयन्ती
25 मई	बुधवार	जेठ बदी 4	वीर आल्हा जयन्ती
7 एवं 8 जून	मंगल, बुध	जेठ सुदी 3, 4	छत्रसाल जयन्ती पर भी दिने बुंदेली समारोह 16 भोपाल
18 जून	सनीघर	जेठ सुदी 13	वीरांगना रानीबाई बलिदान दिवस
22 जून	बुधवार	अषाढ बदी 2	शहीद भगवद बाँटिया ग्वालियर बलिदान
24 जून	सुक्रवार	अषाढ बदी 4	रानी दुर्गावती बलिदान दिवस
25 जून	सनीघर	अषाढ बदी 5	बुंदेलखंड दिवस / परिषद स्थापना दिवस
22 जुलाई 16	सुक्रवार	सावन बदी 3	1857 केशहीद मदनसिंह बानपुर बलिदान दिवस
23 जुलाई	सनीघर	सावन बदी 4	चन्द्रशेखर आजाद जयन्ती
3 अगस्त	बुधवार	सावन सुदी 1	राष्ट्रकवि मैथिलीशरण गुप्त
10 अगस्त	बुधवार	सावन सुदी 7	महा कवि तुलसी दास जयन्ती
16 अगस्त	मंगलवार	सावन सुदी 13	अवन्तीबाई जयन्ती
17 अगस्त	बिस्पतवार	सावन सुदी 15	विदुषी पत्ती देवी स्मरण दिवस - बानपुर
14 सितम्बर	बुधवार	मादौ सुदी 13	हिन्दी दिवस, हरि प्रसाद हरि जयन्ती
18 सितम्बर	ऐतवार	कुँआर बदी 2	शहीद शंकरशाह - रघुनाथ शाह जबलपुर बलिदान
29 सितम्बर 16	बिस्पतवार	कुँआर बदी 14	शहीद बख्तबली बलिदान दिवस शाहगढ़
5 अक्टूबर	बुधवार	कुरीर रादी 4	रानी दुर्गावती जयन्ती
11 अक्टूबर	मंगलवार	कुँआर सुदी 10	बसहरा / कवि बिलारी जयन्ती
19 नवम्बर	सनीघर	अगन बदी 5	लक्ष्मीबाई जयन्ती
6 दिसम्बर 16,	मंगलवार	अगन सुदी 7	लोक कवि ईसुरी का 107वाँ पुण्य दिवस
16 दिसम्बर 16	सुक्रवार	फूस बदी 3	बुंदेल कैंतरी छत्रसाल पुण्य दिवस
(ऊपर के अलावा स्थानीय विधुतियों की जयंतियों अलग से जोर सकत है)			
अखिल भारतीय बुंदेलखंड साहित्य एवं संस्कृति परिषद, भोपाल (म.प्र.)			

(Fig.5. Bundeli Calendar-2016)

The calendar is filled with the rebel figures of Bundelkhand. The Bundeli rebels are remembered by the standard public for sacrificing their lives for the self-respect of “Bundeli land” against the British government in the nineteenth century. They are represented as the subjects of *Bundeli pani*. Mitchell calls this kind of attempt a “step in the larger cultural transformation that ultimately enabled the recognition of a biographical life narrative and personification of the Telugu language” (72). She argues that without making language a foundational category “available within the popular discourse”, the socio-political mobilization of identity and difference would not have been possible in the twentieth century (108). She finds the symbolic manifestation of ideals significant in “a continuous process of consolidation of linguistic identification” (38). On very similar grounds, one can understand the efforts of Bundeli

elites who locate Bundeli, which is personified in the masculine image of *Bundeli mata*, in the cultural discourse of the mother tongue. I explain the cultural politics of the standard public's construction of *Bundeli mata* by deconstructing the meta-narrative of one common linguistic identity and by unpacking the intersectional relation between caste and gender in the linguistic ideology of the standard public.

The standard public represents *Bundeli mata* in a language that can be understood by the Bundeli speakers belonging to different castes. It represents local *veerangana* (the women warriors) of Bundelkhand in the Bundeli calendar; for instance, Durgavati,⁹⁷ Lakshmi bai (1828-1858), and Rani Avanti bai.⁹⁸ The Bundeli calendar also includes other well-known martyrs—Amarchand Banthia,⁹⁹ Mardan Singh,¹⁰⁰ Shankar shah, and Raghunath Shah¹⁰¹ in the districts of Bundelkhand.

⁹⁷ Durgavati (1524-1564) was a Rajput queen in Chandela dynasty based in the fort of Kalinjar at Banda (Bundelkhand, UP). She married to Dalpat Shah, the Adivasi king of Gondwana empire (eastern Madhya Pradesh) in the background of political alliance. She became the Adivasi queen of Gondwana empire after Dalpat Shah passed away. She is remembered for her self-infliction to death against the capture of Mughals. Shah, Aditi, "Rani Durgavati: The Warrior Queen of the Gonds." *Live History India*, 17 July 2017, [live history india.com/herstory/2017/07/17/rani-durgavati-the-warrior-queen-of-the-gonds](https://livehistoryindia.com/herstory/2017/07/17/rani-durgavati-the-warrior-queen-of-the-gonds).

⁹⁸ Rani Avanti bai (1831-1858) was Lodhi (today OBC) by her caste background. She was married to Vikramaditya, the ruler of the Ramgarh estate in Madhya Pradesh. When her husband failed to defend the kingdom due to illness, Avanti bai led the army against the British. To escape the humiliation of capture by the British, she is believed to have sacrificed her life. Jha, Rakesh. "Rani Avanti Bai: the Queen who raised an Army of over 4,000 and fought against the British." *INUTH*, 9 Aug. 2017, inuth.com/india/women-freedom-fighters-of-india/rani-avanti-bai-the-queen-who-raised-an-army-of-over-4000-and-fought-against-the-british/.

⁹⁹ Amarchand Banthia (1793-1858) is remembered for his loyalty as a treasurer of Gwalior estate in the then Bundelkhand. He helped the queen of Jhansi and other revolutionaries financially. He was hanged by the British publically in Sarafa bazar in Gwalior (MP). G, S. "Remembering Martyr Amarchand Banthia of Gwalior." *Soulsteer Gwalior*, July 2020, gwalior.soulsteer.com/2020/07/19/remembering-martyr-amarchand-banthia-of-gwalior/.

¹⁰⁰ Mardan Singh was "the Chief of the senior branch of Bundela Rajputs who rose in arms immediately after" the mutiny in 1857 in Jhansi" (214). Roy, Tapti. "Visions of the Rebels: A Study of 1857 in Bundelkhand." *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, Feb. 1993, pp.205-228. *JSTOR*, [jstor.org/stable/312882?seq=1#metad-ata-info-tab-contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/312882?seq=1#metad-ata-info-tab-contents).

¹⁰¹ Shankar Shah and Raghunath Shah as the freedom fighters belonged to Gond Adivasi in the nineteenth century. They are remembered for their fight against the British. They were killed with the canons in Jabalpur district (MP). The political parties of India commemorate the tribal icons to garner a positive impression in the vote bank politics in local constituency. Sharma, Rajendra. "BJP to observe martyrs' day to generate sense of belonging among

These icons are specific reminders to the local memory of people, especially people belonging to the Dalitbahujan castes and tribes in Bundelkhand. In his book, *Women Assertion and Dalit Heroes in North India*, Badri Narayan shows that the local heroes and heroines of Bundelkhand are still present in the oral traditions, which are shared among the Dalitbahujan castes (16). Madbaiya describes these martyrs as the “Bundeli” icons in his poem, “Bundelkhand ka Rajya Geet Hamari Maati Bundeli” [Bundelkhand State Song Our Land Bundeli].¹⁰² He brings the rebels of Bundelkhand to one place in the form of Bundeli calendar. The memorization of Bundeli martyrs is enacted in association with a common linguistic identity of people belonging to different communities. It indicates a collective agenda of writing the lives and glory of the martyrs of Bundelkhand. Bundeli belongs to the individual and the community in a liberal secular framework of the standard public. Like Hindi, the standard public is inspired by the “ideal” of one nation and one language based on the European model (Orsini 18). It proposes to own an inclusive framework in the constitution of Bundeliness. The Bundeli calendar appropriates local icons within the larger framework of linguistic identity and statehood. It is less interested in the specificities of the stories associated with the local icons. I look at the meta-narrative to draw attention to the observation made by Mitchell in this case.

In the discourse of martyrdom, Mitchell argues that the lives and actions of the members of the Telugu community cannot be reduced to a “blind devotion” for language (32). They are involved in the narrative of the linguistic movement. A follower of Gandhian ideology, Potti Sriramalu died after “his fast-unto-death” in the struggle for the separate linguistic state in 1952 (189). But he attracted Dalitbahujans who were unaware of the movement but showed “great respect” to him as their leader against “untouchability” (205-206).

tribals.” *The Times of India*, 17 Sep. 2016, timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/BJP-to-observe-martyrs-day-to-generate-sense-of-belonging-among-tribals/articleshow/54383699.cms.

¹⁰²“Bundelkhand ka Rajya Geet Hamari Maati Bundeli” [Bundelkhand State Song Our Land Bundeli]. *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, bundelkhand.in/poem/bundelkhand-ka-rajya-geet-by-kailash-madbaiya.

Ramaswamy argues that languages are embedded in “the structures of sentiments” (246). They are expressed “in the new people-centered ideologies of modernity” (246). It would be misleading to bracket the subjects of *Bundeli pani* in a single homogenous category of standard public. The term, *Bundeli pani* implies a heterogeneous space in which several histories of Bundeli identity can be marked out. The logic of progress with *Bundeli pani* demands the standard public to situate the question of language on the ground of development as well. Katare and Shah refrain from delving into the realm of nationalism. They express their concern for a Bundeli identity against the increasing economic divide in the region. I share my observations in this case.

Aditya Jain, the former Member of Parliament, was invited to the literary gathering held during 9-10 January 2016 at Orchha. Jain shared his observation of the local conditions in Bundelkhand. He mentioned to the standard public that the local Adivasis were forced to attack the rich people due to starvation and extreme poverty in the region. This indicates the rise of alienation against the state. Jain wanted the standard public to perceive the materialistic perspective in the politics of Bundeli identity. Shah alerts the standard public to refrain from causing ethnic violence in the pursuit of recognition for Bundeli language and this stands in complement to Aditya Jain’s observation. But Shah argues against the existence of ethnic violence on the axis of language in Bundelkhand later.¹⁰³ He believes that Bundeli speakers have experienced deep vulnerabilities on the margin. Both Jain and Shah call for, in the words of Ramaswamy, the “people-centered ideologies” (“Passions” 246) to the attention of the standard public. However, it contradicts with a stateless condition of the region. The term, *Bundeli pani* explains both the logic and conditions of modernity in Bundelkhand differently. The demand for a separate state of Bundelkhand resonates in the logic and the conditions of modernity in north India. I explain the sexist dimension to this logic and conditions in the ideological schema of the standard public further.

¹⁰³ Shah, Madhukar. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 10 Nov. 2016.

In his essay, “*Bundelkhand: Ek Asliyat*,” [Bundelkhand: A Reality] Madbaiya argues that the demand for a separate state of Bundelkhand is legitimate after the formation of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Telangana (56). He uses a popular saying to convey the failure of the demand: *Garib ki lugai so sab ki bhaujai* (the wife of the poor is everyone’s sister-in-law) (58). He compares the region with the wife of a poor man. She is treated like a sister-in-law by all others who can play sexual jokes with her. The popular saying implies statehood and identity are the ‘territory’ of men. Madbaiya also uses the local idiom: *ji ki lathiya u ki bhains* (one who owns the stick, possesses the buffalo) to indicate the nexus between the powerful lobby and the governing state (56). He compares *bhains* (buffalo) with Bundelkhand/Bundeli *mata* in a gendered tone to express the control of dominant caste. In the territory of men, *Bundeli mata* is proposed to be protected against the dominant forces. Madbaiya identifies the dominant force with the upper caste Thakur, the landowning group in Bundelkhand. The Thakurs do not concern themselves with ‘lesser’ people. They are exploitative forces. They provoke the local people into becoming dacoits in the region (57). They are *maha kuthangi jaat* (ill-mannered caste) (58).

The standard public demonstrates the survival of *Bundeli mata* against Hindi chauvinists and the traditional elites who dominate the Bundeli speakers based on caste and gender identity. Madbaiya argues that Bundeli is not *bapauti* (patrimony) of one caste/class (“Bundeli kau” 104). But then, these liberal notions of Bundeli ideology as expressed by the elites is exclusionary in its structure of thought and is insufficient. The Bundeli nation thus has its discontents.

The standard public redefines the masculinist idea of *Bundeli mata* in an attempt to consolidate Bundeli speakers using the narratives and symbols of local warriors and martyrs of Bundelkhand in the Bundeli calendar. It claims to protect *Bundeli mata* by attributing to Bundeli language the status of a warrior caste. Simultaneously, it represents a virile attitude in the discourse on martyrdom of *veerangana* (women warriors). The Bundeli calendar marks the Rajput (warrior) caste status which is ranked at the upper-strata in the caste-hierarchy. It shapes a Bundeli consciousness around the idea of a macho-warrior. It motivates the subjects of *Bundeli pani* to act for their land and language. This is evident in the celebration of the anniversary of warrior legends, “Veer Alha Jayanti” and “Chhatrasal Jayanti” in the Bundeli calendar, and the texts produced by Madbaiya. Madbaiya authorizes texts on the warriors of Bundelkhand. Among

these are *Vindhya ke Bankure* [The Warriors of Vindhya] and *Jai Veer Bundele Jawanan ki* [Long Live Bundeli Knights]. The following is an outline of the narrative based on the valor of the local legend warriors popular in Bundelkhand (See Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). The following story of the local warrior legends helps us understand the gender ideology of the standard public and also critique it.¹⁰⁴



(Fig.6.The Statue of Alha at Alha Chowk at the Center of Mahoba)

¹⁰⁴ The narrative is described by Kailash Madbaiya in his book. The narrative is popular and follows a similar narration on YouTube as well.



(Fig.7. Udal Chowk at Mahoba)

Following the conspiracy of Mahil, the chieftain of Mahoba, Parmal, the king of Mahoba, expels his brave and loyal warriors, Alha and Udal with their mother, Devla. Alha and Udal take refuge in Kanauj where they are welcomed by the king, Jaychand. Mahil conspires against Parmal too. He motivates Prithviraj Chauhan, the king of Delhi to attack Mahoba in the absence of Alha and Udal, and marry his son to Chandravali, the daughter of Parmal. On the other side, Parmal does not take weapons in hand because he has vowed to not do so at a ritual. The wife of Parmal, Malhana sends the court poet, Jagnik to convince Alha and Udal and get them back from Kanauj soon. Jagnik takes help from their mother Devla to persuade Alha and Udal to shed off their anger and help Parmal. Being inspired by mother Devla, both take the guise of hermits along with Lakhan, son of Jaychand, and leave for Kirat sagar lake where Prithviraj has camped with his soldiers to seize Mahoba. Alha and Udal enter the battlefield in disguise and overcome the armed force. They attack Prithviraj but forgive him on the plea of his court poet, Chand Bardai. However, Prithviraj invades the army of Mahoba at Kirat sagar (lake) once again to capture Chandravali who has reached with Malhana to attend the Kajli ritual. Alha himself safeguards both from the attack and defeats Prithviraj. Prithviraj realizes that the hermits in disguise are the brothers of Malkhan and the sons of Jachhraj and Vachhraj who belong to

Banafar lineage, famous for its hardiness. Prithviraj withdraws and decides to move back to Delhi also because Alha and Udal have been blessed by the goddess, Sharda. The victory against Prithviraj is followed by a celebration at Mahoba where both Alha and Udal are made brothers by Chandravali. They are urged to stay back in Mahoba by her and by the people of Mahoba. Both promise their return from Kanauj with mother Devla to Mahoba.

The narrative described above is associated with the celebration of the Kajli festival in Bundelkhand. I focus on the relation between the Bundeli calendar and Kajli, the local festival to illustrate the masculinist notion of *Bundeli mata* or Bundeli language as a masculine-female subject. The Chandravali (the young women) of Bundelkhand sets out to celebrate the ritual of the Kajli festival every year on the following day of the occasion of Raksha bandhan (a Hindu festival of sisters and brothers) in August. The people of Mahoba celebrate the arrival of Alha and Udal back to their town to protect the *Bundeli pani* and Bundeli women on this symbolic event. The Bundeli girls plant *javare* (seeds) in small baskets at home for some weeks. After the seeds sprout into plants, girls and women come out with baskets of green plants in a procession (See Fig. 8). They march to the Kirat sagar lake in Mahoba where they take out *kajli* or *bhujariya* (the grown plants) from the baskets, wash them in the lake water, and immerse the baskets in the water. The men and women share the *kajli* or *bhujariya* (plants) (See Fig. 9) as a gesture of collective bond in the community. The brother being male promises the protection of his sister.



(Fig.8. The Women of Bundelkhand Worshipping Kajli) ¹⁰⁵



(Fig.9. The Kajli or Bhujariya) ¹⁰⁶

The state government funds the local administration to organize the Kajli *mela* ‘Vijay Utsav’. ¹⁰⁷ It is celebrated on the grounds of Kirat sagar lake every year. The performance of Alha

¹⁰⁵ “Kajli Mela and Festival, Mahoba: Kajli mela, Mahoba.” *Bundelkhand Research Portal*, bundelkhand.in/kajli-mela-mahoba.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

songs is also organized. The celebration of the oral tradition of singing Alha songs evokes the effect of valor in the local culture. The site for the celebration of the Kajli festival is preserved in the memory of the local legends, Alha and Udal by the department of archaeology at Mahoba. Mahoba is well-known as Alha Nagri (town of Alha) in Bundelkhand.

The celebration of the anniversary of the popular legends, Alha and Udal in the Bundeli calendar is at the center of the Kajli festival and its gender politics. The festival exemplifies the commitment of Bundeli males, Alha and Udal to become the 'ideal' in the territory of men. The role of Hindu women is considered significant and at the center of such cultural practices. In their book, *Cultural Studies and Discourse Analysis*, Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasinski analyze the role of language in the construction, constitution, and shaping of the social world. They use the approaches of critical analysis discourse to explain the relationship between ethnicity and gender. They discuss Julia Kristeva's views and other noted feminist theorists. They note Kristeva and find that the construction of femininity and masculinity is not specific to the body of a woman and a man in biological opposition (168). Both men and women share and occupy these constructs (168). Kristeva calls it a struggle more than a conflict between the sexual identities (168).

In the Bundeli context, the Bundeli elites represent *Bundeli mata* as masculine but also as instrumental in reinforcing the politics of commitment to the linguistic identity. *Bundeli mata* is masculine in the political enactments of identity while she is described as feminine in the poetic expression of Bundeli identity. Katare highlights the poetic virtues of *Bundeli mata*. He writes:

कानन सें घुस कें जा बैठी सबके दिल में

गजलें जब सें गान लगी है बुंदेली

दिल्ली, बम्बई, कलकत्ता तक जा पोंची

मिश्री सी गुरयान लगी है बुंदेली

सुगम पैल सें जो कोउ ऊखों जानते

अब उनसे लड्यौन लगी है बुंदेली (Katare, “Bundeli”)

The female figure of Bundeli sings sweet songs. She wins the hearts of her children in Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata, the commercial centers in India. The access to the poetics of language is determined by the privilege of access to the particular form of communication under specific historical conditions. Unlike Madbaiya, Katare chooses poetry to express his love for Bundeli language. He uses the metaphor of *mishri* (sugar). He creates a sensory presence of Bundeli language. Bundeli enters into the ears of her children/viewers on social media. She settles into the heart of the people with the potential of her linguistic features. Katare does not refer to the Bundeli language rhetorically. He perceives her to be resilient and caring. She *ladyan lagi hai* (loves back) people who know her since the beginning. Katare establishes a primordial relationship with the subjects of *Bundeli pani* on the ground of their familiarity with the Bundeli language. His relationship with her is situated in an earthly context. It is not marked in a continuous sense of past which is divine and Sanskritized. The aspects of resistance and care are complementary in his ideology. As seen before, Katare compares Bundelkhand with *narak* (hell) but he expresses his choice to endure the crisis with happiness and live in Bundelkhand until he dies in his commitment towards Bundeli language.

Unlike Katare, the Bundeli calendar projects the local legends and martyrs, male and female from Dalitbahujan castes. It glorifies them in order to build an image of *Bundeli mata*. It captures the process of linguistic mobilization incorporating dissenting voices from the margin. The standard Bundeli leaves behind other forms of speech supposedly inconsequential for making a political impact. It denies the social status of the speakers who live on the margins. The refusal of the standard public to take the notion of caste in the making/gendering of Bundeli implies two incorrect assumptions: language cannot be the source of symbolic violence against Bundeli speakers belonging to Dalitbahujan communities; and the language spoken by the Dalitbahujan women is ‘vulgar’ and ‘impure’. The construct of *Bundeli mata* places the upper-caste Bundeli men and women in a position to control the sexuality of women belonging to the Bundeli Dalitbahujan communities.

Narayan argues that the legends, warriors and icons belonging to Dalitbahujan castes assume greater significance than issues of development of the Dalitbahujan castes in rural Bundelkhand (16). The main reason for the bigger significance of local icons is manifested in “the stories narrated by the people at grass-roots levels, their statues erected at various places, the plays narrating their bravery, the folk songs based on them and in the collective memories about them in the popular psyche of the people” (16).

On similar grounds, the source term for the cognate, *Bundeli mata* is *Apni mata* (our mother). It owns a metaphysical status beyond name and face, alongside *Bharat mata* (mother of the entire nation). The popularity of the local figures can create moments of affect around the construct of *Bundeli mata* in the public sphere. By emotion or affect, the Bundeli female subject is made an object of representation in the politics of *thasak* (pride) and poetics of *pusan* (likeability). On this ground, the experiences of the Bundeli language are stabilized and guarded in the cultural sphere. But contrary to the experience of the standard public, the reclamation of identity is contingent upon everyday issues in the lives of the Dalitbahujan Bundeli speakers. The invocation of self is possible “in” language but not “outside” it. The boundaries of standard Bundeli are closed because the standardness or Bundeliness of language assumes a culturally assigned status. In the preface to the book, *Vindhya ke Bankure*, [The Knights of Vindhya] Shyamsundar Dube identifies the *veerangana* (the women warriors) of Bundelkhand with Hindu goddess such as Durga and Bhavani (1). Dube attributes to Bundeli women the notion of “respectability.” It renders the class and caste position of the standard public in the realm of Bundeli culture.

Two positions, in shaping a Bundeli consciousness, appear worth noting are at the historical and grassroots level. The invention of political idioms in Katare’s Bundeli *ghazal* (poetry) marks the radical reshaping of the Bundeli tradition in the literary sphere. The question, nevertheless, is on the side of the standard public: does it imagine an equally shared power in the masculinization of the Bundeli subject? Does it have a vision of empowerment of the subjects of *Bundeli pani*? I argue that the standard Bundeli is not ashamed to emasculate the Dalitbahujan Bundeli speakers from carrying the aesthetics of resistance against the dominant forces. The regional ethos of listening to songs of the legend warriors is replaced by the national ethos of

submitting to the state by appropriate social behavior while seeking credit to their ‘service’ towards the Bundeli nation.

Conclusion

The chapter examined the ways in which the Bundeli elites build the narrative of and discourse on *Bundeli mata*. Madbaiya represents a dual role in his Indianist approach in a normative framework. Katare binds minor languages in a sisterhood. He suggests that minor languages live in harmony. He portrays *Bundeli mata* in a critical framework. She is happy and loves her children against the domination of the state, capitalists and anti-social elements. Both Madbaiya and Katare leave her unnamed, leaving it to the readers and viewers to figure out who she is in the context of Bundeli identity. Both hold the privilege to access education as one of the features in the theme of standardization and class mobility to access the sight of *Bundeli mata*. The representation of martyred rebels of both men and women in the Bundeli calendar allows the standard public to enter into a space that speaks for Bundeli as the language of people. The Bundeli calendar and the Bundeli *gazal* create the structure of visibility and feeling in the politics and poetics of Bundeli language. Ramaswamy calls this “the immediacy of bonds” (“Passions” 86). It provides the standard public an alternative to the “de-sexualized” and gendered image of *Bundeli mata*. The chapter juxtaposed such mainstream notions of gender ideology and sexuality by focusing on the context of caste-gender oppression against the Dalitbahujan women in the film, *Bandit Queen* and the celebration of Phoolan as a Dalit feminist icon in the project of Dalit History Month. The upper-caste scholars have produced works focusing on the relationship between elite and modernity in much of post-colonial studies. The elites accept modernity in the context of nationalism and human rights but does not agree with modernity’s ideals of equality in the realm of gender and caste.

In the process of cultural production, new cultural shifts are marked in Bundelkhand. For instance, Mahesh Katare invents a new tradition—to write political *ghazals* in the tradition of Bundeli poetry. The politics of standard Bundeli is manifest in the form of a visual reminder, the Bundeli calendar. It claims a masculinist Bundeli. I explored this process of cultural production in the larger scope of *Bundeli pani*. I focused, partly, on the representations of Phoolan Devi in

cinema and the project of Dalit History Month. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I continue to explore this process across a group of Dalitbahujan women reporters, who run a Bundeli newspaper in rural Bundelkhand.

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Chapter 3

Khabar Lahariya: Language, Identity, Women, and Dalitbahujanality

Introduction

The present chapter focuses on *Khabar Lahariya* (Waves of News), a fortnightly newspaper published in Bundeli in Bundelkhand districts between 2002 and 2017. It was also published in Bajjika and Avadhi, languages spoken in the rural area of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. *Khabar Lahariya* focuses on news with a focus on gender and caste perspective. It came in the form of pamphlet. *Khabar Lahariya* is run by a group of forty women belonging to rural areas of Bundelkhand and mostly from the communities of Dalit (SC), Adivasi (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC) including religious minorities. In his article, “Violence and Dalit Women’s Resistance in Rural Bihar,” Sumit Srivastava notes that the term, ‘Dalit’ can be expanded to the sixteen percent of people in Schedule Caste, the eight percent of people in Schedule Tribe, and nearly fifty percent of the people in Other Backward Classes (32).¹⁰⁸ In this sense, *Khabar Lahariya* can be identified as a newspaper and news media that is run by a group of Dalitbahujan feminists. Heera Jatav,¹⁰⁹ the editor-in-chief of *Khabar Lahariya*, Sangita Bundelkhandi, the digital head of *Khabar Lahariya*, Anita Prajapati, the assistant editor of Mahoba edition of *Khabar Lahariya* are from the Dalit community and other Dalitbahujan women reporters in *Khabar Lahariya* belong to the Kol Adivasi community¹¹⁰ and the OBCs

¹⁰⁸ Srivastava notes the location of the SCs out of the caste hierarchy as ex-untouchables. He finds the STs as the group of early settlers who are not part of the caste-system. The OBCs are the untouchable peasants and artisan communities that lived between the SCs and the upper-caste Hindus (32). Srivastava, Sumit S. “Violence and Dalit Women’s Resistance in Rural Bihar.” *Indian Anthropologist*, vol.37, no.2, July-Dec. 2007, pp.31-44. *JSTOR*, [jstor.org/stable/41920038](https://www.jstor.org/stable/41920038). Accessed 3 July 2019.

¹⁰⁹ I use fake names for the Dalitbahujan women journalists in this chapter.

¹¹⁰ Kols were “the original inhabitants of the area” in Central India but they are confined “in the dry *Patha* region of Karwi” block in Chitrakoot today (36). They are part of the Schedule Tribe (ST) population in the Bundelkhand districts of MP but they are “classified as ‘castes’” in Chitrakoot and Banda (UP) (35-36). See, Naqvi, Farah. *Waves in the Hinterland*. Zubaan/Nirantar, 2007.

(including the Muslim). I identify them as Dalitbahujan women reporters in both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

Heera Jatav explains the journey of *Khabar Lahariya* in the editorial, “*Chunotiyo se Bhare rahe Khabar Lahariya ke Chaudah Saal*” [The Fourteen Years of *Khabar Lahariya* have been full of Challenges] (3). It is a challenge for Dalitbahujan women reporters associated with *Khabar Lahariya* to assert themselves with the identity of a journalist and as women from Dalitbahujan communities in the districts of Bundelkhand. With the local Dalitbahujan women reporters, Heera started their first edition from Chitrakoot (UP) district in 2002, the second edition from Banda (UP) in 2006, the third edition from Sitamarhi district, Bihar in 2010, and three more editions from Banaras, Faizabad, and Mahoba (UP) in 2012. Since there is shortage of funds, Dalitbahujan women reporters have taken a break from print-journalism but *Khabar Lahariya* is fully active in its digital form since 2013.¹¹¹

The main office of *Khabar Lahariya* is located in Karvi block, Chitrakoot. I collected the copies of *Khabar Lahariya* from the office in Chitrakoot. As the copies of the newspapers were not sufficient, Heera suggested me to contact Disha Mullick and Shalini Joshi. Both Mullick and Joshi handle *Khabar Lahariya* as Project Coordinators at New Delhi. They were associated with the NGO called Nirantar (I shall discuss Nirantar later in detail) before they became fully engaged with the plan and production of *Khabar Lahariya* in print and digital media along with the Dalitbahujan women reporters. They are the resource persons in collaboration with Heera, Sangita, Anita, and the other Dalitbahujan women reporters in running and managing *Khabar Lahariya*. Both Mullick and Joshi continued to assist and sustain *Khabar Lahariya* in print until 2017 and continue to assist on digital platforms. In an interview, “Splice Low-Res 5,” Mullick introduces herself as an “urban, English-speaking, upper-caste” (00:11:40-00:11:47).¹¹² She calls *Khabar Lahariya* a unique women’s media because it has sustained through the perspectives of both the upper-caste women like her and Dalitbahujan women reporters (00:11:48-00:11:58).

¹¹¹ Jatav, Heera. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 25 Oct. 2017.

¹¹² “Splice Low-Res 5: Diversity –Khabar Lahariya.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Splice Media, 19 June 2020, [youtube.com/watch?v=f09g5B52RwU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f09g5B52RwU). Accessed 23 Oct. 2020.

Dalitbahujan women reporters are largely neo-literate and based in the small towns and remote villages of Bundelkhand. They work in the larger “ecology”¹¹³ of literacy feminists and developmental NGOs run by the women who are from Dalitbahujan communities but mostly from the Brahmin and the Savarna castes. The Brahmin and the Savarna feminists of NGOs in rural Bundelkhand belong to metro cities like New Delhi and Lucknow. They work in a horizontal form of solidarity with the Dalitbahujan women reporters. In a survey, *Zile ki Hulchul*, [News about the District] the upper-caste feminists identify *Khabar Lahariya* as “alternative,” “community” and “development” media with an aim “to challenge the existing powers, to represent marginalized groups, and to foster horizontal linkages among communities of interest” (6-10). The attempt among them is to consolidate issues both at the centers and margins of women’s movement in the larger, global background of citizenship and democracy. It is interesting to note how these women intervene in the affairs of rural Bundelkhand at different levels. For instance, Nirantar (based in New Delhi), Vanangana, and Sahjani Shiksha Kendra are the three prominent NGOs which work on literacy, caste and gender violence, water, employment, land rights, and development in Banda, Chitrakoot, Lalitpur and Mahoba (the major Bundelkhand districts in UP).

Farah Naqvi narrates the journey of *Khabar Lahariya* in her book, *Waves in the Hinterland*. She notes that the upper-caste feminists associated with the above mentioned NGOs (mainly Nirantar) are active in a larger network of such organizations involved with print-journalism, and new media journalism since the 1990s (20). They play a crucial role in providing resources to their parallel enterprises at the micro-level. For instance, Dalit Mahila Samiti (DMS, 2005) is an organizational branch of Vanangana. It is active till today. In the issues of *Khabar Lahariya* that were published between 2002-2017, it can be seen that Dalitbahujan women reporters cover the grassroots issues and stories in the ecology of Nirantar, DMS, Vanangana,

¹¹³ I use the term “ecology” with reference to Gopal Guru’s concept of freedom of expression (39). Guru makes distinction between “ecology of argument” and “social ecology” (39). He explores the question of dignity in relation to a healthy public culture where Dalit men and women can deliberate openly (39-40). Guru, Gopal. “Freedom of Expression and the Life of the Dalit Mind.” *EPW*, vol.48, no.10, March 2013, pp. 39-45. *JSTOR*, jstor.org/stable/23391357. Accessed on 23 Feb 2019.

Sahajani Shiksha Kendra, and other such NGOs. They stand in a complementary relationship with ‘pro-Dalitbahujan’ NGOs. In this chapter, I identify the readers and viewers of *Khabar Lahariya* as members of the ‘Dalitbahujan community’, and the upper-caste feminists associated with the NGOs as ‘mainstream literacy and media feminists’.

Khabar Lahariya is the one and only women’s media that is run independently by women from the marginalized communities based in rural Bundelkhand. Started in 2002, it can be appreciated for the documentation of people’s lives in rural Bundelkhand. But it loses its documentary vigor and vision by 2010 in an attempt to attribute itself a mainstream look. It does not carry forward the spirit borne out of *Mahila Dakiya* (MD), (about which I will discuss in detail later), a broadsheet newspaper, which was hand-prepared by the neo-literate Dalitbahujan women reporters of Chitrakoot in the 1990s. It loses the simplicity of a rural weekly newspaper designed with hand-made visuals for the neo-literate people in the interior villages. This change in the format of *Khabar Lahariya* can be located in the larger context of culture industry in north India.

The progress of the culture industry in print media is determined by both ideological and technological factors. In her book, *Headlines in the Heartland*, Sevanti Ninan counts the “localization” of news content a cherished claim of the regional dailies in Hindi. She notes that the event of “localization” is a commercially driven phenomenon (30). She argues that the news market strategies vis-à-vis the “localization” of news content invoked a great demand for Hindi dailies in north India and central India “in the mid-1990s” (30-31). However, the event of localization of news content occurred from the outside (14-20). For example, the Hindi dailies revived Bundeli language and culture in their pages but with a clear focus on the reinforcement of the local market (296-297). Basically, it denotes the commodification of local culture. Vipul Mudgal, in his article, “Rural Coverage in the Hindi and English Dailies,” argues that the Hindi dailies are biased because they do not cover the rural crisis enough. He does not have the same complaint with the English newspapers (92). But Tabereh Ahmed Neyazi appreciates the vernacular media in his article, “Politics after Vernacularization: Hindi Media and Indian Democracy,” for its significant role in the lives of marginalized groups (78). He does not count the ideological factors of caste-based politics as a prominent factor behind the growth of regional

newspapers in north India (78). He counts upon modern features such as literacy, technology, and transportation as aiding the growth of civic consciousness among the deprived sections during and after 1980s and 1990s (78).

Having noted above the location, the profile, and perspectives of *Khabar Lahariya* and of its Dalitbahujan women reporters and the mainstream literacy and media feminists, I highlight the objectives of the present chapter in the next section.

Objectives

The present chapter explores the politics of the Dalitbahujan women reporters. *Khabar Lahariya* informs us of the ideological and technological features, which are grounded in the Dalit Feminist Standpoints (DFS),¹¹⁴ the literacy movement, the socio-economic reforms, land rights, and affirmative action in the public sphere. It is different from the mainstream newspapers dominated by the upper-caste males in the socio-political context. It does not focus on the sensational tactics that uses the rhetoric of victimhood (Naqvi 18). Dalitbahujan women reporters do not work under the anxiety of alienating Hindu readers. They assert their individual and collective identity through “alternative” journalism, and through the politics of “difference”. In this background, the politics of Dalitbahujan women reporters offer an alternative to the politics of standard public, the base of urban male elites.

The Chapter focuses on the three main objectives of *Khabar Lahariya* which are as following: first, the participation of rural Dalitbahujan women in journalism; second, the coverage of news in the places where the voice of people remain unheard in the mainstream newspapers and third, the issues of Dalitbahujan communities, particularly, of the women in its coverage and publication (Jatav, “Chunotiyo se” 3).

¹¹⁴ Dalit Feminist Standpoint (DFS) moment occurred during 1990s. It prioritizes the feminist cause over the differences of caste-class lines (Srivastava 33). It is a matter of debate whether *Khabar Lahariya* should be called an autonomous Dalit feminist newspaper or it works accordingly Dalit Feminist Standpoint (DFS), an alternative offered by Sharmila Rege. *Khabar Lahariya* is sustained by the co-operation between the Dalitbahujan women reporters and the mainstream literacy and media feminists from Brahmin and other Savarna communities.

With the objectives mentioned above, the chapter deals with these questions:

Research Questions

- (1) What does it mean to report “like” the Dalitbahujan women? How is “localization” of news redefined by them?
- (2) How can we identify *Khabar Lahariya* as a ‘Dalit/feminist’ newspaper? what are its features? What are its (in Sharmila Rege’s use of the term) “standpoints”? Or How do the Dalitbahujan women reporters fit into the ecology of local NGOs, mostly led by the non-Dalitbahujan women activists in Bundelkhand?
- (3) What is the role of the Dalitbahujan women reporters in the making of Bundelkhand on the regional map of India? How do they posit an alternative to contest the standard public? what are the issues dealt by them? How do they deal with those issues?
- (4) What are the markers of identity attributed to the Dalitbahujan women in particular and other people in general? What are the strategies and the discursive properties employed in *Khabar Lahariya*, the news reports, articles, editorials and interviews of the Dalitbahujan women reporters?
- (5) What is the significance of *Khabar Lahariya* in the personal life of the Dalitbahujan women reporters? Does it constitute a new center of ‘alternative public’ in the attempt to position the margins or the peripheries towards a center? Or does it break away from the binaries of the margins and center? How do the Dalitbahujan women reporters redefine the correlates of western impact such as recognition, social change, and modern development? Or reinscribe the narratives of social change?

Khabar Lahariya is the best platform to explore the questions mentioned above because it inherits certain radical contexts. It was produced in the backdrop of collaboration between governmental and non-governmental agencies in alliance with the local stakeholders in Bundelkhand (Naqvi 24). It owes to the historic moments of the literacy movement and the women’s movement in the 1990s and the Mandal moment that provided reservations to Dalitbahujan women (and men) to participate in the decision-making processes under the

Panchayat Raj system. It offers a scope to understand issues concerned with the empowerment of Dalitbahujan women and features of alternative public. A discussion on the historical background may explain the reasons regarding why and how *Khabar Lahariya* is qualified to claim the Dalit feminist standpoint. Before I highlight the historical background of *Khabar Lahariya*, I discuss the reasons for using the phrase, alternative public.

Implications of Alternative Public for Bundeli Language

Khabar Lahariya or Dalitbahujan women reporters constitute an alternative public in a pragmatic sense. They give priority to an understanding of the local contexts, conditions and situations. It is difficult to distinguish the counterpublics as a province of the ‘lower-castes’ against the upper-caste/class in polemical sense. There is a proliferation of middle level castes in north India. This is one of the reasons why social movements against Brahmanism do not speak of a similar history like it can be noted in western India and south India. The emergence of Dalitbahujan women reporters counter the assimilation of ‘lower-castes’ into a dominant public sphere. The issue of assimilation of the lower-castes into dominant public is exemplified in the politics of the standard public in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. By an alternative means of anti-casteist perspective, Dalitbahujan women reporters focus on redistribution of the resources and fight for material change from the margins. This strand of counter in terms of a linguistic, materialist and creative economy constitutes Dalitbahujan women reporters into an alternative public. Dalitbahujan women reporters focus on diversification of the media space in order to offer a new language of social inclusion. *Khabar Lahariya* uses Bundeli and other local languages. It is via these languages that the Dalitbahujan women reporters assert the material identity of Dalit women. Language is not a cultural ideal for them but a means to demand material resources to live a just life. It is used creatively to open up new opportunities in the monetization of local issues and culture. They try to reconcile the ethics of redistribution of the resources and recognition of Bundeli culture through a journalistic method. The language of *Khabar Lahariya* is multi-dimensional. This can be observed in the evolution of *Khabar Lahariya* and its development.

Historical Background

Naqvi calls *Khabar Lahariya* a “brainchild” of the mainstream literacy feminists who were formerly associated with National Institute of Adult Education (NIAE), New Delhi (32). The National Literacy Movement (NLM) aimed to spread literacy in 1989 in accordance with the government program of spreading literacy in “five hundred fifty districts” of India (27). The NLM was a failure in the villages of Bundelkhand. It learned through the hard way that it had followed the “official standard of literacy” (28). It was found necessary for NLM to select a reading material that would be more sensitive than just be an “easy to read” type of material for a largely neo-literate community (26-29). The mainstream literacy feminists in NIAE ensured NLM to help Dalitbahujan women who were “literate-below-standard” (21). But they left both NLM and NIAE and established their separate organization, Nirantar in 1994 to carry forward *Mahila Dakiya*, a broadsheet newspaper and continue the production of *Mahila Dakiya* ahead (31-32). *Mahila Dakiya* was a sixteen by twenty-two inches “wall newspaper” “in a mix of Hindi and Bundeli” (22-24). It was an internal part of a government program called ‘Mahila Samakhya’ (“Education for Women’s Equality”) since the 1980s (24). It aimed at Dalitbahujan women’s empowerment. It is radical because it provided the rural communities an easy practice of reading at the comfort level of readers on a weekly basis. It was successful in establishing a relation between the word and the world of the rural audience, especially of the adult Dalitbahujan women. The latter designed it themselves by hands and distributed it in the villages under the guidance of mainstream literacy feminists (24-25).

The Dalitbahujan women were part of Mahila Samakhya which provided them non-formal education and the ability to run *Mahila Dakiya*. The mainstream literacy feminists of Nirantar learnt their lessons after working with many such neo-literate Dalitbahujan women in Mahila Samakhya during their literacy campaigns and workshop trainings in Chitrakoot. They became more sensitive to understand the local conditions, contexts, and situations to work constructively (26). Naqvi shows that the mainstream literacy feminists of Nirantar worked with the Dalitbahujan women in Mahila Samakhya to resolve immediate crises such as scarcity of water, poor education, and nutrition (39-40). The training under the mainstream literacy feminists transformed the Dalitbahujan women into reporters of *Mahila Dakiya* to fight against

the denial of space, against patriarchy and fight for their rights, both in the immediate and in the structural contexts (59). They aimed to take *Mahila Dakiya* with the Dalitbahujan women beyond the identity of a programme-based broadsheet in Mahila Samakhya and make it a rural newspaper (59-60). The Dalitbahujan women and the mainstream literacy feminists of Nirantar came together to share the objectives of Mahila Samakhya, its organizational structure, and the language of sisterhood. Naqvi cites the objective of Mahila Samakhya:

The role of the educationists will be to enter into dialogue with women and create for them space and time to launch on the path of critical reflection. Women are caught in a vicious circle where their inability to educate themselves lends credence to the stereotype that education is irrelevant to them. Daily struggles for food, fuel, water, fodder for their cattle, childbirth and child-rearing saps them all of their energy. Their social interaction is determined by cultural traditions, taboos and superstitions. Their social and family roles are well defined. They are socially and physically oppressed (...) All these factors reinforce a low self-image...the program seeks to address itself to the constraints under which poor women live and it hopes to counter the disabling mechanism through women's collective i. e. the Mahila Sangha (25).

The objective of Mahila Samakhya is to fetch recognition, empowerment, and social justice in the lives of women who are marginalized for being a woman from 'lower-caste,' neo-literate/illiterate, poor families, and from the hinterlands. It counts on the value of education primarily. The Dalitbahujan women play the roles of *sahayogini* and *sakhis* in Mahila Samakhya.¹¹⁵ They address the mainstream literacy feminists as '*didi*' (elder sister). It does not reflect the hierarchical salutations like 'sir,' 'ma'am and boss, or other sophisticated salutations such as 'Mrs.' and 'Ms.' in the work-space (46-47). It suggests a politics of solidarity.

¹¹⁵ The *sahayogini* is an in-charge co-ordinator of ten *sanghas* or collectives of women volunteers. The *sakhi* is a village level co-ordinator of a collective of women. The *sakhis* are not necessarily expected to be literate but they are selected for their leadership qualities and enthusiasm. They are part-time workers and are paid two hundred rupees per month. They assist the *sahayoginis* by conducting field-work at the village level. The *sahayoginis* are required to have basic education and leadership qualities to co-ordinate the ten collectives of *sakhis*. They are initially paid Rs 750 and Rs 250 as fixed TA/DA allowance (Naqvi 39n).

The context of print-culture concerning the Dalitbahujan women reporters is historically different. Naqvi argues that the thesis of mainstream media scholars is limited in understanding the determiners of print-revolution in Bundelkhand. Fundamental issues like water crisis determine the mobilization of the Dalitbahujan women in their individual and collective transformation (39-40). For example, a group of Dalit and Kol Adivasi women, who were associated with Mahila Samakhya, broke empty pitchers at the District Magistrate (DM) office in Chitrakoot (39). They registered their protest against the indifference of the Jal Nigam Board in the 1990s (39). Having found no solution from the administration, the mentioned group of women took up the task of repairing and maintaining the hand pumps themselves (40). Water crisis is a collective issue in Bundelkhand. It became crucial for the women to mobilize the whole rural community with the help of the mainstream literacy feminists. This led to a pattern of collective participation for the Dalitbahujan women reporters in the Hindi public sphere (40-44).

Naqvi narrates the ups and downs in the production and circulation of *Mahila Dakiya* due to many obstacles it went through in its earlier avatar of being a government product. When there was no governmental body left to fund *Mahila Dakiya* anymore, the mainstream literacy feminists of Nirantar and the Dalitbahujan women reporters of *Mahila Dakiya* gave it a new avatar in the name of *Khabar Lahariya* (87-88). The laboring women of Chitrakoot and Banda redefined themselves as intellectuals in the public sphere. They carved an intellectual path for the future of the Dalitbahujan women reporters in their journey of grassroots journalism. The Dalitbahujan women reporters continue to work in synergy with the mainstream literacy and media feminists today. They address, work, and resolve basic issues as grassroots journalists independent of the government program. The roots of emergence of *Khabar Lahariya* were in the present. Before I explain the role of the Dalitbahujan women reporters, I highlight the methodology and my argument in the following sections.

Methodology

The present chapter focuses on the representation of the local issues based on the news coverage against caste and gender hierarchy. I collected the newspapers published between 2002 to 2017. In the overall mapping exercise, one hundred ninety-seven copies of *Khabar Lahariya* published between 2002 to 2009 and four hundred three copies of *Khabar Lahariya* published between 2010 to 2017 were obtained from *Khabar Lahariya* office at Chitrakoot and New Delhi respectively. I analyze reports, stories, articles, editorials published in *Khabar Lahariya*, field notes and interviews of the Dalitbahujan women reporters and of the mainstream literacy and media feminists. I interviewed Heera and the other Dalitbahujan women reporters named Salma, Meena, Neeta, and Sobha on 25th October 2017. I also follow the interviews of Dalitbahujan women reporters published on *YouTube*. I discuss their views and the content published in the newspapers in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

Argument

The standard public is a dominant form of the public and an extension of Hindi elites. The Dalitbahujan women reporters counter the values of the standard public. They do not attribute “natural” qualities to the notion of Bundeli identity. They are critical of such representation. They hold an insider’s view. I argue that the Dalitbahujan women reporters consciously or unconsciously carve out a significant space and practices of political thought between the homogenizing tendency of ‘standard’ public and the mainstream literacy and media feminists’ interest to intervene and deliver intellectual tools. On the one hand, they posit an alternative to the ‘standard’ public by embracing—the “Other”—Bundeli languages spoken at the margin, the villages in the heterogeneous location.¹¹⁶ On the other, their thinking is grounded in the regional and communitarian resources available to their cultural memory. They challenge the stigma of caste and gender identity by demonstrating a spirit of survival and progress against patriarchy and poverty in a promising context of democracy. The events of hope, resistance and

¹¹⁶ The Bundeli Other is also the subject of their journalism. The issues which affect Dalitbahujan women, do not usually get space in mainstream media.

survival against socio-economic odds help us understand the question: what it means to report like the Dalitbahujan women? The field of reporting in rural or small-town spaces is quite gendered in nature. It suffers with the disparity of socio-economic status and the exclusion of women.¹¹⁷ In this case, it is challenging for the Dalitbahujan women reporters to negotiate with factors like caste, class, gender, region, and religion in the field of reporting. Several external and internal forces challenge the Dalitbahujan women reporters in the field of rural journalism. I discuss these forces in the next sections.

It is important to answer what it means to be a Dalitbahujan man and woman in modern India at first to deal with the question above. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report entitled, “Gender wise Victims under Crimes against SCs during 2014-2019,” shows an alarming increase in the total number of crimes against Dalits from “forty-two thousand, two hundred-sixty” in 2014 to “forty-seven thousand, eight hundred sixty-seven” in 2019.¹¹⁸ The crimes against Dalit women, in particular, have increased from “eight thousand, nine hundred seventy-nine” in 2014 to “twelve thousand, three hundred-thirty” in 2019 (“Gender wise”). More than three thousand Dalit women suffered from sexual violence and rape in 2019 (“Gender wise”). National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) register more than two thousand cases of harassment against Dalits and Muslims, including mob lynching, between 2016 and 2019 (Rawat).¹¹⁹

In a survey, “The Situation of Dalit Rural Women,” published by the Navsarjan Trust, an NGO based on Dalit rights, highlights the main factors behind the increasing violence targeted

¹¹⁷ Nimmagadda, Bhargav. “Discussion.” Message to Dipak Barkhade. 13 Jan. 2021. Email.

¹¹⁸ “Gender wise Victims under Crimes against SCs during 2014-2019.” *National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)*, [ncrb.gov.in/crime-in-india-table-contents?field_date_value \[value\] \[year\]=2019&fieldselectadditional _table _ti_value=All&items_per_page=All](https://ncrb.gov.in/crime-in-india-table-contents?field_date_value[value][year]=2019&fieldselectadditional_table_ti_value=All&items_per_page=All). Accessed 23 Oct. 2020.

¹¹⁹ Rawat, Mukesh. “With forty three percent share in the hate crimes, UP still most unsafe for minorities, Dalits.” *India Today*, 19 July 2019, indiatoday.in/india/story/dalits-minorities-harassment-attack-cases-uttar-pradesh-india-1570980-2019-07-19. Accessed 23 Oct. 2020.

against the Dalit women in India.¹²⁰ The survey shows that Dalit women are subject to a subordinate position. They live with a social status at the bottom of caste-hierarchy, class-hierarchy, and gender-hierarchy (1). A Dalit woman is discriminated against for belonging to ‘impure’ or ‘untouchable’ castes. She is landless. She faces sexual violence by the male inside the home and outside it as well. She is prone to social harassment, sexual abuse, humiliation, naked parading, rape, and murder (1).

In UP, the recent case of brutal gang rape and assault against Manisha, a nineteen years old Dalit woman by the men from the dominant Thakur castes caught the attention of people nationwide. The UP police showed utter insensitivity as it was “politicized” by the state against the victim’s family and in the interest of the accused.¹²¹ It was not easy for the journalists to cover the reporting of the case against the state police in UP. It is found that the Dalits could not hold protests in the district. The UP state declared “Section 144 of the CrPC” in the entire district.¹²² This sent a message of legal action against any lawful protest and could be charged with a case of sedition.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters counter multiple challenges that are rooted in the inter-relations of caste, class, gender, language, ethnicity, region, and a neo-literate status—a range of factors that explain what it means to be the Dalitbahujan women reporters. I elaborate on these forms of challenges in the next sections. The multiple forms of oppression explain the reality of the Dalitbahujan women reporters. The latter use various strategies to tackle these forms by creatively constituting an ‘alternative’ public.

¹²⁰ “The Situation of Dalit Rural Women.” Navsarjan Trust, ohchr.org/documents/hrbodies/cedaw/ruralwomen/fedonavsarjantrustids.pdf. p. 1. Accessed 23 Oct. 2020.

¹²¹ Shergill, Jaiveer. “Hathras case and its aftermath shine a light on need to sensitise police to its role in society.” *Indian Express*, 21 Oct. 2020, [indian express.com/article/opinion/columns/hathras-case-police-reforms-india-6811520/](https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/hathras-case-police-reforms-india-6811520/). Accessed 29 Oct. 2020. Tankha, Raghav. “UP Police Must be Investigated for Attempting to Shield Hathras Accused.” *The Wire*, 3 Oct. 2020, [the wire.in/law/hathras-case-uttar-pradesh-police-shielding-accused](https://the-wire.in/law/hathras-case-uttar-pradesh-police-shielding-accused). Accessed 29 Oct. 2020.

¹²² Jeenger, Kailash. “UP’s Handling of Hathras Case in Violation of UN Convention on Racial Discrimination.” *The Wire*, 11 Oct. 2020, thewire.in/law/hathras-uttar-pradesh-violation-un-convention. Accessed 29 Oct. 2020.

The Rule of Violence

To report like the Dalitbahujan women is a matter of a great deal of courage. Naqvi suggests that it is not easy for the Dalitbahujan women to report in Chitrakoot and Banda. It is “normal” to find armed gangs, dacoits, politicians, and the bureaucracy all in a nexus there (36). The presence of the feudal structure dominates over constitutional laws in the form of “*benami* properties (acquired under assumed names)” (36). In her book, *Daughters of the Earth*, Smita Tewari Jassal notes that the Brahmin and Thakur castes, who are five percent of the population, “own hundred to five hundred *bigahs* (one acre is equal to two and half *bigahs*)” land illegally in the villages of Bundelkhand (151). They register the land in the name of agricultural laborers, peasants, and the landless without giving the latter any rights over the land. The practice of cultivation based on “crop-sharing arrangement” continues in the villages (151). The following reports published in *Khabar Lahariya* throw light on the domination of upper-castes and the risk factor against the Dalitbahujan women involved in civic journalism.

The Dalitbahujan men and women face physical violence for reclaiming land. If they take the issue to courts in order to fight against upper-caste men, justice comes too late. Kumbha Kol of Manjhgava village won the case in court against Ramesh, the local *dabang* (the dominant castes) after fifteen years.¹²³ He remained landless throughout this period time owing to Ramesh’s dominance. A Dalit woman, Puniya of Ahmatganj village was thrashed with a stick by the local *dabang* because she cut grass on her three *bigah* land.¹²⁴ She visited the police station frequently but remained landless for three years. She lived under threat because she complained to the police. The government of UP distributes *patta* land on the lake-beds to the Dalit farmers in Mahoba. Lila and Nathu of Bashari village plowed the *singhara* (water chest-nuts) worth fifty

¹²³ I give full citation to the reports published in *Khabar Lahariya* in footnotes and enlist them in the appendix in the end of this chapter. “Jitve ke Baad na Mila Kabja” [Kumbha Kol Won the Case but did not Get his Possession]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.25, 15-29 Feb. 2004, p.6.

¹²⁴ “Kabja karis Dhamki Det” [The Upper-caste Men Control Lands and Threaten Lives]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.50, 1-15 March 2005, p.4.

thousand rupees.¹²⁵ But the upper-castes captured their production forcefully. They also demoralize the farmers by mixing poison in the lake.¹²⁶ A Brahmin landlord named Raghu Raj seized thirty-five *bigah* lands of a Dalit family in Khichdi village.¹²⁷ He controlled the land with the help of *daroga* (police), *lekhpal*¹²⁸ and the woman Pradhan (the village head) after the Dalit farmers grew the crops.

The reports entitled “*Patta Kare ma Mange Ghoos*,” [Demands Bribe for Patta Land]¹²⁹ “*Pradhan aur Ward Sadasya Lekhpal ke Khilaf Dihin Darkhas*,” [Pradhan and Ward Member Complained Against Lekhpal]¹³⁰ “*Lekhpal ke Laparvahi*,” [The Indifferent Lekhpal]¹³¹ and “*Lekhpal se Pareshan Maddai*” [People in Distress due to Lekhpal]¹³² mark the intervention of Dalitbahujan women reporters against injustice to Dalitbahujan men and women by the *lekhpal*. The Dalitbahujan women reporters suggest to the local men and women to maintain documents as evidence against such violence. They check the documents provided by the poor before questioning the administration.¹³³

¹²⁵ “Talab ma Kabja” [The Upper-caste Men Control the Lake]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 270, 9-15 Dec. 2013, p.1.

¹²⁶ “Milain Talab ma Jahar” [The Upper-caste Men Mix Poison in the Lake]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.18, 22 Oct. 2008, p. 2.

¹²⁷ “Dekhais Dabangai” [The Upper-caste Men Dominate]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.13, June 2003, p.6.

¹²⁸ The *lekhpal* is a local administrator of the blocks. He handles the post of registrar and keeps records of *khatauni* (list of village lands with details of distribution and assessment) and the list of *chakbandi* (division of holdings) in the villages at the block level.

¹²⁹ “Patta Kare ma Mange Ghoos” [The Official Demands Bribe for Patta Land]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.21, 15-31 Aug. 2006, p.3.

¹³⁰ “Pradhan aur Ward Sadasya Lekhpal ke Khilaf Dihin Darkhas” [Pradhan and Ward Member Complained Against Lekhpal]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.216, 8-14 Oct. 2012, p.2.

¹³¹ “Lekhpal ke Laparvahi” [The Indifferent Lekhpal]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.23, 16-31 Feb.2008, p.6.

¹³² “Lekhpal se Pareshan Maddai” [People in Distress due to Lekhpal]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.56, 1-8 Oct. 2011, p.2.

¹³³ “Devais Kabja” [Fought for the Possession]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.57, 16-31 Feb. 2008, p.6.

The headlines with the titles, “*Pandra Sal Bad Mila Kabja*” [Got the Possession after Fifteen Years]¹³⁴ and “*Jitve ke Baad na Mila Kabja*” [Won the Case but did not Get the Possession] show that the distribution of *patta* land by the administrators is a futile practice against the predominance of the upper-castes in the villages. The Dalitbahujan households are distributed a small piece of arable land. This becomes a matter of struggle to live with dignity on such a meager piece of land. These lands mostly are uncultivable, ‘assigned’ lands, surplus lands (Swaminathan 14).

Against this background and unlike the standard public, the Dalitbahujan women reporters reintroduce Dalitbahujan icons from Dalit literature. They employ a polemic of Lalit (upper-caste) versus Dalit (‘lower-caste’) in the aesthetics of journalism. *Khabar Lahariya* published the poem, “*Thakur ka Kunwa*” [The Well of Thakur] penned by Omprakash Valmiki. Valmiki describes the social crisis in rural Bundelkhand in this poem. He exposes the dominance of Thakur (the rural elite), who control the farming lands in the village. He questions the deprivation of Dalits in the lines as follow:

The Thakur owns the well and
the water in it.
Farm and orchids belong to him only.
He dominates the street too.
What do we own?
Do we belong to the village?
the city? and
the nation? (7)¹³⁵

¹³⁴ “Pandra Sal Bad Mila Kabja” [Got the Possession after Fifteen Years]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.5, 15-31 Dec. 2005, p.3.

¹³⁵ Valmiki, Omprakash. “Thakur ka Kunwa” [The Well of Thakur]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.226, 22-28 April, 2013, p.7.

Valmiki draws attention to the alienation of landless Dalitbahujan men and women in the mentioned lines. *Khabar Lahariya* includes another piece of poetry from Dalitbahujan literature, “*Jo Ulaz kar Rah Gayi Filo ke Jal me*” [The Unresolved State of Lands in the Web of Files] by Adam Gondvi (1947-2011). Gondvi highlights the fractured reality in the narrative of socio-economic reforms for the marginalized communities in rural Bundelkhand. He expresses his dismay at the role of intermediaries in the administration in the lines as follow:

Unresolved in the web of files,
how many years will the village take to see
a light? (7)¹³⁶

Gondvi presents an unromantic view of the plight of landless Dalitbahujan peasants. He too counts the land distribution futile because the dominant castes control big acres of land in nexus with the local village head, the registrar of the village’s land accounts, and the police.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters intervene in the situation by covering local stories and pain of the Dalitbahujan community against the usurpation of lands by the bullying dominant groups. They move beyond journalism. They not only cover the issue of land rights but also visit the villages to investigate the cases of land usurpation. The Dalitbahujan men and women cannot afford to visit the court due to poverty and threat from the upper-castes. They face stay orders in many cases. This situation leaves them under extra pressures of survival.

It is quite challenging for Dalitbahujan women reporters to deal with the dominance of the upper-castes in the social/public spaces. The attack on women is instrumental in spreading fear among the Dalitbahujan community (“The Situation” 1). The police, the *lekhpal*, the village head, the administration are influenced by local upper-caste men. The Dalitbahujan women demonstrate an example of struggle against these injustices. In Chapter 4, I shall focus on the stories of *himmati mehariya* (courageous women) to explain how Dalitbahujan women take over

¹³⁶ Gondvi, Adam. “Jo Ulaz kar Rah Gayi Filo ke Jal me” [Unresolved Lands in the Web of Files]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.229, 15-21 May 2013, p.7.

the issue of subjugation of women from their communities. Here, I elaborate the features of Dalitbahujan women reporters against the rule of violence in the field of rural journalism.

The Dalitbahujan Women Reporters' Everyday Politics

The Dalitbahujan women reporters mark the rise of Dalit Mahila Samiti (DMS)¹³⁷ in Chitrakoot and Banda and Sahjani Siksha Kendra in Lalitpur. They focus on the coverage of stories of violence against the Dalit women. The Dalit women volunteers of Sahjani Siksha Kendra and twenty-eight other NGOs, were attacked by Sahab Singh Yadav in Lalitpur. The attack caused injury to the head of one of the Dalit women workers. Yadav was vengeful because the Dalit women volunteers protested against the trafficking of women and girls by his family members. *Chappal pratha* (the practice of untouchability) is very much in practice in the said district. Unlike the standard public, the Dalitbahujan women reporters are apprehensive about the nature of the state. They make sure that the victims act against injustice and get required support from the state by doing a full coverage of the story. Dalit women volunteers wrote to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). The NHRC commanded the Secretary and Director General of Police (DGP) of UP to prepare a report on the practices of untouchability, the very low gender ratio, and sexual violence against Dalitbahujan women in Lalitpur.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters cover the protest of DMS against caste panchayats in the villages of Bundelkhand. The caste panchayats believe itself above the law.¹³⁸ They consider it a crime to practice exogamy. The Dalitbahujan women reporters find that the members of caste panchayat killed many girls for choosing life-partners outside their caste status. They note an increase in the number of caste killings. They question the stand of state and the central

¹³⁷ The DMS is a branch of Vanangana. It works for gender justice for the Dalitbahujan women. The Dalit women activists of DMS fight against gender violence on Dalitbahujan women and the practice of untouchability in the implementation of MNREGA and other government schemes. They are active in the seventy villages of Chitrakoot district. "Lalitpur ko Mila Jativad par Notice" [Lalitpur Received Notice for Casteism]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.244, 17-23 June 2016, p.1.

¹³⁸ "Jati Panchayat aur Niyav" [Caste Panchayat and Justice]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.99, 22-28 July 2010, p.8.

government that stood in silent support of these killings. The caste panchayats claim themselves to be the guardians of *shadi ke sanskriti* (the culture of marriage).

The reports noted above draw attention to the overt violation of human rights in the districts of Bundelkhand. The Dalit women activists and Dalitbahujan women reporters register their entry in the public space but not without the risk of retaliation from the upper-caste men. In this situation, to report like Dalitbahujan women reporters means fighting against the events of everyday violence against Dalit women in the public domain.

In an interview, “Experiences while Reporting—Men and Threats,” Meeta and Reva, the Dalitbahujan woman reporters share their experience of masculine space. Meeta visited Lokhadi village alone on the request of a man (0:11-1:26).¹³⁹ The man sought her help to deal with the difficulties of his wife. When Meeta reached the man’s home, he invited her inside. She denied at first. She argued that she was a woman. She came to his home alone. But she entered after his insistence. She found his wife asking her to escape the man because her man tried to shut the door with dubious intents. She escaped with an excuse of going out to take her bag that had the copies of *Khabar Lahariya*. From then on, she is determined to avoid such traps from men. The men seek their advances deceitfully in the hinterland. The Dalitbahujan women reporters find it quite challenging to overcome such moments in the field of journalism.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters are threatened many times by men for publishing stories against them. The coverage of stories exposes the complicit role of the officials in cases of corruption. In another instance, Reva visited Markundi village to get the details from the District Magistrate (DM) about his visit to the same village (1:27-2:16).¹⁴⁰ She found that there was an issue with the Widow Pension Scheme in the village. The women of Markundi came to Reva and requested her to write about their exploitation by the Bank Manager. Reva published a

¹³⁹ “Experiences while Reporting—Men and Threats.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Khabar Lahariya, 10 July 2013, [youtu.be.com/watch?v=Y6bFibrhxyQ&list=PLbuagTG3WThNZg2Wi5SyW-yw1eJdjI2&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6bFibrhxyQ&list=PLbuagTG3WThNZg2Wi5SyW-yw1eJdjI2&index=2). Accessed 29 Oct. 2020.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

story against the bank official. The women of Markundi showed the story to the DM after it was published in *Khabar Lahariya*. The Bank Manager persuaded Reva to burn all copies of the newspaper with a promise of bribe. But Reva was adamant to expose the truth. The local upper-caste male network cannot imagine Dalitbahujan women reporters deconstructing the deep seated image of women as vulnerable and as beyond their control. I explain, in the next section, how patriarchy has culturally processed information about the identity of Dalitbahujan women in the rural landscape and situate it in the historical context.

The Local Context of the Dalitbahujan Women Reporters' Assertion

The Dalitbahujan women reporters make their entry into the public space with a strong determination against the images which are historically encoded in the Brahminical institutions. This offers a counter to the consolidation of the cultural metaphors legitimized onto the body of a Hindu woman. Charu Gupta, in her book, *The Gender of Caste Representing Dalits in Print*, illustrates the “injustices of caste hierarchies,” in the institutionalization of the identity of Dalit women in the Hindi public sphere (53). These injustices are also marked in the misrepresentation or criminalization of the identity of Dalit women. The upper-caste Hindu male reformers served the Dalit community, argues Gupta, a particular discourse to aspire an ideal of a “subservient” figure like Shabari, an Adivasi woman figure of Ramayana (54). Hence, the marginalization of “grotesque” figures like Surpankha has been legitimized in the discourse around “purity” and “pollution” (73-76). The upper-caste male and the patriarchal state legitimize caste and gender relations that work against the dignity of Dalitbahujan women.

Though differently, the Dalitbahujan women are represented as “witches” in the traditional culture of Bundelkhand. In her report, “Chudel Police ke Khel pe Sangita ka Karara Prahar,” [Sangita Lambasts the Police on Playing Witch-Hoax] Sangita Bundelkhandi speaks about a story of rumor-mongering published by the local police in Bundelkhand (00:46-1:00).¹⁴¹ She criticizes the unprofessional and biased Banda police which spread the rumor of *chudel*

¹⁴¹ “Chudel Police ke Khel pe Sangita ka Karara Prahar” [Sangita Lambasts the Police on Playing Hoax of Witch]. *YouTube*, uploaded by Khabar Lahariya, 10 Aug. 2018, [youtube.com/watch?v=ICnzZnoP6E4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICnzZnoP6E4). Accessed 24 Oct. 2020.

(witch) on social media. A team of Dalitbahujan women reporters find that the people of Banda believe in the existence of witches in the form of *nagin* (snake) and this is connected to the misrepresentation of women's identity on TV serials (6:15-7:28). Sangita observes that the Dalitbahujan women are tonsured and expelled from their villages (7:30-8:00). People blame certain women for playing *tona totka* (magic) on small children. Sangita fights against such practices of abuse against Dalit women with the help of law and police (8:24-9:21).

In her article, "*Mukhya Dhara se Kati Hasiye par Dalit Aurate*," [The Dalit Women on the Margin of Mainstream] Anita Bharti, a Dalit feminist, writer, and activist argues that Dalit women suffer social violence at a greater intensity because they are accused of being witches (4). Dalit women suffer severe physical abuse and mistreatment on this account. The custom of *dayan pratha* (witch-hunt), the *bedani pratha* (village sex-worker who is said to be dedicated to the god/goddess), and the caste-occupation of cleaning the defecation add to the brutal forms of violence against Dalit women's bodies. The Dalit women are immolated alive, stripped naked in the street, and ill-treated on a daily basis. The Dalitbahujan women reporters highlight the demonization of the identity of Dalit women in the local context and strongly register their protest through *Khabar Lahariya*.

Unlike the standard public, the Dalitbahujan women reporters challenge the historical perceptions of casteist patriarchy that leads to the brutalization of Dalit women's bodies. The Dalitbahujan women reporters make use of the cultural resources to expose the caste-gender violence. Bundelkhand is largely an agricultural society. Regressive forms of superstition, as mentioned in the above description, are practiced to target the Dalitbahujan women inhumanly. This has invisibilized their role as farmers. It is believed that only men possess the right to the land and for farming. For example, people believe that if women plow the land, it can beget drought and it can make the gods ashamed; the gods can be forced to bring rain if the women are stripped naked and made to plow the land at night.¹⁴² These and other local practices are used as a tactic to grab land from Dalit women in the villages ("The Situation" 1). The Dalitbahujan

¹⁴² "Mahila bhi Kisan hai" [Women also Deserve the Status of a Farmer]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.219, 22 March-7 Apr. 2013, p.3.

women reporters argue that the women are barred from reclaiming economic mobility. They demand recognition for women as the tillers of land and due respect for them as women farmers. They publish the story of Dalitbahujan women who plow the land against such beliefs with some success.

Jassal identifies Dalitbahujan women as “poor peasants, agricultural laborers, and the landless” in the villages of Banda and Chitrakoot (148). The women activists were critical of the new land ceilings act, redistribution of land, and legislation to secure the rights of the tenants in the 1970s (144-147). Dalitbahujan families are given access to the land through “*patta* ownership” or “tenancy” (150). But they are given *patta* ownership through forced mediation, and on the condition that they will share crop although it was their land, money, and labor (170). The suppression of Dalitbahujan families in the feudal society place the status of Dalitbahujan women at the bottom of socio-economic hierarchy (170). It deprives them from rights to their own land and productive resources. However, Jassal does not detail about the impact of oppressive system of the family on the Dalitbahujan women.

Dalitbahujan women are subjugated within their home and community as well. For instance, Krishna, a Dalit woman faced opposition from her brother-in-law because she claimed her share in the family property after her husband’s death.¹⁴³ She fought the case in the court and got justice. However, her brother-in-law threatened to shoot her. Krishna could not withstand the threat to her life and she was forced to give up her right to the property. In a similar case, the father of Semdevi and Rampati of Barcha village left thirty-five *bigah* land in their name.¹⁴⁴ But they were stopped by their cousin from plowing the land. For eleven years, they were forced to spend three hundred rupees a week for attending the prosecution at the court in Banda. They lived with a fear of insecurity. The Dalitbahujan women are oppressed by their family members mostly after losing their husband or father. They are forced to spend money on fighting cases which take a long period and put them in severe crisis.

¹⁴³ “Ka Mor Adhikar nai Ay” [Don’t I have My Right]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.19, 30 Nov. 2003, p.6.

¹⁴⁴ “Baap ke Jamin ma Nahi Mile Kabja” [Does not Get Control on the Land of Father]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 178, 1-7 Apr. 2012, p.4.

The women are not recognized as farmers despite them working hard in the fields and household. The editorial, “*Karj ka Boz Dhoti Aurate*,” [The Burden of Debt on Women] highlights the cases of suicides among women farmers in Bundelkhand.¹⁴⁵ It mentions a survey by Bhasha Sinh, a mainstream literacy and media feminist (12). Sinh completed a survey in Bundelkhand. According to her survey, the distress of debt in the families indirectly results in domestic violence on women. The distressed male farmers express their anger on women in their families. The debt affects not an individual but the whole family. It shows that thirty-five women committed suicide against a total of one hundred ten suicides in 2011. When the men are forced to migrate to the city to earn, their wives are left to listen to the taunts of the upper-caste money-lenders.

Reclamation of land is one of the crucial issues in the empowerment of women. In her article, “*Aurate ki Jamin par Hak ki Jamini Hakikat*,” [Ground Reality of Women’s Right to the Land] Swati Mathur presents the case of Kerala to explain the significance of land ownership by women (5). She notes that seven percent of the women faced domestic violence because they owned land but forty-nine percent of women suffered the same because they were landless. She argues that if women are guaranteed land rights, the developmental scheme for welfare and economic transformation of women would be automatic. The question of ownership of land is crucial to safeguard the security of women in general and the security of Dalitbahujan women in particular. Land is an important premise where the dominant castes control huge stakes in the economic and cultural context.

As seen in the news reports and writings, Dalitbahujan women reporters intervene against the cases of exclusion of Dalitbahujan women from their right to land and property. It is also clear that Dalitbahujan women reporters rise against violence and misrepresentation of Dalitbahujan women.

¹⁴⁵ “*Karj ka Boz Dhoti Aurate*” [The Burden of Debt on Women]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.210, 8-15 Dec. 2012, p.12.

The Dalitbahujan Women Reporters as the Emergent Voices

Unlike the standard public, the Dalitbahujan women reporters locate the experience of humiliation in the politics of marginalization across caste, gender and ethno-linguistic minority. They represent the entry of the subjugated voices, who have been suppressed and excluded from the knowledge domain by the nation-state as well as practices in the local realms. They engage in discursive practices to challenge the boundaries which are demarcated by oppressive forces of the state and of casteist practices. They assert against the logic of the nation-state and challenge its power-dynamics. This can be seen in the use of Bundeli as the language of the newspaper.

Naqvi narrates the perspectives of Dalitbahujan women reporters in the use of Bundeli as a political tool. Initially, the Dalitbahujan women reporters were not convinced of using Bundeli to write. They internalized the ideology of the dominant Hindi public. They complained that the male gaze was intertwined with perceptions about their 'lower caste' status, gender identity and the identity of Bundeli language as '*dehati bhasha*' (village language) (70). They feared they would be looked down for the use of Bundeli in their newspaper. But then, they were convinced and negotiated with the dominance of Hindi by embracing Bundeli and proved their ability to access "the mainstream power structures" via Bundeli (70). The mainstream literacy feminists of Nirantar persuaded Dalitbahujan women reporters to take up the Bundeli 'other' as their source of power against the domination of Hindi (70). They use simple, local Bundeli for the writing of news content in *Khabar Lahariya* and at times also used Hindi that is comprehensible to a majority. They focus on understanding the psychological makeup of the local community in the hinterlands (70-76).

Naqvi discusses her experience with the Dalitbahujan women in the journey of news reporting. The Dalitbahujan women reporters engaged in the politics of language in a horizontal frame. They adopted a systematic "field-testing methodology" that included the Dalitbahujan women reporters and the local readers in the process of reading the news aloud (73). Secondly, they focused on the "look" of Bundeli language. They followed the "field-testing strategy" of making the readers speak and write Bundeli words (71). They found that the readers experienced a "disconnect" between the written Bundeli word and the spoken Bundeli word. Bundeli is

largely an oral language. It was very difficult to script Bundeli spoken in the villages of Chitrakoot and Banda. The spoken Bundeli followed “several inflections, which could only be scripted as conjoints” (71). The Dalitbahujan men and women were always troubled by “reading a conjoint” such as “*Swochat*” (to think) (73). Mainstream literacy feminists and Dalitbahujan women reporters decided to “minimize the use of conjoints” (73). They decided to use a simple alternative, “*Sochat*” for “*Swochat*”. Secondly, they followed the reading habit of women and chose to script two separate words/sounds like “*jaat hai*” “a single word” into “*jaathai*” (73). They dismantle the macro norms of linguistic hierarchies put forth by the standard public and move towards a politics of language that is accessible.

Bundeli thus becomes a site of power-play. Salma reveals to me the response of *Khabar Lahariya*’s middle-class readers.¹⁴⁶ She points out that Bundeli is respected by both *high-class ke log* (upper class) and *gaon ke log* (the people in the villages). She informs me that it is the *bich ke log* (the middle class) who remark negatively on the use of Bundeli language in *Khabar Lahariya*. “*Duniya to age badh rahi hai. Ap piche ki taraf la rahe hai*” (The world is progressing. You people are taking us back in time) is how they responded. Salma identifies the mainstream literacy and media feminists as the “upper class” in her usage of the category, *high-class ke log*. She attended training programs and found a section of upper-caste feminists open about using Bundeli as a tool of assertion and bringing change. She was reintroduced to the idea of Bundeli language during her training as a reporter. She embodies Bundeli in a political sense. She is able to express herself against the linguistic stigma in the villages. On the other hand, she discovers the *bich ke log* (middle class) indifferent and tensed about the use of Bundeli language in print. She debunks the nature of civility that is encoded in the outlook of the middle class. Unlike the Dalitbahujan women reporters, the middle class, in its aspiration for upward mobility, imitates the standard public that is caught, in its selfhood, with the ‘inferior-image’ of Bundeli language. Salma’s contemplation resonates with the views of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the formation of caste in its wholeness. Ambedkar writes in his essay, “Castes in India”:

¹⁴⁶ Salma. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 25 Oct. 2017.

If the Hindu society were a mere federation of mutually exclusive units, the matter would be simple enough. But Caste is a parcelling of an already homogenous unit, and the explanation of the genesis of Caste is the explanation of this process of parceling (6).

Ambedkar identifies caste as a cultural phenomenon. The Hindu society is a homogenized unity of caste and therefore of community and culture. The notion of this cultural community stands on the normative structure of the Hindi/Hindu public sphere. The middle-class viewers of *Khabar Lahariya* find the use of rural Bundeli antithetical to the cultural notion of progress. Having said this, I do not suggest a casteless notion of the Hindi public sphere. I do not suggest that either the standard public or the Dalitbahujan women reporters constitute a public by itself. I suggest that both exist within a generative system. The standard public's unified version of Bundeli entails a demarcation of Bundeli in high and low status. It encodes the Hindu ethics and values in a liberal-secular framework of public welfare. The Dalitbahujan women reporters do question the dominant practices of representation of a linguistic community by the means of mother-tongue. They conceptualize Bundeli language in the framework of empowerment of Dalitbahujan women who live in the hinterlands.

In his article, "A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization," the sociologist, M N Srinivas proposes that the Dalitbahujan communities experience the process of Sanskritization and upward mobility—social change—in complimentary terms (483). It is important to note his argument here. He speculates that Sanskritization or upward mobility among Dalitbahujan groups "results in harshness towards women" (484) and westernization is specific to Brahmins (490). Jaffrelot, in his article, "Sanskritization vs. Ethnicization in India," argues that the Dalits inherit the "sectarian" formation of identity to counter Brahmanism in north India (764). The Dalit public challenge caste from within the social system. When Srinivas argues that the attributes of Sanskritization are specific to the Dalitbahujan groups, he finds the experience of social change in the cultural context and hardly any in the structural context (490).

Salma's experience, it can be said, corresponds to Srinivas's theory but with a salient difference. She represents the sociological location of Dalitbahujan women, which is

heterogeneous. Her experience of Bundeli language is not solely from the political location of the mainstream literacy and media feminists, who organize the Dalitbahujan women into a homogenous category of the Dalitbahujan women reporters or, say, the 'alternative public'. In her article, "Caste in a Casteless Language," Rita Kothari argues that the 'Dalit' is usually constructed as a homogenous category (61). The writing of autobiography in Dalit literature marks a process of archiving the voices from the heterogeneous spaces in the public sphere while simultaneously constructing 'Dalit' as a homogenous category (60-61). Similarly, the Dalitbahujan women reporters, including Salma, speak from the heterogeneous locations. They disrupt the linguistic binaries in their archive of differences. In this sense, they speak of the social groups from 'below' or in horizontal frame which otherwise may be missed in the use of the homogenous categories such as '*high-class ke log*' (upper class) and '*bich ke log*' (the middle class), posited in binary opposition.

Pierre Bourdieu argues that the use of language is socially conditioned (10). He shows how the "guardians" of culture define language in terms of class values and dominate the notion of mother-tongue in the normative context (60). He finds both the systems of differences, linguistic and sociological, complimentary. He emphasizes to study them in terms of a mutual relationship (54). He argues that the "correctness"/"distinctness" in language is a condition assumed between the individual speakers and the institutions (60). Both the language of speakers and their culture is inseparable from that of the institutions (62).

The case of Salma marks a point of departure from the standard public. The media organization of the Dalitbahujan women reporters does not regard the insider/outsider binary as much as the standard public. Rather, it is concerned with the actual stakeholders in the political enactments of civic journalism. Salma is a drop out from school.¹⁴⁷ She is not very familiar with Bundeli either. But she has got the opportunity to become a rural news reporter in *Khabar Lahariya* and sustain her family with self-respect. In her interview with me, she recalls a response from one of the readers: "*Madam, ap bol ke bhi dikhao na jaise likhti ho. Ye ap hi log*

¹⁴⁷ Salma. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 25 Oct.2017.

likhti ho? Yakin nahi hota.” (Madam, since you write in Bundeli for the newspaper, you should speak in Bundeli too. Do you write by yourself in Bundeli? It is unbelievable). Salma reveals that the Bundeli speakers in villages read *Khabar Lahariya* happily. They are slightly amused with the use of Bundeli language in print. In her observation, the readers can mark the boundaries between the act of writing news in Bundeli and the act of speaking it in actuality. But they have not done so on the basis of claiming the class privilege and maintaining the status quo. The response of people reflects a feeling of distance (and respect) in the usage of ‘madam’ to address Dalitbahujan women reporters. But there is also a positive reflection. It is a matter of curiosity for the readers of *Khabar Lahariya* to relate with the Dalitbahujan women reporters. It indicates that the experience of people, who are at the margin, can be materialized in the Bundeli language. It is a matter of embracing Bundeli in a new form with a certain kind of openness.

A field-based approach to assist local readers is one of the significant features in the media enterprise of the Dalitbahujan women reporters. It establishes proximity between an ‘outsider’ like Salma and the Bundeli speakers at the grassroots. The standard public privileges the act of writing over the act of speaking. It maintains a clear hierarchical position in between writing and speech utterances. The Dalitbahujan women reporters counter this dominant notion of the standard public. They do not set any preconditions of literacy skills to accomplish the task of reporting. They have depended on the short-time course and training under the guidance of mainstream literacy and media feminists. In using Bundeli, and by not insisting on pre-requisite literary skills, they challenge the question of merit against the dominant standards of qualification to bring change both on technological and ideological grounds. They represent a socio-culturally challenged linguistic minority. For instance, in her show, “*Roobaru: Khabar Lahariya ki Sampadak Sangita Bundelkhandi se Khas Mulakat*,” [A Special Interview with Sangita Bundelkhandi] Bhasha Sinh interviews Sangita. She finds that Sangita has changed her surname from ‘Devi’ to ‘Bundelkhandi’. Sangita believes that she belongs to Bundelkhand and finds the identity of Bundelkhand quite strong (0:47-1:03).¹⁴⁸ She inverses the equation of power

¹⁴⁸ “*Roobaru: Khabar Lahariya ki Sampadak Sangita Bundelkhandi se Khas Mulakat*” [A Special Interview with Sangita Bundelkhandi, the editor of *Khabar Lahariya*]. *YouTube*, uploaded by NewsClickin, 7 Nov. 2019, [youtube.com/watch?v=GVdtR9fx4ig](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVdtR9fx4ig). Accessed 24 Oct. 2020.

between the identity of Sangita as a Dalit woman and as a woman representative of the entire linguistic region in her political strategy to change her last name. This move marks the role of the Dalitbahujan women reporters in mapping Bundelkhand on the political map of the region which is predominantly an upper-caste male-centric domain. In the act of renaming herself, Sangita counters the ideology of the mainstream linguistic movement. She foregrounds the aspirational outlook of Dalitbahujan women reporters and Dalitbahujan community in the vernacular domain of media space.

In his book, *The Politics of the Governed*, Partha Chatterjee discusses the nature of “political society” (38). He argues that the legitimacy of any modern state is contingent upon the fact that the voice of the people is heard (27). The question of recognition of the people’s identity is central. Chatterjee defines the notion of “political society” in terms of “split between elite politics and the subaltern politics” (40). He suggests that the latter is not as equipped as the elite or civil society in terms of holding a cultural capital (42). He points out that the subalterns are the “object of governmentality” (36).

The Dalitbahujan women reporters help us critically engage with Chatterjee’s arguments. These reporters are no longer objects of governmentality, but are consciously determining things for themselves, their lives and neighborhoods. I think what the Dalitbahujan women reporters are doing is this—to sensitize the entire system and society—and thereby challenge the nature of “political society” in their daily confrontation with the officials and dominant forces in Bundelkhand. They make an impact with their news. Being insiders to the community and region, they communicate relevant information to the people for their well-being. They are critical and grounded in their political consciousness and moral make-up. For instance, Heera argues that Tulsidas’s (1532-1623) *Ramacharitmanas* (Ramayana), the literary text hugely popular in central India, contains a large chunk of Bundeli words.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Jatav, Heera. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. Oct. 2017.

I believe such moments constitute the personal identity of the Dalitbahujan women reporters and local communities. These might help them mark their identity in multiple ways. I think the Dalitbahujan women reporters are involved in what Chatterjee terms ‘the politics of the governed’: “to give the empirical form of a population group the moral attributes of a community” (emphasis in the original 57). They capture, in Chatterjee’s words, “the everyday language of moral discourse” in *Khabar Lahariya* and civic journalism (10). The Dalitbahujan women reporters are constantly challenged by the dominant forces because they belong to the ‘lower castes’ and are from poor backgrounds. The use of Bundeli language in *Khabar Lahariya* adds to the stigma to their caste identity unlike the case of the standard public. The Dalitbahujan women reporters negotiate these challenges by striking an impact in the male dominated media space. Though a social minority, they thrive in Bundelkhand region, in the territory of men, held by caste based interests. I elaborate their role in the emergence of a new minority discourse in the following section.

Dalitbahujan Women Reporters as Harbingers of a New Minority Discourse

The Dalitbahujan women reporters form a minority in the discourse of public sphere. In a scene from documentary film on *Khabar Lahariya*, Amita Devi, one of the Dalitbahujan women reporters can be seen to report the story of Dalitbahujan women contestants in the local election. The video clip of the scene is published with the title, “Public Space and Reporting: Amita Follows Election Story,” and it illustrates her navigation as a single woman reporter through a crowd of male figures in the public.¹⁵⁰ She is the only woman to cover the local election amidst men all around her. The Indian media space is notorious for its underrepresentation of minorities. Rina Chandran notes that Kenneth J. Cooper, a reporter for the Washington Post could not find a single Dalit journalist in India in 1996, man or woman.¹⁵¹ There is no Dalit figure found among

¹⁵⁰ “Public Space and Reporting: Amita Follows Election Story.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Khabar Lahariya, 28 June 2013, [youtube.com/watch?v=fwC-7LiZsYw&list=PLbuagTG3WThNZg2wi5SyW-y_wvJeJdI2&index=3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwC-7LiZsYw&list=PLbuagTG3WThNZg2wi5SyW-y_wvJeJdI2&index=3). Accessed 24 Oct. 2020.

¹⁵¹ Chandran, Rina. “Report like a Dalit Girl: One Indian publication shows how.” *Firstpost*, 24 Jan. 2017, [firstpost.com/india/report-like-a-dalit-girl-one-indian-publication-shows-how-reuters-3218784.html](https://www.firstpost.com/india/report-like-a-dalit-girl-one-indian-publication-shows-how-reuters-3218784.html). Accessed 24 Oct. 2020.

three hundred odd senior figures in media, according to a 2006 survey (Chandran). According to P. Sainath, the utter indifference to ground issues adds to the vulnerability of a rural journalist.¹⁵² Sanjay Kumar counts the lack of transparency, “caste-consideration,” and silence by the cultural elite as the main factors behind the exclusion of Dalit voices in the Hindi mainstream media.¹⁵³ Against this background, the Dalitbahujan women reporters diversify the social identities, stories, and perspectives in the media space, which is largely dominated by the upper-caste/class male, to create an independent organization of women from diverse groups.

Sangita responds in detail about what it means for the Dalitbahujan women reporters to mark an entry in the Indian media space (“Splice” 00:15:42-00:18:34). Initially, she imagined media a world of male reporters—from upper-caste, urban, well-educated, and financially rich background. They also are usually affiliated to landowners or the political parties. Despite these issues, she has developed a sense of women’s community after joining *Khabar Lahariya*. She can grasp the reasons behind the exclusion of her Dalit community from the media space. The Brahminical media serves the story of male politicians or politics and of the cities. The distribution of job responsibilities is caste-specific, religion-specific, and gender-specific even in the big media houses that are run by male-owners. She does not call this a true diversity in the news media. She argues that the mainstream Hindi media is filled with advertisements and urban news. She advocates for the inclusion of news about villages to mainstream the news content itself.

Having observed fewer women media reporters from Dalitbahujan communities, Sangita criticizes the patriarchal prejudice for counting women *komal* (soft) or unfit for journalism (00:18:58-00:20:43). She refutes the idea that the women are the subject only of the domestic realm and could engage in *galat kam* (wrong deeds) if they worked ‘outside’. Sangita sees men talking about women with lot of prejudices. They reduce women to the events of love affairs and

¹⁵²Committee to Protect Journalists. *Dangerous Pursuit*, 2016, cpj.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CPJ-India-PDF-Done.pdf. Accessed 24 Oct. 2020.

¹⁵³Kumar, Sanjay. “Media me Dalit Dhundte rah Jaoge” [Your search for a Dalit in media will never end]. *Bhadas4Media*, 7 Feb. 2013, bhadas4media.com/old1/मीडिया-में-दलित-ढूँढते-रह/. Accessed 24 Oct. 2020.

elopement with the boys after moving outside their homes for work. She points out that there is a fear in men who believe women would capture the power in media space. She wants to diversify the media space by including women, not from the upper-castes alone but mainly from the “Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim, poor and *gramin*” (semi-literate) women—from “*hasiye pe rehne vali*” (the margin) (00:18:58-00:20:43). The mainstream male media, though dominant, does not show the will-power to cover the stories of Bundelkhand. Unlike the standard public, the content, the language and the entry of the Dalitbahujan women reporters in *Khabar Lahariya* are linked to each other in the context of diversity.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters narrate their understanding of minority in their experience of space as well. The section below highlights the spatial dimension in the constitution of an alternative public.

The Dalitbahujan Women Reporters’ Experience of Space

The Dalitbahujan women reporters represent Dalitbahujan communities in the hinterlands of Bundelkhand (Naqvi 29). They can’t help but walk three to six kilometres to visit men and women in the remote villages. They belong to the villages, which cannot be found on the map since there is no road connectivity. They walk through isolated spaces and jungles on feet. The Dalitbahujan women reporters endure the topographical features of the region. Bundelkhand is a drought-prone region (Jatav, “Chunotiyo” 3). The villages of the Dalitbahujan women reporters and the people are deprived of water, electricity, and other basic amenities. People rarely see officials visiting their villages. The Dalitbahujan women reporters reported from dense forest between 2004 and 2005 when the social environment was filled with the fear of a local “dacoit” named Dadua. They completed a survey of twenty-four villages on the issue of migration of people from Bundelkhand to the other parts of India since 2006. It is difficult for the mainstream media to report from these remote spaces.

The towns and villages of Bundelkhand can be understood as a space of gendered sociality enmeshed with caste in the Dalitbahujan women reporters’ collective experience of rural journalism. Their everyday mobility signifies an important documentation of the village as an entity stuck in time and space in a paradoxical sense. In her interview, “Journalists@Khabar

Lahariya,” Anita finds it crucial for a reporter to have her personal vehicle (2:00-2:20).¹⁵⁴ However, she has not got one with her. She is offered a lift by male reporters on their bike when she visits the sites for reporting in Mahoba. She expresses her dislike regarding male reporters offering her a ride. Moving through the roads in Mahoba, she experiences a spatial segregation in the male gaze. She knows that she is not equally privileged like the men whom she finds offering her a ride in a very charitable sense. She reflects on this contradiction between women and men and expresses her self-respect in rejecting the offers from men.

Bundelkhand as a space is marked by indicators of poverty, mal-nourishment and lowest literacy in the region (Naqvi 33-38). A minor issue such as the instalment of a hand pump makes a huge difference to the Dalitbahujan groups in their daily survival (39-41). In this background, the Dalitbahujan women reporters embody the thirst of the community for both water and communication. In solidarity with the mainstream literacy and media feminists, the Dalitbahujan women reporters redefine the village space as a site of social difference and prove it politically consequential (42-44). This is evident in the ideology and practices of the mainstream literacy and media feminists.

There are various scholarly positions on the identity of Dalit women. Social scientists discuss the implications of the multiple forms of discrimination which Dalit women experience and struggle. In the next section, I highlight the points which are particular to the “socio-constructionist” positions¹⁵⁵ to make my point on the multiple roles performed by the Dalitbahujan women reporters in rural journalism. I also discuss the main points on the debate around standpoint theory in relation to *Khabar Lahariya*.

¹⁵⁴“Journalists@Khabar Lahariya; Anita, Mahoba.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Khabar Lahariya, 11 June 2016, youtu.be/be/Lm-HETA4jtc. Accessed on 14 No. 2020.

¹⁵⁵ Shruthi Herbert notes that the “the social constructionist views come from the idea that social institutions and knowledge are created by actors within the system, rather than having any inherent truth on their own.” Herbert, Shruthi. “The Violence of Dalit Feminist Standpoint and Dalit Patriarchy.” *Round Table India*, 25 July 2020, [roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?Option=com_content &view=article&id=9969:the-violence-of-dalit-feminist-standpoint-and-dalit-patriarchy&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132](https://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?Option=com_content&view=article&id=9969:the-violence-of-dalit-feminist-standpoint-and-dalit-patriarchy&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132). Accessed 25 Oct. 2020.

The Dalit Feminist Standpoints (DFS) and the Dalitbahujan Women Reporters

Dalit Feminist Standpoint is a theoretical category that is strongly connected to the material lives and practices of Dalit women. In her article, “A Dalit Feminist Standpoint,” Rege argues that the non-Dalit feminists from the upper-castes can learn from Dalit feminists and contribute to the women’s movement in constructive ways.¹⁵⁶ She counters the theory of Gopal Guru, who in his article, “Dalit Women Talk Differently,” argues that it is logical for the Dalit women to talk differently with both the non-Dalit feminists and with Dalit male writers because feminism as a movement is primarily marked by an axis of difference (81-85). He makes it clear that Indian women do face violence in a male dominant society but the intensity of violence in the cases of atrocities against the Dalit women demand our attention to the need of Dalit women to talk differently. He adds that the caste violence against Dalit women by upper-caste men and women is a daily issue (82). The relationship between Dalit women and upper-caste men and women reveals many contradictions. The patterns of caste and sexual violence on Dalit women are eschewed in manifestations of the social relationships. He finds these relations contradictory because the non-Dalit feminists may fail to notice the caste factor, naturalize the poverty of Dalit women, and appropriate ‘Dalit’ identity in the politics of solidarity (82). Guru argues that it is legitimate for Dalit women to claim autonomy in feminist politics.

Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana extend the thesis of Guru, in their article, “Problem for a Contemporary Theory of Gender.” They argue that for the Dalit woman to be a “subject” is difficult (234). They explain the factors behind the invisibility of the ‘lower’ caste bodies in the public sphere. The visibility of “upper-caste, middle caste/class female respectability” has been achieved at the cost of erasures of expression of Dalit and Muslim women (236). The gender ideology in India resorts dominantly to a legal procedural basis (235). This is evident in the upper caste/class women’s alliance with the “rioting men” against the Mandal Commission in the 1980s (238-241). Tharu and Niranjana argue that the upper-caste notion of sexuality is not inclusive of the ‘lower-caste’ men. This reversely reinforces upper and middle-class women’s

¹⁵⁶ Rege, Sharmila. “A Dalit Feminist Standpoint.” *India Seminar*, no. 47, Nov. 1998, pp.47-52. india-seminar.com/2018/710/710_sharmila_rege.htm. Accessed 25 Oct. 2020.

“right to purity.” It normalizes the atrocities against Dalit women by the upper caste men (242-243).

The Dalitbahujan women reporters of *Khabar Lahariya* were determined to fight back against the odds in life, including their neo-literate status. Sangita did not know what the terms, “media” “*akhbar*” “*paper*” etc. meant before joining *Khabar Lahariya* (“Splice” 00:16:28-00:16:43). It is twenty years since she has been working as a Dalitbahujan woman reporter. She does not find higher education a mandatory requirement for Dalitbahujan women to become a reporter like her. The Dalitbahujan women reporters can finish their schooling after becoming part of *Khabar Lahariya*. Many of them knew to write only their name and the name of their village. Some have passed the seventh grade, tenth grade and twelfth grade in their journey as reporters in *Khabar Lahariya*. They are enabled in this journey to script reports and send them to the editor. At a personal level, it is a big achievement for the Dalitbahujan women reporters to join journalism (00:39:31-00:40:00). I shall discuss the impact of *Khabar Lahariya* on the lives of its reporters at the end of the chapter.

In the article, “*Apni Awaz main Banaye apna Akhbar*,” [Build your Newspaper in your Voice] one of the mainstream media feminists (the article is published anonymously) writes about her experience of training neo-literate Dalitbahujan women of Bundelkhand in the field of rural journalism (4). The Dalitbahujan women, who were selected for a six-month training in rural journalism, included one apprentice, two were twelfth standard passed and others were schooled between 7th to 9th standard. Most of them were married at an early age. With *Khabar Lahariya*, they came out of their houses for the first time after marriage. Many were young mothers who had to listen to the trainers while suckling their babies at the same time. They wrote, edited, photographed, designed, and distributed *Khabar Lahariya* in the villages by themselves. Each reporter became the voice of her community and a part of the collective enterprise. Where and how can we place the solidarity between the mainstream literacy and media feminists and the Dalitbahujan women reporters in such a scenario?

The Dalitbahujan women reporters claim autonomy to some extent. *Khabar Lahariya* writes about the Dalit women’s demand for relative autonomy in the article published by Anita

Bharti. Bharti critiques the women's movement and argues that the mainstream women's movement has not included the issues of untouchability faced by the Dalit women, including the water crisis and the entry of Dalit women into temples (6). She illustrates the exclusion of Dalit women with the example of Mayavati, a political leader of Dalit community in north India. The upper-castes mock Mayavati despite her achievement as the first Dalit Chief Minister in UP. The Dalit woman leader is abused and mocked, which indicates the disrespect Dalit women face in Indian society. The upper-caste women too practice caste discrimination against Dalit women in their day to day interactions. The Dalit women are not given due recognition as woman writers in the mainstream. Bharti marks the emergence of Dalit feminism to tackle the issues of brutal violence and humiliation on Dalit women in both rural and urban communities. It is important for the Dalit women activist to counter the caste-system among the non-Dalit women based on autonomous groups. It is also crucial for them to achieve recognition as writers in the mainstream.

The anonymous mainstream literacy and media feminist acknowledges in her article that rural journalism is equally new for both the Dalitbahujan women and upper-caste women media trainers like her (4). There is no single institution of journalism in the rural sphere. But thousands of journalists pass out from such institutions in the cities. The experience of Dalitbahujan women reporters and the kind of locales they work in, are distinct from their *anubhav* (experience), *pusthbhoomi* (location), and *vaishvik nazariya* (global perspective) in the mainstream media (4).

The Dalitbahujan women reporters see that they claim a relative autonomy in the coverage of events of solidarity from the mainstream literacy and media feminists. Four organizations held a meeting following the vision of Savitri bai Phule on 14th February 2012.¹⁵⁷ The remembering of Dalitbahujan icons is one of the important features in the manifestation of Dalit feminist standpoints. The vision of "Jotirao-Savitri" is based on an "institutional network" of schools for Dalitbahujan girls (Narake 11). Both believed in "vocational and trade-oriented" education for boys and girls according to their opinion expressed in an 1852 report (15). The

¹⁵⁷ "Gramin Vipattio ki Nishaniya" [Signs of Rural Obstacles]. *Khabar Lahariya*, vol.1, no.51, 6-12 Feb. 2016, p.8.

memoirs written by Balwant Sakharam Kolhe describes Savitribai as a woman with “immense courage” (17). She was discouraged by upper-castes for teaching Dalitbahujan girls. She compared “the stones of cow dung” thrown at her hatefully with flowers (17). It can be said that the mainstream literacy and media feminists are inspired by the Phuleite model in assisting Dalitbahujan women reporters. One of the organizations, Dynamic Action Group Organization (DAGO) appealed to Dalit women to achieve their *pehchan* (identity) and demonstrate *himmat* (courage) against the dominating forces.¹⁵⁸ The mainstream literacy and media feminists represent the logic of capitalism in search of the new spaces or venues in the larger global framework. In this background, to report like the Dalitbahujan women reporters with a Dalitbahujan identity depends on the strategies to speak out in solidarity. How do then Dalitbahujan women reporters fit into the ecology of NGOs, mostly led by the non-Dalitbahujan women activists in Bundelkhand?

In his article, “The Idea of India: ‘Derivative, Desi and Beyond,’” Gopal Guru notes that the upper-caste intellectuals have dominantly engaged in the making of civil society and public sphere. Chatterjee categorizes the intellectual engagement of the upper-caste as a “derivative” discourse (36). He contextualizes it in terms of a nationalist counter against the colonization of the British (37). In his article, “One Step Outside Modernity,” MSS Pandian counters Chatterjee’s formulation. He argues that there has been a great deal of indifference to the question of caste by the upper-castes while engaging in the discourse of civil society, public sphere, and nationalism (1735). The upper-caste intellectuals do this by maintaining an authority over spiritual domain and spoke of “caste by other means” but not “on in its ‘own terms’” in the public sphere (1735-1737). They obscure their caste-relations with the groups oppressed by caste and gender. Pandian suggests that Dalit intellectuals by talking about caste openly and by envisioning an equal society, are indeed one step outside of these intellectual projects, but are one step ahead of the dominant discourses that define a particular modernity (1735). The phenomenon of caste is not found candid and relatable enough in the self-narrations of upper-

¹⁵⁸ “Samuh se Mili Jankari” [The Organization Help with the Information]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.177, 22-28 March 2008, p.9.

caste intellectuals. On the contrary, it is compelling for the lower-caste members to tell their stories with regard to their caste location, especially, in the rural sphere (1735).

The mainstream literacy and media feminists were in solidarity with the Dalitbahujan women reporters to produce *Mahila Dakiya*, and then, went on to publish *Khabar Lahariya*, a fortnightly newspaper. They provided *Khabar Lahariya* a mainstream look after it became marketable in 2009-2010 in the districts of Bundelkhand.¹⁵⁹ Associated with Nirantar, they began to move into the orbit of the print-materials which would suit the needs of Dalit and Kol women in the 1990s (Naqvi 32). The mainstream feminists came from upper-caste, university educated and urban background (26). But they were mobilized in the rubric of literacy movement into the rural territories of India (26). They created a group of neo-literate women volunteers, activists and news reporters from Dalitbahujan communities in carrying out *Mahila Dakiya* and *Khabar Lahariya*. As a new segment of elite women, they have established some proximity with ruralism.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters as the representatives of Dalitbahujan community are mediated through the mainstream literacy and media feminists. But their narratives are anchored in the histories of marginalized communities. They register their requirement for fundamental necessities such as education, health, employment/livelihood and participation in the decision making processes. They challenge the tradition of self-expression dominated by the upper-caste intellectuals in India. In Pandian's observation of the 'lower'-caste leaders such as "Periyar E V Ramasamy and Babasaheb Ambedkar" (1737), the Dalitbahujan women reporters can be credited as being one step ahead in the project of democratizing the Hindi-Hindu public sphere because they negotiate one step outside the notion of cultural progress, which is dominantly based on the standard public's imagination of Indian society.

I argue that the Dalitbahujan women reporters counter the politics of marginalization that can be understood in Pandian's terms. They maintain one step outside the Indian political thought by creating or embracing a new space in taking up Bundeli language as an Other or as a

¹⁵⁹ The copies of *Khabar Lahariya*, which I have collected, are published in color by 2009 onwards.

symbol of ‘lower-caste’ identity. They depart from Chatterjee in the function and action of their politics. They do not carry an “apologetic” notion of agency (Guru, “The Idea” 37). They represent the Dalitbahujan community whose stakes are not grounded in the ideas of the distant past but are at stake now, the present. They register their social confidence in the material realm, which is characterized by a daily struggle for fundamental necessities such as water, food, education, health, employment, and participation in the decision-making processes at the local level. This mode of departure by the Dalitbahujan women reporters from the dominant discourses has implications for the alternative public also to the standard public in remaking of the Hindi-Hindu public sphere. It signifies a materiality for the assertion of Dalitbahujan women in rural Bundelkhand.

Khabar Lahariya neither shares the rhetoric of victimhood which was employed in the reformist agenda in the late nineteenth century nor does it find Dalitbahujan women reporters as being instrumental in the nationalist politics of the early twentieth century (Naqvi 26). They deconstruct these dominant narratives (26). This suggests how Dalitbahujan women reporters posit an alternative to the “standard” public. They carve their own space claiming an identity of being a writer, editor, and news reporter. In this regard, I focus on news reports in *Khabar Lahariya* and examine how the activities of NGOs enable Dalitbahujan women in reclaiming their rights and space in the male dominant activities and spaces, how the governing systems respond to the needs of Dalitbahujan women, and how external factors have a bearing on the politics of (talking/naming) ‘difference’ in the larger enactment of women’s identity.

Mapping the Politics: *Khabar Lahariya* and the Dalitbahujan Women Reporters

In her article, “What Did They Mean by ‘Public’?” Francesca Orsini highlights the fact that the publication of reformist journals was at the centre of the political press. She is of the view that the reformist writings played an important role but it failed (415). It represented the ideas of *jati* (caste community) based on authority or consensus around the notion of what Hindi language, literature, and culture should look like in the constitution of a category called ‘public’ (415). The upper caste elites proposed a ‘neutral’ and ‘ideal’ space in the name of duty and love for the Hindu nation (410). Orsini cites the examples of periodicals and newspapers and also the

magazine, *Chand* (1922) for women against such an elitist background (413). She argues that the newspapers were pretty conscious of thinking about the common ‘mass’ and *Chand* represented “women *satyagrahis*” in the 1930s’ UP (412-413) (410). The newspapers included the issues of *kisan* (peasants) and workers in syntactically simple language (410). The latter was “close to the colloquial speech” (410). Orsini provides us an understanding of the “political vocabulary of modernity” (409). This vocabulary refers to the different attitudes and ways of attributing meaning to a particular notion of ‘public’ namely: normative and governmental (409).

In the context of *Khabar Lahariya*, it is independently handled by Dalitbahujan women reporters although not autonomously. The Dalitbahujan women reporters report within the constrained boundaries of governmentality. This helps them de-caste the state at some levels if not the social relations with the Dalit male within the family and the upper-caste/class men and women within the village community. By de-caste I mean the participation of Dalitbahujan women in the public spaces thereby deconstructing the notion of public that was heretofore accessible only to the upper-caste male. The Dalitbahujan women reporters act as watchdogs and check the accountability of administrators at the district level and block level. They cover the activities of local NGOs to and watch the government functionaries at the intermediate level. For instance, the local administration misused the distribution of resources under various welfare schemes. It did not always identify Dalitbahujan women reporters as the representative of the Dalitbahujan community in the political sense. An official, Lakshmi Sahoo of Karvi Nagar Palika argued that ‘woman’ was a caste neutral category and the distribution of rights had no caste angle.¹⁶⁰ This only proves how the category of women is seen as a homogenous category, often bypassing caste and class differences that mark them as separate throughout their lives.

The standard public shares a historical anxiety in the wake of the coming of Dalitbahujan women reporters and the new media in the contemporary Hindi public sphere. Firstly, the political ideology of *Khabar Lahariya*, enacted in the public spaces of district and *taluka* premises, governs the everyday lives of the Dalitbahujan women reporters. In this sense, the

¹⁶⁰ “Sammelan kai ke Dihis Jankari” [Women Organized Gathering and Gave Information]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.97, 8-14 July 2010, p.5.

Dalitbahujan women reporters politicize everyday life. They depart from the standard public. They do not organize literary gatherings in elite and enclosed spaces like Bundelkhand Riverside Hotel at Orchha. They cover local events and meetings between the functionaries, intermediaries, and the MLAs, whose responsibility is to manage ground issues in their respective constituencies. They focus issues such as literacy, employment, and women's participation in the local election. The Dalitbahujan women reporters' engagement with these ground issues reflects the markers of participatory democracy. They cover the news on developmental activities with the objective to reform the socio-economic conditions of Dalitbahujan women. I shall elaborate on the everyday politics of Dalitbahujan women reporters in Chapter 4.

Secondly, the Dalitbahujan bodies re-signify the public sphere. The Dalitbahujan women reporters engage in the spaces which are 'official', 'constitutional', 'legal', 'material', and 'public'. The events of *pad yatra* (march by walk), *mela* (festival), *pangat* (public sitting) *sammelan* (gathering), the performance of plays on the stage, *karyashala* (workshop), and conferences at other public spaces like village grounds, schools, halls, colleges, hotels, etc., are actively engaged by Dalitbahujan women in the blocks and villages of Bundelkhand districts. They mark a shaping of mind of Dalitbahujan women in a new culture of participation. The following examples draw attention to the mobilization of Dalitbahujan women in the coverage of local news by Dalitbahujan women reporters.

The Dalit Mahila Samiti (DMS) organized a three-day Dalit Mahila Sammelan against the practice of *chhooa-chhoot* (untouchability) and the cases of *Dalit hinsa* (violence against the Dalit community) during 11-13 February, 2006 at Ramayan mela ground in Chitrakoot.¹⁶¹ The Dalit women volunteers provided documents on the cases of atrocities against the Dalit men and women to Ramshankar Sahu, the local District Magistrate (DM), and Dadoo, the local MLA in the presence of the members of Dalitbahujan groups such as "Domar, Chamar, Khatik, Dhobi, Kol, Pandit, Kurmi, Musalman, and Kumhar" (6). The petition includes issues like how Dalit women staff are not appointed in schools to cook the mid-day meal; and how they are stopped

¹⁶¹ "Manava Dalit Mahila Sammelan" [Dalit Women's Gathering Celebrated]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.10, 1-15 March 2006, p.6.

from taking water from public wells and taps in the villages. The Dalit women activists symbolically served food to the upper-caste guests in *pangat* (public sitting for sharing food). They carried out an *arthi*¹⁶² (bier) of a mannequin. They burnt the mannequin to register the annihilation of untouchability in the public. This public spectacle creates an aura of a collective resistance against practices of untouchability in the villages. The DMS demands: 1. Promotion of Dalit women in MNREGA; 2. Reservation for Dalit women in the local government under the 73rd amendment of Panchayati Raj system; 3. Dalit women's Right to Information Act and 4. Formation of a Dalit Mahila Samiti for the distribution of new ration cards in every village.

This gathering by DMS dismantles many notions of hierarchies in a symbolic space. The Dalit women volunteers of DMS challenge the linguistic and cultural binaries of private/public, inner/outer, spiritual/material, etc. These binaries collapse at junctures in the Dalitbahujan imagination of nation. DMS reintroduces the popular concept of *pangat* (public sitting for sharing food). It makes visible the evil of untouchability in the form of a mannequin. It also offers resistance as a practice. It demands economic rights, the entitlement to share power, collect information from the local administration, and the formation of new committees exclusive to Dalit women in the villages.

Khabar Lahariya provides the Dalitbahujan women reporters and the Dalit women volunteers a new apparatus to locate their subjectivity. It can be seen in the organization of a *pad yatra* (march) of the Dalitbahujan women through twelve villages. The DMS constituted a committee in each of the villages by forming Khandeha Nyay Panchayat against gender violence.¹⁶³ It aims to provide an alternative forum to demand justice for Dalit women. Dalit women rarely experience a fair system in the police station and also the case of atrocities against them continue despite law on paper. The Dalitbahujan women reporters includes here a note of solidarity: “*court kacheri pehle na jaibe, gaav ma samasya mil nipataibe gaanvan ka hinsa*

¹⁶²[www.britannica.com/topic/arti#:~:text=Arti%2C%20\(Hindi%3A%20%E2%80%9Cthe,prayer%20or%20singing%20a%20hymn.](http://www.britannica.com/topic/arti#:~:text=Arti%2C%20(Hindi%3A%20%E2%80%9Cthe,prayer%20or%20singing%20a%20hymn.)

¹⁶³ “Ab Samiti Kari Nyay” [Now the Committee Will Give Justice]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.14, July 2003, p.4.

mukta banaibe.” (We shall not go to the court first. We shall unite to resolve the problems together and set the village free of caste-gender violence) (4).

The reports of *Khabar Lahariya* also debunk the narrative of quarrelsome women in the domestic sphere. At required junctures, they signify the political unity of women across castes. A group of women celebrated *Saas Bahu Sammelan* (Gathering of Mothers-in-law and Daughters-in-law) by performing a social play on dowry in the government centre of Ram Nagar town in Chitrakoot.¹⁶⁴ The Dalitbahujan women reporters highlighted the Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and different forms of violence.¹⁶⁵ These reports engage the Bundeli readers in the discourse on *kanooniyat* (Lawness) more than the discussion about *kanoon* (law). This is marked by reports on distinguished guests such as BD Naqvi, the Judge of Banda district, Vrinda Grover, the director of Marg and advocate at the Supreme Court, Sima Mishra, an eminent social activist and advocate at the Supreme Court.¹⁶⁶ The latter visited many places in Bundelkhand to encourage a hundred lawyers from Banda, Hamirpur, Mahoba, and Chitrakoot. In a report, “*Kanoon to Nik hai pai Kanooniyat Kharab hai,*” [Law is Good but the Lawness is Bed] the Dalitbahujan women reporters argue that the law is not implemented in full because the lawyers are themselves not aware of it.¹⁶⁷ They note that most of the cases of gender violence are pending and unheard due to the indifference of the police. They demand more number of women police stations and facilities for victims of gender violence to communicate their grievances to the district court.

Dalitbahujan women reporters provide a new configuration to the language used for ‘*mela*’ (popular festival). In the previous chapter, we have seen how the standard public offers a

¹⁶⁴ “Karin Natak” [Performed the Play]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.68, 22-28 Nov. 2009, p.4.

¹⁶⁵ “Sangharshshil Mehariya Manain Mela” [The Struggling Women Celebrated a Festival]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.82, 15-21 March 2010, p.12.

¹⁶⁶ “Dui Din ka Mela” [The Two Days Festival]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.75, 15-21 Jan. 2010, p.1.

¹⁶⁷ “Kanoon to Nik hai pai Kanooniyat Kharab hai” [Law is Good but Lawness is Bed]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.116, 15-21 Aug. 2010, p.8.

popular imagination in the usage of the term, '*kajli mela*.' It represents *veerangana* (warrior women) in a valorised form. It attributes a certain masculinity to Bundeli language but only under the condition where the men can protect *Bundeli mata*. Unlike the standard public, a popular space like *mela* is reoriented by the Dalitbahujan women to challenge the dynamics of power. The Dalitbahujan women are mobilized by the need for literacy so that they can speak out in the public domain on a daily basis. The use of verb form *manain* (celebrated) for the gatherings of women, and the use of familial salutations such as *saas* (mother-in-law), *bahu* (daughter-in-law), *bitiya* (daughter) *bahin* (sister) for the solidarity of women, etc., are constitutive of the alternative public in very different contexts. I focus on the theme of literacy in the constitution of alternative public by the Dalitbahujan women reporters. The latter discusses the significance of government schemes, covers the activities of NGOs in the democratization of education in remote villages, helps the NGOs so that the Dalitbahujan women can make inroads towards an economic stability and mobility through literacy, tallies the democratic activities in the forms of public conferences, meetings, workshops on literacy held by the NGOs and focuses on the experiences of Dalitbahujan women in these meetings.

Under the Savitri bai Phule Garib Balika Yojana (Savitri bai Phule Scheme for Elimination of Poverty among Girls), the Dalitbahujan women reporters demanded free education for the girls below poverty line in both public and the private schools.¹⁶⁸ In a report, "*Sent ma Padhai Adhikar Hamar*," [Free Education is Our Right] they also expose the manipulation in allotment of funds in the local administration.¹⁶⁹ They argue that the laws passed by the central government are of foremost importance than the laws passed by the state government. They put pressure on the administration to implement the law effectively.

The mainstream literacy and gender feminists associated with Nirantar, Vanangana, Sahjani Siksha Kendra, and Pahal organize literacy festivals to share information on health, literacy, gender discrimination, and employment schemes. The mainstream literacy feminists of

¹⁶⁸ "Sent ma hoi Padhai" [Free Education]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.48, 1-7 Aug. 2011, p.4.

¹⁶⁹ "Sent ma Padhai Adhikar Hamar" [Free Education is Our Right]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.47, 22-28 July 2011, p.8.

Sahjani Siksha Kendra organized a festival of *mehariya ke shiksha mela* (festival of women's education) to commemorate the memory of its founder, Arti Shrivastav¹⁷⁰ during 15-17 June 2005 at C B Inter College, Jhansi district.¹⁷¹ They also held the education program in Chanehara village of Banda district on 11 December 2011.¹⁷² They trained fifty young Dalit and Muslim girls in videography and photography as part of digital literacy. They held a *jansunvai* (people hearing) on children's rights in Mahrauni block of Lalitpur on 18th July 2011.¹⁷³ They presented a survey to the officers, Kiran Bhatti, Ani Namala, and Arundhati Ghuru of the National Child Education Protection Commission (NCEPC) along with five hundred people. The data highlights many problems in the school system. There were loopholes such as the incorrect construction of walls, mid-day meal without a proper menu, poor quality of education, irregularities of the teachers, discrimination against students from the Dalitbahujan community, the illegal practice of demanding fees. Kiran Bhatti warned the Basic Education Officer (BEO), Devendra Kumar that the hearing would take place in the supreme court if the problems related to schools were not solved at the village level. A group of senior women from Devran village attended a two-day national level "Mahila Saksharta aur Siksha ka Rashtriya Sammelan" (National Conference for Women Literacy and Education) during 13-14 June 2014.¹⁷⁴ They shared their experience with the Dalitbahujan women reporters. One of the women expressed that education at a late age enabled her to fill up the form, apply for an employment scheme and withdraw money from the bank.

¹⁷⁰ Arti Shrivastav was a literacy feminist based in Bundelkhand and the founder of Sahjani Shiksha Kendra. She passed away in a road accident in 2004.

¹⁷¹ "Mehariya ke Shiksha Mela" [Women's Education Festival]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.58, 1-15 July 2005, p.6.

¹⁷² "Nai Media aur Hum" [New Media and We]. *Khabar Lahariya*, 5-21 Dec. 2011, p.8.

¹⁷³ "Kari Jansunvai Shiksha Hamar Adhikar Ay" [Public Hearing: Education is Our Right]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.47, p.22-28 July. 2011, p.1.

¹⁷⁴ "Mahila Saksharta aur Shiksha ka Rashtriya Sammelan" [National Conference for Women Literacy]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.297, 22-29 June 2014, p.3.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters take up leadership in coordination with DMS, MS, Vanangana, Nirantar. They feel enriched with a sense of community space in the coverage of news reports. They are enabled to share and speak out on issues that mattered to them in their everyday life. The NGOs and the Dalitbahujan women reporters help women decrease the gap between local administration in the villages and blocks. It can be said that the role of the Dalitbahujan women reporters is like a catalyst in building a public consciousness among Dalitbahujan women. They reintroduce the potential of the Dalitbahujan women in the coverage of news.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters choose to negotiate with the markers of the Bundeli self and the other both. They document the views of Dalitbahujan women in public events of literacy *mela* and in the discourse on employment. Sahjani Siksha Kendra and Nirantar organized a two-day annual festival on women's education in the Madavara block of Lalitpur in the presence of six hundred women during 8-9 September 2009.¹⁷⁵ They emphasized education for Dalitbahujan women.

In her article, "Literacy, Power, and Feminism," Malini Ghose¹⁷⁶ discusses the issue of literacy as an arena of "power dynamics" (1615). She also plays her role as one of the mainstream literacy feminists in the history of Nirantar for training the neo-literate group of Dalitbahujan women in Bundelkhand. She explains how power relations are reproduced and transformed between them and the local neo-literate women (1615). She shares her experiences in the contexts of linguistic hierarchy, the writing process, and the construction of alternative knowledge during different training programs. She argues that the value of truth is subjective (1617). For instance, one seventy years old woman, Siyarani, expected the literacy festival to be

¹⁷⁵ "Alagtan ka Mela" [Different kind of Festival]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.61, 15-22 Sept. 2009, p.7.

¹⁷⁶ The member of National Child Protection Commission (NCPC) and in charge of the division in UP, Malini Ghose visited a program on free and compulsory education which was organized by Vanangana on 7th April 2011 in the villages of Banda and Chitrakoot. She visited the schools to understand the problems in the villages. She noticed the ignorance about literacy laws in the local community. She discussed the problems with the local administrators like the District Magistrate (DM) and commoners. See, "Kanoon ki di Jankari" [Information About Law]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.147, 15-21 April 2011, p.3.

a place where she could find the metaphors and markers of femininity such as toys, *bindi*, and bangles (“Alagtan” 7). But Siyarani found books and posters related to *apan adhikar aor kanoon* (our rights and law) (7). Shabina Mushtaq, one of the women workers in Sahjani Siksha Kendra informed Dalitbahujan women reporters that the Dalit and Muslim women of Karbai and Chanehara villages were trained in sewing, cooking, videography, and computer since 2005.¹⁷⁷ They can make the families proud if they were given opportunities. However, daughters are not allowed to study outside the village. The brothers are treated in big hospitals if they fell sick while the sisters are given remedies at home.

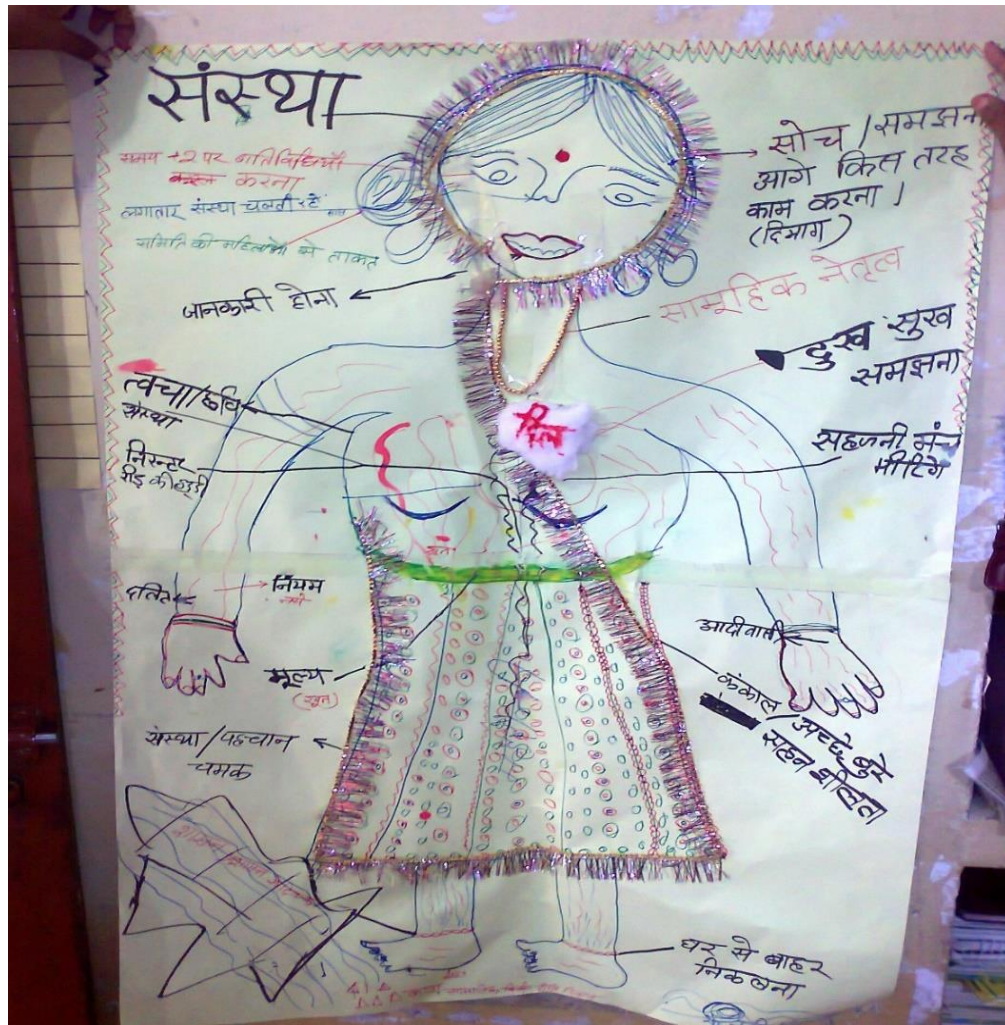
According to her experience during the training program in Bundelkhand, Ghose explains that the neo-literate Dalitbahujan women take the act of writing passionately (1617). The idea of writing is determined by their outlook of the world. It reflects in their perspective on gender violence (1617-1620).

The experience demonstrates that neither can we in our practice do away entirely with the mainstream, nor can we simply construct the ‘other’ in opposition to the mainstream. Negotiating between the two becomes crucial to the construction of a sustainable literacy intervention, where there is an integrated ‘participation’ of the two rather than mere substitution (1620).

Besides the notions of literacy and writing, Ghose also argues for an alternative knowledge in the linguistic transition from using Bundeli to Hindi (in *Khabar Lahariya*). She suggests that structural “inequalities” are embedded in the dialogue between mainstream literacy and media feminists and the neo-literate Dalitbahujan women (1620). The relation between Bundeli self and the other can be inversed against the predominance of Hindi (1620). The Dalitbahujan women reporters initially aspired for mainstream education but later used Bundeli in very interestingly subversive ways (1620).

¹⁷⁷ “Bhedbhav Mitave Khatir Manain Mela” [Festival Hold to Avoid Discrimination]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.137, 22-28 Jan.2011, p.4.

The mainstream literacy feminists' methodology to educate the neo-literate Dalitbahujan women is significant. The Dalitbahujan women are inspired to express themselves in an animated form of language, which marks the local significations of meanings among the local Dalitbahujan women volunteers, reporters, and activists for the democratic institutions. Sahjani Shiksha Kendra and Nirantar follow a unique style to engage the Dalitbahujan women in the process of extracting everyday reality in an embodied form of language. This can be seen in one of the handmade posters designed by the Dalitbahujan women volunteers (See Fig. 1). I explain what the Dalitbahujan body produces in a metaphorical sense with the help of the poster prepared by the Dalitbahujan women. I find it to be a mouthpiece for the pedagogy of oppressed in Dalit feminist politics. The following image provides an example to understand the embodiment of language by the Dalitbahujan women reporters in *Khabar Lahariya*.



(Fig. 1. Sahajani Shiksha Kendra's Feminist Pedagogy for Dalitbahujan women)¹⁷⁸

The Dalitbahujan women reporters embody the markers of democratic institutions in the context of affect. The figure mentioned above symbolizes a gendered image of Sahjani Shiksha Kendra/Nirantar/*Khabar Lahariya*, all of them feminist institutions, in a detailed manner. This can be juxtaposed with the gendered image of *Bundeli mata* in the ideological schema of the standard public. It does not represent a valorized body of the middle class woman. The above figure marks the Dalit women (as the left hand) and the Adivasi women (as the right hand). The

¹⁷⁸ "Vision." Sahajani Shiksha Kendra, TechMistriz, 2018, ssklalitpur.com/vision/.

Dalit and Adivasi women are mobilized in the ecology of NGOs. Among them, Nirantar is identified as *rid ki haddi* (backbone) of *Sanstha* (the institution). Sanstha as a gendered body marks the solidarity between the Dalit-Adivasi women and the mainstream literacy and media feminists. She is dressed in a shining attire. The attire carries *chamak/pehchan* (recognition). She is inscribed into a living body with *khoon* (blood) as *mulya* (values) flowing in her vein. She is described to have *kanakal* (bones) which are compared with *sahanshilta* (endurance) of good and bad experience in life. Her *dil* (heart) is symbolized as a center of collective meeting between all women. The heart attributes to the ability of Sanstha to understand *sukh-dukh* (joy and sorrow) of people in the Dalitbahujan community. Her neck and head are redefined as *samuhik netutva* (collective leadership) and *soch samajh ke age kam karna* (strategy to work tactfully in future). Her mouth is compared with the device of *jankari* (information). Her legs highlight the main objective of Dalit and Adivasi women for *bahar nikalana* (coming out) in the public space.

The animated form of language, as detailed above, is used for the embodiment of Sanstha (a living feminist and anti-casteist institution) among the Dalitbahujan women of Bundelkhand. I illustrate the function of bodily language with a focus on the reports about Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA)¹⁷⁹ in *Khabar Lahariya*.

The women volunteers of NGO, Sahjani Siksha Kendra invited the District Magistrate (DM), the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), and the District Development Officer (DDO) at Rimjhim Hotel in Lalitpur.¹⁸⁰ They discussed the flaws in the implementation of MNREGA that went against the interest of Dalitbahujan women. MNREGA is one of the sites of news coverage where there is a struggle for equality of labor in the villages of Bundelkhand. The struggle for an equal distribution of welfare schemes has become difficult due to corrupt administrators and mediators. The Dalitbahujan women reporters demand recognition for the

¹⁷⁹ MNREGA is the government scheme to eradicate poverty in the rural India. It provides employment to people in the developmental activities for a mandatory period of 150 days besides farming. It aims at the eradication of socio-economic inequalities on the basis of employment schemes. "Gramin Vipattio ki Nishaniya" [Sign of Rural Obstacles]. *Khabar Lahariya*, vol. 1, no. 51, 6-12 Feb. 2016, p.8.

¹⁸⁰ "Mela Manain" [Organized the Gathering]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.132, 15-21 Dec. 2010, p.7.

Dalitbahujan women on the grounds of dignity of labor. The women Pradhan and fifty peasant women of Sitapur village participated in a conference, Mahila Kisan Adhikar Abhiyan for three days during 16-18 February 2008 at Calcutta Dharmshala.¹⁸¹ They discussed their unequal participation and treatment in farming in the villages of Chitrakoot. The DMS inaugurated the act of digging a pond under the MNREGA scheme on 21st May 2011.¹⁸² To prove a point, they demonstrated the task of digging the pond and demanded *mategiri* (management).

In his article, “Lettered and no Longer Fettered by Ignorance,” Pankaj Jaiswal reports that only one percent of women can become a MNREGA Mate in the UP districts of Bundelkhand. “*Mategiri*” (a job of MNREGA Mate) is a technical job to oversee MNREGA work sites and labourers. Nirantar and Sahajani Shiksha Kendra train the neo-literate Dalitbahujan women to become a MNREGA Mate. Ramkali Ahirwar, a Dalit woman mate of Dongri Khurda village in Lalitpur informs that MNREGA Mates have “a supervisory role,” they measure and “quantify the job done by different persons at a particular site, organize the work force, maintain the muster role (an official list of labourers) and keep accounts” (Jaiswal). The MNREGA Mates enjoy a new status with a bag and measuring tap in hands (See Fig. 2).

¹⁸¹ “Nahi Milat Darja” [Status is Unrecognized]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 58, 1-15 March 2008, p.4.

¹⁸² “Karin Udghatan” [Did Inauguration]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.152, 1-17 June 2011, p.4.



(Fig.2 Dalit-Adivasi “women learning to measure the land in Lalitpur”)¹⁸³

An old woman shares her experience with the Dalitbahujan women reporters: “since the job card is issued and an account is created in our names in the bank, all of us women should also be recognized as Mates (a manager) on the post of *mukhiya* (chief) to fight out our exploitation”.¹⁸⁴ The Dalitbahujan women reporters bring the dignity of labor to the forefront in identity politics. The laboring group of Dalitbahujan women challenge their suppression under the stereotypical image of a laborer and demand the status of a manager.

¹⁸³ Jaiswal, Pankaj. “Lettered and no longer fettered by ignorance.” *Hindustan Times*, ssklalitpur.com/achievement/s/.

¹⁸⁴ “Sanstha karis Janch aur Bethak” [The NGOs Investigated and Held a Meeting]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.167, 15-21 Sept.2011, p.1.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters conceptualize womanhood unlike the standard public. They break the gender stereotype of Dalit and Adivasi woman fixed into the image of a laborer. They ascribe the alternative role/image/look of a MNREGA Mate in the male-centric discourse of technical education. They depart from the dominant concept of womanhood stereotyped by non-technical roles. It can be said that the Dalitbahujan women reporters engender an alternative women's community. Their engagement with civic journalism in the forms of digital technology substantiates the fact that Dalitbahujan women break away from the dominant gender roles. The context of writing is different in the case of the Dalitbahujan women reporters. Salma believes that her writing is not very good.¹⁸⁵ She likes *mobile vala kaam* (collecting news reports on videos by mobile phone) because it has reduced her task of writing. Another reporter in *Khabar Lahariya*, Neeta, talks about her struggle to cope with the act of writing the reports.¹⁸⁶ Neeta has overcome the practice of writing with the help of her husband during the training period. Her husband wishes her to become a news reporter. In common, it is found that both Salma and Neeta also stay in the office during the nights of two-day meetings. Both have been introduced to the world of Bundeli words to reclaim a new identity of *patrakar bahin* (woman journalist) and seek an alternative to writing in digital media. I elaborate on what they meant by a new identity of *patrakar bahin* (woman journalist) in the next section.

The Impact of *Khabar Lahariya* in the Personal Lives of the Dalitbahujan Women Reporters

The change and impact after joining *Khabar Lahariya* is very tangible in the lives of the Dalitbahujan women reporters. The changes can be marked in different forms. In an interview published with the title, “Khabar Lahariya: Impact on Lives of Journalists,” the Dalitbahujan

¹⁸⁵ Salma. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 25 Oct.2017.

¹⁸⁶ Neeta. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 25 Oct. 2017.

women reporters share their experience of new changes in life after having become reporters in *Khabar Lahariya*.¹⁸⁷

Sangita makes her own decisions about what she wants to do and what is most important in her life (0:04-0:14). Anita mentions that she worked until class IX as a laborer in a stone quarry near her home (“Journalists” 1:00-3:58) but she is proud of running the house by herself now. She is not dependent on others/male anymore (“Khabar Lahariya Impact” 1:06-1:11). She can buy books and pay fees to study further. She is no more a subject to the circumstance of stagnation in studies due to poverty (1:13-1:25). In the “Interview with Khabar Lahariya Journalist Leela—Banda, Uttar Pradesh,” Leela expresses her happiness because she can change her life with the money she gets by working for *Khabar Lahariya*.¹⁸⁸ Sarita shares her story in the interview titled, “Khabar Lahariya Reporter Sarita Shares her Story” (0:01-2:04).¹⁸⁹ Before joining *Khabar Lahariya* in 2010, Sarita had a three months old daughter. Her *saheli* (friend) persuaded her in-laws to let Sarita be educated in Mahila Samakhya for six months in Karvi block but they were not supportive. Sarita joined Mahila Samakhya because her mother agreed to take care of her three-months old daughter. She studied at Mahila Samakhya but had to spent five to six years in her natal home. Her friend Ansuya advised her to work in *Khabar Lahariya*. Sarita had no trust in herself. She was diffident because she faced English words in the language of the administrators. She communicated with them about the language of *Khabar Lahariya*. She could manage with them in a language she is comfortable with later. She could buy a piece of land after being a reporter in *Khabar Lahariya*.

¹⁸⁷ “Khabar Lahariya-Impact on lives of journalists.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Khabar Lahariya, 24 June 2013, [youtube/PCv3JNeJ4h8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCv3JNeJ4h8). Accessed on 16 Nov. 2020.

¹⁸⁸ “Interview with Khabar Lahariya journalist Leela- Banda, Uttar Pradesh.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Khabar Lahariya, 21 Dec. 2012, [youtu.be/ulcuhJMb1Jw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulcuhJMb1Jw). Accessed on 15 Nov.2020.

¹⁸⁹ “Khabar Lahariya Reporter Sarita Shares her Story.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Khabar Lahariya, 27 June 2013, [youtube.be/ij46q-54YEw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ij46q-54YEw). Accessed on 15 Nov. 2020.

It is clear that the Dalitbahujan women reporters are determined to find new destinies in their lives despite odds. It is no less than a dream to be identified with the name of *mahila patrakar* (women reporter) in rural Bundelkhand.

Suman carries her *khas pehchan* (special identity) as a reporter in every district office, every block office, and every police station. The officers know her as a *Khabar Lahariya* reporter (“Khabar Lahariya Impact” 0:20-0:30). Anita enjoys to cover stories based on controversial issues and investigate cases in the presence of police, officials and crowds (“Journalists” 4:32-4:46). She wishes to interview the SP, the DIG, the IG at the district level and then reach the level of doing the same with the PM of India and the CM of the state (“Khabar Lahariya Impact” 4:47-5:27). Ganga can communicate with the government officials imagined like never before (1:26-1:28). People call her by the name of newspaper, “Khabar Lahariya” (1:39-1:41).

For Lata, the change is special because she is not confined at home anymore; she is no more burdened with the stereotyped roles of a domestic woman (0:31-0:35). She has become stronger as a public figure. The Dalitbahujan women reporters have got an opportunity to inculcate knowledge (0:46-0:54). Seema can move freely without any cultural prohibitions (0:55-1:01). In her interview, “Becoming a Rural Reporter,” Uma Jatav says she never imagined that she would get a job in rural journalism.¹⁹⁰ She is not schooled but empowered enough to communicate with the village head, the higher officials with no fear. She enjoys it. She dreams to complete her education and get a good job (1:42-2:50). Ruturaj, a local subscriber published his poem, “*Gagar me Sagar Bhare, Ruturaj ki Lahariya*” [Ruturaj’s *Khabar Lahariya* is a Pot Filled with a Sea of Knowledge] in *Khabar Lahariya*. He identifies the Dalitbahujan women reporters as a symbol of *gagar* (pot of knowledge), *nirbhik* (courage), *sab ki khabar leti hai* (watchdog), *bhaav* (affect), and *mahila ka sangam* (solidarity) in the struggle for social justice for Dalitbahujan women (8).

¹⁹⁰ “Becoming a Rural Reporter: Uma Jatav from Khabar Lahariya in Mahoba.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Khabar Lahariya, 11 Dec. 2012, [youtube.be/wnMVtJZgOI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnMVtJZgOI). Accessed 15 Nov. 2020.

Heera sees a significant change in the ambience at her home. Her journalism has improved her children's standards of education at home ("Khabar Lahariya Impact" 0:36-0:45). In an "Interview with Khabar Lahariya Journalist," Kamna says her husband and the neighbors were not supportive towards her job as a reporter in *Khabar Lahariya* (0:01-2:39).¹⁹¹ She had to be outside and return home late at uncertain times. She joined *Khabar Lahariya* to educate her children better and make them self-dependent. She experiences courage and ability in herself after working as a reporter. She feels more like a reporter than a woman. She is happy to find people respecting her new identity.

Unlike the standard public, the Dalitbahujan women reporters are the subjects of transformation of identity. They do not engage in the discourse on identity in terms of "preservation", "conservation", "saving", "protecting", etc. They redefine Bundeli language in a tangible experience of self-expression in the material realm. The self-transformation is evident in their progress from margin to mainstream. They do not play out the binary of margin and mainstream in their language. They look at their marginalization from an oppositional perspective to mainstream their identity in future.

From Margins to Mainstream

Khabar Lahariya is not limited to local life and death. It has accorded the Dalitbahujan women reporters a global recognition as it works for the universal values of human rights and social justice. Sangita made a presentation abroad ("Khabar" 1:30-1:38). She finds journalism full of opportunities. The issues related to the rights of the Dalit women are addressed at the international level too. The Dalitbahujan women reporters run special shows on YouTube. In the interview, "Tejasvini," Sangita finds her popularity increased, particularly, after her 'The Kavita Show' on YouTube. She discusses the socio-political issues on her show. Her show gets near about a lakh views (20:20-21:30).¹⁹² In her report, "*Khabar Lahariya ke Popular Shoj ke piche ki*

¹⁹¹ "Interview with Khabar Lahariya Journalist Kamna-Banda, Uttar Pradesh." *YouTube*, uploaded by Khabar Lahariya, 8 Dec. 2012, [youtube.be/ediGI8aY3do](https://www.youtube.be/ediGI8aY3do). Accessed 22 Jan.2021.

¹⁹² "Tejasvini: Co-founder of Khabar Lahariya and MD of Khabar Lahariya Disha Mullick." *YouTube*, uploaded by DD News, 13 Jan. 2019, youtu.be/LmP2vyBjd1g. Accessed on 15 Nov. 2020.

Interesting Kahani,” [Interesting Story Behind the Popular Shows of Khabar Lahariya] Kamala, the video producer of *Khabar Lahariya*, introduces the main features of popular shows run by the Dalitbahujan women reporters on YouTube.¹⁹³ Anita runs her own show, ‘Jasoos ya Journalist’. She reports on crime stories in the show (00:27-01:08). Salma has become popular for her ‘*Aa Gai re Chatauri Show*’ (Show for the Food Lovers) on YouTube (4:13-5:18). She visits small villages and towns to cover stories of food culture in Bundelkhand. The Dalitbahujan women reporters engage in the politics of mainstreaming themselves. Heera joined panels with international organizations like Oxfam and Water Aid at Sahakarita Bhavan on 19th October 2013 in Lucknow.¹⁹⁴ The international organizations evaluated the social, political, and economic condition of Dalit women in UP in the presence of three hundred people. Many Dalit women shared their experience with Heera on the issues of untouchability, domestic violence, fight, rape, and migration. Heera shared the chair as one of the panelists along with mainstream personalities such as Martin Macwan, and Dalit rights activist, Vimal Thorat, a writer and a social activist, Rajni Tilak, the president of National Dalit Women’s Forum and KK Ray, an advocate, and a lawyer on international platform.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters along with the mainstream literacy and media feminists challenge the mainstream urban male dominant media for keeping itself willingly ignorant about the issues of marginalized communities in rural Bundelkhand. In “The Khabar Lahariya Manifesto,” they explain their manifesto with a recurring verse in Bundeli, “*Dilli to bahutai door havai/Tum ka jano, kayase tum to rahat ho Dilli me*” (Delhi is very far/What would you know, you who live in Delhi?) (0:01-0:50).¹⁹⁵ They turn the gaze back to urban male and oppose them in collective opposition. They indicate that they are not insensitive and

¹⁹³ “Khabar Lahariya ke Popular Shoj ke piche ki Interesting Kahani” [Interesting Story behind the Popular Shows of Khabar Lahariya]. *YouTube*, uploaded by Khabar Lahariya, 26 Dec. 2020, youtube.be/pagGswDAE6LA. Accessed 22 Jan. 2021.

¹⁹⁴ “Dalit Mahilao ke Anubhav par Manch” [Discussion on the Experience of Dalit Women]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 264, 28 Oct.-3 Nov. 2013, p.5.

¹⁹⁵ “The Khabar Lahariya Manifesto.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Khabar Lahariya, 13 Jan 2016, youtube/OIEhELtKXGE. Accessed on 16 Nov. 2020.

irresponsible like the mainstream media. They cover local issues like: the boys have to move outside the school to use the toilet since there is no toilet in the school; someone is electrocuted; the school teacher attends school drunk and calls some children “*chamar*” (caste abuse); he extorts money from them for mid-day meal; there is drought and unseasonal rainfall in the region; many farmers commit suicides; and such. The Dalitbahujan women reporters assert their manifesto that they will fill the gap in reporting with determination by publishing the newspaper by themselves. They will make it both local and global; they will take the knowledge of using YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Periscope in their voice (0:51-1:11).

The Dalitbahujan women reporters work with the feminist principles but also inculcate individual perspectives in their personal outlook. They share their individual perspectives on the difference between *gramin* (rural) and *shahari* (urban) feminism. They consider the first two phases specific to the enfranchisement of women and to the strict laws against *yaun shoshan* (sexual exploitation) respectively in the women’s movement.

In the article, “*Charchai, Purani aur Nayi Najar se,*” [Discussions from New and Old Perspective] Amita Devi, Heera Jatav and Apeksha Vora share their perspectives on feminism (5). Devi believes that the attempt to solve the biological, mental, and economic problems of women is at the center of feminism. She feels empowered with the use of the word, ‘feminism’ itself. The word mobilizes the Dalitbahujan women reporters and inspires them to work against sexual exploitation and disrespect on crossing gender boundaries. Heera defines the term, feminism as an ideal to live independently. She finds the use of the term a tool to fight the caste-based and gender-based discrimination. But she finds the women unfamiliar with the term in villages. She claims that the Dalit and Adivasi women face intense violence that cannot be compared with the violence committed against women of upper castes. A Nirantar activist, Vora argues that the women want to progress in common but the issues of Dalitbahujan women are not taken seriously in the villages due to caste and gender biases among the women from the upper-castes. She believes that it is important to provide women an opportunity to become an *adarsh* (ideal) for herself and all others. The diversity of views on feminism and solidarity between the Dalitbahujan women reporters and the mainstream literacy and media feminists mark the creation of an alternative space against the Hindi male public sphere.

Conclusion

In the present chapter, I drew upon firstly, the several forms of discrimination and challenges in the everyday life of the Dalitbahujan women. These forms explained what it means to report as a woman and belong to a Dalitbahujan, poor, rural and neo-literate background in rural Bundelkhand. Secondly, the chapter highlighted public discourses concerning the identity of Dalitbahujan women in *Khabar Lahariya*. It noted that the political vocabulary of the Dalitbahujan women reporters draws attention to a critical outlook. It discussed the Dalit Feminist Standpoint theory to understand the politics of the Dalitbahujan women reporters. Thirdly, the chapter focused on the impact of *Khabar Lahariya* in the personal and public life of the Dalitbahujan women reporters. *Khabar Lahariya* has transformed the Dalitbahujan women reporters more as a citizen, marked a sense of self-respect in their personality and brought in new changes in their personal lives.

Appendix

1. “Jitve ke Baad na Mila Kabja” [Won the Case but Did not Get the Possession]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 25, 15-29 Feb. 2004, p.6.
2. “Kabja Karis Dhamki Det” [Upper-Caste Man Control Land and Threaten Lives]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 50, 1-15 March 2005, p.4.
3. “Talab ma Kabja” [Upper-caste Control the Lake]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 270, 9-15 Dec. 2013, p. 1.
4. “Milain Talab ma Jahar” [Mixed Poison in the Lake]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 18, 22 Oct. 2008, p.2.
5. “Dekhais Dabangai” [Exercise Dominance]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 13, June 2003, p.6.
6. “Patta Kare ma Mange Ghoos” [Demands Bribe for Patta Land]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 21, 15-31 Aug. 2006, p.3.
7. “Pradhan aur Ward Sadasya Lekhpal ke Khilaf Dihin Darkhas” [Pradhan and Ward Member Complained Against Lekhpal]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 216, 8-14 Oct. 2012, p.2
8. “Lekhpal ke Laparvahi” [The Indifferent Lekhpal]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 23, 16-30 June 2008, p. 6.
9. *Lekhpal se Pareshan Maddai*” [People in Distress due to Lekhpal]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.56, 1-8 Oct. 2011, p. 2.
10. “Devais Kabja” [Fought for the Possession]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 57, 16-31 Feb. 2008, p.6.
11. “Pandra Sal Bad Mila Kabja” [Got the Possession after Fifteen Years]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 5, 15-31 Dec. 2005, p. 3.
12. “Lalitpur ko Mila Jativad par notice” [Lalitpur Received Notice for Casteism]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 244, 17-23 June 2016, p.1
13. “Jati Panchayat aur Niyav” [Caste Panchayat and Justice]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 99, 22-28 July 2010, p.8.
14. “Mahila bhi Kisan Hai” [Women also Deserve the Status of a Farmer]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 219, 22 March-7 April 2013, p.3.
15. “Ka Mor Adhikar Nahi Ay” [Don’t I have My Right]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.19, 30 Nov. 2003, p.6.

16. “Baap ke Jamin ma Nahi Mile Kabja” [Does not Get Control on the Land of Father]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.178, 1-7 April 2012, p.4.
17. “Karj ka boz Dhoti Aurate” [The Burden of Debt on Women]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 210, 8-15 Dec. 2012, p.12.
18. “Samuh se Mili Jankari” [The Organization Help with the Information]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.177, 22-28 March 2012, p.9.
19. “Mela Manain” [Organized the Gathering]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.132, 15-21 Dec. 2010, p. 7.
20. “Gramin Vipattio ki Nishaniya” [Signs of Rural Obstacles]. *Khabar Lahariya*, vol. 1, no. 51, 6-12 Feb. 2016, p.8.
21. “Nahi Milat Darja” [Status is Unrecognized]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 58, 1-15 March 2008, p. 4.
22. “Karin Udghatan” [Did Inauguration]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.153, 1-17 June 2011, p. 4.
23. “Sanstha karis Janch aur Bethak” [The NGO Investigated and Held a Meeting]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 167, 15-21 Sept. 2011, p.1.
24. “Sammelan kaike Dihis Jankari” [Women Organized Gathering and Gave Information]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 97, 8-14 July 2010, p.5.
25. “Manava ga Dalit Mahila Sammelan” [Dalit Women’s Gathering Celebrated]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.10, 1-15 March, 2006, p. 6.
26. “Ab Samiti Kari Nyay” [Now the Committee will give Justice]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.14 July 2003, p. 4.
27. “Karin Natak” [Performed the Play]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 68, 22-28 Nov. 2009, p. 4.
28. “Sangharshshil Mehariya Manain Mela” [The Struggling Women Celebrated a Festival]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.82, 15-21 March 2010, p.12.
29. “Dui Din ka Mela” [The Two-Days Festival]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.75, 15-21 Jan. 2010, p.1.
30. “Kanoon to Nik hai pai Kanooniyat Kharab hai” [Law is Good but Lawness is Bed]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.116, 15-21 Aug. 2010, p. 8.
31. “Sent ma hoi Padhai” [Free Education]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 48, 1-7 Aug. 2011, p.4.

32. “Sent ma Padhai Adhikar Hamar” [Free Education is Our Right]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 47, 22-28 July 2011, p.8.
33. “Mehariya ke Siksha mela” [Women’s Education Festival]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 58, 1-15 July 2005, p.6.
34. “Nai Media aur Hum” [New Media and We]. *Khabar Lahariya*, 5-21 Dec. 2011, p. 8.
35. “Karin Jansunvai shiksha Hamar Adhikar ay” [Public Hearing: Education is our Right]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 47, 22-28 July 2011, p. 1.
36. “Mahila Saksharta aur Siksha ka Rashtriya Sammelan” [National Conference for Women Literacy and Education]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 297, 23-29 June 2014, p.3.
37. “Alagtan ka Mela” [Different kind of Festival]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 61, 15-22 Sept. 2009, p.7.
38. “Kanoon ki di Jankari” [Information About Law]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.147, 15-21 April 2011, p.3.
39. “Bhedbhav Mitave Khatir Manain Mela” [Festival Hold to Abolish Discrimination]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.137, 22-28 Jan. 2011, p.4.
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Chapter 4

Writing Everyday Lives: The Narratives of the Dalitbahujan Women Reporters and *himmati mehariya* (courageous women) in *Khabar Lahariya*

Introduction

The status of ‘untouchability,’ poverty, and gender identity intersect and distinguish the subjection of the Dalitbahujan women’s bodies to various forms of violence in Indian society. Unlike the standard public, the oppression against the Dalitbahujan women reporters is inherently encoded in various forms of discrimination. The present chapter shows that becoming a Dalitbahujan woman reporter in *Khabar Lahariya* is an ‘event’ in itself. The Dalitbahujan women reporters challenge the oppressive forces of caste, gender, language, region, poverty, educational ‘backwardness’ and assert on these axes of differences. Language plays an important role in these multifaceted contexts of identity. The linguistic practices in *Khabar Lahariya* and among the Dalitbahujan women reporters are very different from the literary aesthetics and canons of the standard public. The standard public claims its privileges on a Bundeli identity based on the categories of “urban,” “class,” “male-centric,” “objectivist” and “standard”—all belonging to the so-called modern, secular models of imagination for a social change. The rise of the Dalitbahujan women reporters as successful media personnel marks a strong challenge to the Brahminical patriarchy that is encoded in such dominant claims. They are grounded and speak for alternative accounts of memory, history, events and contexts.

In his book, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922-1992*, Shahid Amin deals with a complex relation between judicial narratives the oral narratives based on the accounts of the relatives of peasant “martyrs” who died in the 1922 riots in Gorakhpur district (UP). As a historian, his “entanglement” between archives and fieldwork is a testimony of his scholarly encounter with the exclusion of local stories against reconstructions of past in mainstream historiography (11). Amin shows that the riots between police and “peasant officers” is used for its metaphorical significance in nationalist historiography (14-15). He focuses on “the inherent

unpredictability of a negative consciousness playing itself out” on the grassroots (12). He explains “the ambiguities and tensions of an officious record” (198). He suggests that the peasant “martyrs” are more than the “pensioners” of colonial government and the “volunteers” of Gandhi’s disobedient movement. This can be seen in the unpredictable retort of peasants charged with abusive language against *thanedars* (police) (78). Amin argues for such traces grounded in local relation between the peasants and the police.

However, the Dalitbahujan women reporters are universal in their representational roles though they speak from the margins. They challenge the governing system and practice a politics of difference beyond the mainstream media and literacy feminists’ intervention. This can be looked at as an ‘event’ that enables them to become a Dalitbahujan woman reporter. Dalitbahujan women reporters stand outside dominant narratives and help us understand the nature of Dalitbahujans’ struggle for equality. The notes of resistance against cases of direct and indirect discrimination and violence are a main concern to Dalitbahujan women reporters, who enact the politics of writing everyday lives of self and community. They offer an alternative to the gender ideology of the standard public because they draw inspiration from the everyday challenges to assert their identity against an oppressive system. The courage is inherent in the subjectivity of Dalitbahujan women reporters and of the young Dalitbahujan women. But, unlike Amin, I argue that the courage to run *Khabar Lahariya* is an outcome of their experience in self-journey. It is not developed out of “the inherent unpredictability of negative consciousness playing itself out” on the grassroots (12). It is not eschewed with “the ambiguities and tensions of an officious record” (198). Dalitbahujan women know very well that they cannot afford losing courage against the oppressive system. They live at the margins but struggle to bring development and recognition for self and community. For instance, the Dalitbahujan women’s reclamation of land rights stands for recognition, equality, economic independence, and social justice in the villages of Chitrakoot and Banda (Jassal 167).

Having highlighted the main difference between the standard public and the public of *Khabar Lahariya*, the following are the objectives of the present chapter.

Objectives

First, I examine the narratives articulated by Dalitbahujan women reporters and by the Dalitbahujan women in juxtaposition to the narratives of the standard public; second, I attempt to conceptualize the ‘inherent’ notion of courage/reality of the Dalitbahujan women reporters in particular and of the Dalitbahujan women in general. I analyse the power-dynamics between land and culture in this case. I focus on the struggle of Dalitbahujan women in reclaiming their identity, in pushing for economic reforms and asking for their share in the power-structure at the local constituency; third, I explain why the Dalitbahujan women reporters and the Kol Adivasi women demonstrate a great amount of *himmat* (courage) in rural journalism. I examine this form of expression via Bundeli and find it to be internal to its structure. With these objectives, the main research questions of this chapter are as following:

Research Questions

- How do the Dalitbahujan women reporters define humiliation in an everyday civic discourse?
- What are its implications in their relationship with the idea of Bundeli language, identity and democracy?
- What are the local contexts, conditions and situations that operate in their negotiation with the Dalitbahujan self and in their invention of a new political idiom?
- What meanings do the Dalitbahujan women reporters attribute to the stories of the Dalit and Kol Adivasi women?
- How do they *write* their lives and histories in the form of individual womanhood vis-à-vis the larger Dalitbahujan identity?
- What distinguishes them from the standard public?

The Dalitbahujan women reporters’ writing of news reports, interviews and journalistic practices help integrate the information in existing literature about the Dalitbahujan women’s struggle to reclaim land and the resources. They democratize, develop, and diversify the media space as well as the Bundeli society. They express themselves as citizens more than the subjects

of the state. They set a narrative that disrupts the power-dynamics in multiple ways. In the next section, I deal with their everyday experience of caste-gender relations in the family and in the public domain.

The Dalitbahujan Women Reporters: Writing Everyday Lives of Self and Community

Farah Naqvi documents the journey of *Khabar Lahariya* and of the Dalitbahujan women reporters in her book, *Waves in the Hinterland*. She describes the everyday life of the Editor-in-Chief of *Khabar Lahariya*, Heera Jatav—a mother of five daughters, Heera travels fifty kilometers daily by bus for two hours from Mau block to Karvi block to reach *Khabar Lahariya's* office in Chitrakoot (141). Though coming from “an upwardly mobile Dalit family,” she is the only woman who graduated from her village in the *tehsil* (141). Her family wanted to keep her away from rural journalism earlier. They counted it as a dangerous field. But they are proud of Heera after seeing her success as a leading figure in rural journalism. She has been the editor of *Khabar Lahariya* since 2005 (142).

I met Heera at her office in the post-lunch session on 25 October 2017. She just returned from a crowd gathered at the spot of the UP Chief Minister, Adityanath Bisht's visit in Chitrakoot. She went there to cover the story of the CM's visit on that day. I saw and heard her sharing the experience of the crowd with other Dalitbahujan women reporters present in the office. She had not had lunch. She could not have lunch as she waited for the CM since ten o'clock in the morning standing at the venue. She found it very difficult to visit the venue of CM's arrival even in a hired auto because the way to the venue passed through a dense forest. She walked a long way to reach the crowd. As she reached near the site in the auto, and before she started to walk, she came across a policeman. The policeman abused the auto-driver continuously and Heera was angry. She threatened him and cautioned him against abusing while on duty in *wardi* (uniform). She complained to the *vidhayak* (MLA) about the policemen against their abusive conduct with common people in public space. The MLA informed her about the sensitizing program in the police department. The other Dalitbahujan women reporters laughed at the police department for holding such special training program. For them, reforms in the police department were impossible. Heera shifted her observation to the management of CM's

visit. She reasoned out why the visit of the CM was organized in a remote place on the outskirts instead of it being organized in the main town itself. She pointed out two accidents on the previous day of the visit. She argued that the administration deliberately masked the condition of roads in the town from the media to escape blame. She also complained to the MLA for not providing *aam janta* (the common people) any facility to visit the gathering. She shared with the Dalitbahujan women reporters the MLA's assurance of facilities to the common people. She expressed her regret for failing, like all journalists, in seeking an interview with the CM.

Heera, like other reporters, covered the stories and also distributed the copies of *Khabar Lahariya* in the *talukas* allotted to her (Naqvi 141). She has got the experience of working as a *sahayogini* (coordinator) in the government programme, Mahila Samakhya (142). She was part of the *Mahila Dakiya* team under the same programme in the 1990s (142). However, her identity is mainly shaped by her being a journalist in *Khabar Lahariya*. It also earns her social recognition and economic stability (141-142). At the office of *Khabar Lahariya*, I interviewed other Dalitbahujan women reporters, namely, Neeta, Salma and Meena on the same day of 25 October, 2017.

Neeta is from Dalit community.¹⁹⁶ Before she joined *Khabar Lahariya* in 2011, she worked for one and a half years in her village, Hanna, Chitrakoot, with Swayam Sahayata Samuh, an NGO on saving schemes. She left the NGO because she did not receive payment for her work later. Her husband was unwell and she had no support from her in-laws. She needed to find some job to take care of her husband's ill-health. She worked as a laborer at a brick kiln in Hanna. She got to know about *Khabar Lahariya* when *guruji* (a school teacher) found her in crisis. The teacher informed her about *Khabar Lahariya*. She was prepared to work in *Khabar Lahariya* with a condition for timely payment. The teacher assured her of timely payment and

¹⁹⁶ Neeta. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 25 Oct. 2017. I asked Dalitbahujan women reporters about their social identity during the personal interview but I also cite it from their interviews and stories published in the public domain. They are neither proud nor hesitant to reveal their social identity. They also use official categories such as Schedule Caste (SC) for Dalit identity and BC for OBC castes in their interviews. I use Dalit as a political category, not as sociological.

took her to Mau block in Chitrakoot. She filled the application form to join *Khabar Lahariya*. She attended the interview in Karvi block. In the interview, she was asked the name of her Gram Panchayat, the name of the Pradhan, and about the total number of Gram Panchayats in the Mau block. She was happy with the interview because her early experience with the NGO helped her pass it. She attended the training for fifteen days to become a reporter in *Khabar Lahariya*. She went to each village in the block and learned to report. She found the job of a reporter very challenging because it demanded walking for miles in the hinterland. I find Neeta to be a very determined woman. She succumbed to fever many times in the early days of her job. But she never lost courage and continued to work as a reporter with the help of medicines. She believes that she has some social and economic stability after making a career in rural journalism.

Unlike Neeta, Salma never worked outside before she joined *Khabar Lahariya*. She was a housewife and was occupied with her family business of *Moradabadi bartan* (brass utensils popular in the district of Moradabad in western UP).¹⁹⁷ Salma joined *Khabar Lahariya* in 2007 but took a gap of six years and joined it again in 2014. She became a news reporter after her business was close. She migrated Banda (Bundelkhand) with her five children. She needed a job. Someone informed her about the NGO, Vanangana that worked against sexual violence on Dalit women in the villages of Chitrakoot and Banda. When she visited the Vanangana office, she was advised to approach the Dalitbahujan women reporters for a job. She met Sangita Bundelkhandi, the Digital Head of *Khabar Lahariya* and Heera at Banda. She filled the application form to join *Khabar Lahariya*. She started with *vitran* (distribution) since there were no *bharti* (vacancy) for reporters in *Khabar Lahariya* at that point in time. She sold copies of *Khabar Lahariya* for a commission. She got a chance to participate in a training that trains the Dalitbahujan women in rural journalism. She became a full-time reporter with the office of *Khabar Lahariya* in Chitrakoot after she completed the training. She visited the administrative sections at both the block and district levels and in the villages. She shared her experience with me about the people in the villages. She finds people considering her to be more than just a reporter. People in the villages believe that the Dalitbahujan women reporters will resolve their problems. For Salma, it

¹⁹⁷ Salma. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 25 Oct.2017.

does not take much time to build a *parichay* (familiarity) with the people as much as it takes to do so with the *adhikari* (officers). Another reporter I interacted with was Meena. Meena was busy writing reports in Bundeli. She says that it is too difficult for her to write reports in Bundeli in Devanagari script.¹⁹⁸ But she is used to the task of writing in the journalistic practices.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters, mentioned above, shared some interesting things with Heera in the office the same day when I met all of them at their office. Meena complained to Heera about the junior policemen because each time they refused her request to interview them. Heera calmed her by informing them that there was a police department rule that only senior police officers could address the press. Salma discussed with Heera the posting of a new Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) in Chitrakoot. Heera shared her view on the SDM. She found the new SDM using *achchi Hindi* (comprehensible Hindi) instead of using *kathin* (difficult) Hindi. The women were curious about his caste. Meena (Yadav/OBC herself), on knowing him belonging to Yadav caste, exclaimed: “what use of *jat-biradar* (caste status).” She believes that any officer should be good and caste should not matter. The Dalitbahujan women reporters also discussed about the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Commissioner, and *daroga* (policemen), certain civic issues and so on.

What interests me about the above interaction among the Dalitbahujan women reporters is the universe of civic journalism shared by them at the micro-level. The Dalitbahujan women reporters are sensitive to the question of respect to common people. They share positive confidence among themselves in critiquing the police department. Heera is vocal enough to raise her voice against the minister. She is conscious of making a distinction between a language understandable by all people and an elite or a difficult language often used by the district administration. Her experience of news reporting describes a particular geography of Chitrakoot. It demands travel by long walks to cover news while the town itself is in disorder. The Dalitbahujan women reporters share a sensible view on the caste-status in the public service.

¹⁹⁸ Meena. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 25 Oct. 2017.

Each of the Dalitbahujan women reporters mentioned above can reflect on their experience with a sensibility, with a sense of humor, talk about the moral bond with their spouses, and also critique power structures. In the interview, “Splice Low-Res 5: Diversity—Khabar Lahariya,” Disha Mullick agrees that *Khabar Lahariya* is always looked at as a “very serious non-humorous news platform with ‘serious’ reporting” (1:03:18-1:03:31). She finds the Dalitbahujan women reporters and the editors “pretty feisty” “with a sharp local sense of humor” (1:03:32-1:03:39). They can turn the digital platform “on its head by pushing the local news content to the local audience” (1:04: 16-1:04:21).

To me, the Dalitbahujan women reporters’ challenging the notion of ‘merit’ in journalism is exhilarating. They experience a radical form of liberty in the use of digital medium. They depart from the standard public in their adaption of the digital medium over print. The digital platform helps them depart from the pressure of professionalism they experience in the print-media. It is liberating for both the Dalitbahujan women reporters and other voices. They redefine the meaning of democratization of Bundeli identity. The outlook of Dalitbahujan women reporters helps us understand the bond between the Dalitbahujan women and democracy. This bond is democratic because it is analytical and built on alternative worldviews of Dalitbahujan women as against conventional and elite governmental institutions. It helps us understand how Dalitbahujan women redefine democratization of space. They exemplify and show that the rise of Dalitbahujan women in the field of journalism, governance, culture, etc., signifies changing forms of power, meanings, discourses, contestations, etc.

In her article, “Towards an Anthropology of Democracy,” Julia Paley discusses the reception of democracy in the countries which are subject to a transitional regime (484). She suggests that the struggle for social justice and human rights cannot be universalized (471). The struggles on grass roots level are constituted by the particularities of demand and in particular locales for the recognition of voice (478-487). She makes a distinction between the “procedural democracy” and the “substantive democracy” (474). I shall discuss the “substantive democracy” concerning the contexts of Dalitbahujan women in contrast to the “procedural democracy” concerning the standard public.

Unlike the standard public, the Dalitbahujan women reporters engage with marginalized groups, including the Kol Adivasi in Chitrakoot and Banda that are situated in the periphery of south UP. They document the demands of Kol Adivasi against the state policy. They carry out the functions of democracy for wellbeing of the most underprivileged. They use Bundeli in democratic manner in working *with* the stakeholders. They cover news specific to the self-representation of Dalitbahujan women in election. They help us understand how Dalitbahujan women embody a bond with land, resource and nature. They de-legitimize the role of standard public by subverting the latter's claim of legitimacy in order to speak for the entire linguistic minority in Bundelkhand. The politics of the Dalitbahujan women reporters can be located in their solidarity with the Kol Adivasi community.

Paley is suspicious of the assumption that more NGOs would mean a deepening of democracy given their embeddedness in the market economy (482-483). In the case of *Khabar Lahariya*, the Dalitbahujan women reporters highlight the Dalit and Kol Adivasi as citizens more than, in the words of Paley, as “racial and gendered subjects” (479). They prove Partha Chatterjee's thesis on the “governed” subjects wrong by documenting the struggle of groups towards accessing civil and social rights. They help them distinguish their identity. They enact everyday language of moral discourse in the form of the Dalitbahujan women's courage to act against the dominant forces. I elaborate on this struggle. The next section analyses the discourse of moral courage connected to the identity of Dalitbahujan women.

The Emergence of *himmati mehariya* (Courageous Women)

This section explains what moral courage looks like among the Dalitbahujan women facing casteism in a context filled with toxic patriarchal masculinity and what it means for them to be a Dalit and a woman but yet to be a Bundelkhandi, belonging to the Bundeli land language. I look at the news reports published in *Khabar Lahariya* to discuss their courageous stories. Firstly, the reports allow us to understand the dynamics between men and women and, thereby, deconstruct the narrative that privileges the standard public over Dalitbahujan women reporters. It is important to deconstruct the narrative of victimhood and linguistic motherhood to argue for a narrative that would allow us to define the Dalitbahujan women as makers of their histories.

The standard public tends to nationalize Bundeli culture as a main feature of Bundeli language. Dalitbahujan women reporters inverse this logic on the ground of grassroots journalism. As they reach out to the people, they decentralize the ideal notion of public language encoded in standard Bundeli. Secondly, it is observed many a times that the mainstream literacy and media feminists miss the caste factor (Guru, “Dalit Women” 82-83). The Dalitbahujan women confront casteism but the Dalit men many a times ignore the gender factor (84). This form of intersectional relation between caste-gender oppression comes very real for the Dalitbahujan women.

In the villages of Bundelkhand, the NGOs find that the upper-caste male Pradhan use fake signatures and thumb stamps on the job cards in the name of their relatives to embezzle the money meant for unemployed poor (Appendix 1).¹⁹⁹ Against this background, the Dalitbahujan women reporters published the story of a Dalit woman named Indrāvati.²⁰⁰ Indrāvati belongs to Kujalgarh village in Gorakhpur district (UP). She has become popular as the *mukhiya* (chief) for distributing labor in the village. Despite her illiteracy, she can organize a complete team of Dalitbahujan women through phone calls. She dares to speak to the officials in a loud voice when she finds them not distributing the job cards to the Dalitbahujan women.²⁰¹ She helps women like her because she was deceived by the male Pradhan of her village. The Pradhan did not provide her a job card. She has decided to help all women since then. She inquires about the job cards for women and gets the job cards after talking with a senior officer. She is confident to deal with the administrators in official matters. Indrāvati exemplifies the woman of integrity and a woman of action who goes beyond words. She conceptualizes her personal experience of male-dominance in a collective framework and emerges as a leader of her community. She turns the challenges into a public cause in service to the women marginalized like her. The context of

¹⁹⁹ I cite the reports published in *Khabar Lahariya* in the footnotes of this chapter and enlist all the reports in the appendix at the end of this chapter. “Sanstha Karin Janch aor Bethak” [Organization Investigated the Case and Held a Meeting]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 167, 15-21 Sept. 2011, p.1.

²⁰⁰ “Padhe se Jyada Kadhe hoi ka Chahi” [Be Strict more than Learned]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.25, 1-7 Feb.2011, p.6.

²⁰¹ The job cards are distributed under MNREGA. It matters a lot for Dalit and Adivasi women in the villages. It provides them a financial security against the unemployment in rural climate.

leadership, however, cannot be limited to public context alone in the everyday life of Dalitbahujan women.

The story of Munni Devi of Salempur village in Urai district (UP) is an inspiring example in the Dalit feminist discourse.²⁰² Munni has started a movement against husbands who are addicted to drinking and gambling. The men beat their wives daily. The habit of drinking causes Dalitbahujan women lose their land. Munni leads *mehariya ka sangathan* (the organization of wives). She shares her personal story with Dalitbahujan women reporters. Munni Devi was married to Ramavtar in 1982. She faced violence and hardship in life because her husband was addicted to drinking. She had three daughters and two sons. She got her daughters married and decided to fight against the drinking habit of her husband. She tied her husband and thrashed him to teach him a lesson.

It is pertinent here to note the anti-arrack movement led by the rural Dalit women in 1992 in the Andhra region. K. Ilaiah identifies it as an assertion of “the mother’s right to set the family right” (Tharu and Niranjana 255). Similarly, the Dalit women of Bundelkhand reconfigure the gender relations in their families as their right. Tharu and Niranjana call such a moment “the politics of everyday life” (257). They note that the Dalit women address the “aspiration for physical well-being” and highlight their “economic exploitation” in such an event of Dalit leadership (257). Naqvi finds “The anti-arrack movement” as inherent in Dalit women’s leadership (27). She locates the national literacy campaigns, which took place in 1990s, in the context of such events of “unprecedented social action” (27). She argues that it is the rural Dalit women and not the mainstream literacy activists, who demonstrated both “willingness” and “ability” to come out as “learners”, “leaders” and “volunteers” (27). They are the real determiners in bringing about a social change or in making an impact in the public sphere. It is clear that economic disparity has been a major challenge in the Dalitbahujan community. This, however, should not be a ground to connect Dalit men with addiction to liquor and subsequent violence. We need to see the discourse around liquor as part of changing norms/practices of

²⁰² “Mehariya Sikhain Sabak” [Wives Taught Lesson]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.55, 8-14 Aug. 2009, p.7.

larger society and how the most underprivileged are effected most, be it Dalit men or women; we need to see how upper-class/caste men have the means to deal with their addictions and the violence against non-dalit women by their families often gets hidden from the public for a variety of reasons including caste honor.

In their article, “Caste and Economic Discrimination,” Sukhadeo Thorat and Katherine Newman observe that the Dalits could not claim “economic rights” due to various forms of social exclusion and persistence of discrimination against them in the past (4121). It is important to understand the “economic discrimination with group identities” in the interface between caste and class factors (4121). The Dalit women led “the anti-arrack movement” and pushed the Congress government to ban the sale of arrack “for four years” in south India (Naqvi 27). In the case of Munni Devi, it is seen that she creates the resources to foster herself, the family and the community. She is able to affect the market of liquor in the villages. She breaks the challenges faced by the Dalit women in the family. She brings the dignity of labour back to the informal sector of the village. The struggle to claim, for instance, land and property rights is crucial. The Dalitbahujan women reporters highlight the events of struggle for land and property rights both within and without community.

The report, “*Khader Dihin*,” [Pushed Away] shows that Kairi, a Kol Adivasi woman farmer, led her group of Kol Adivasi women and pushed back the *lekhpal* (the registrar of land redistribution in Panchayat) and the police against the extortion practices of Virendra Pandit, a Brahmin man in Motvan village.²⁰³ Ram bai of Murliyapurva village talked to the Dalitbahujan women reporters that Mukhiya, her brother-in-law forcefully got her father-in-law’s sign on the papers for the eight *bigah* land and property in 2004.²⁰⁴ She won the case against him at the SDM office in 2008 but Mukhiya did not hand over the possession to her. He sexually tortured her. But Ram bai was determined to wait for justice until she got her right to the property. Similarly, the report, “*Himmat kai ke Lihin Kabja*,” [Showed Courage and Possessed Land]

²⁰³ “Khader Dihin” [Pushed Away]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.4, Sept. 2002, p.2.

²⁰⁴ “Mukadama Jite ke Bad Nahi Mila Kabja” [Won the Case but Landless]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 24, 2012, p.4.

narrates the story of Andharva who struggled against upper-caste men for twelve years and eventually got possession over his land.²⁰⁵

The story of Tijiya, a Dalit woman of Pahadi village is noteworthy.²⁰⁶ She lost her home after the flood in the downstream some ten years ago. Her husband Gajraj revealed to the Dalitbahujan women reporters that the *lekhpal* promised him *patta* land on his name at another place for a bribe of three thousand rupees. Gajraj left for Surat to earn his livelihood. But the *lekhpal* sold the *patta* land to the upper-caste Thakur, Ramkripal, for rupees ten thousand. When Tijiya and Gajraj resisted against the *dadoo log* (the dominant caste), the latter filed an FIR against Gajraj. Tijiya was adamant to build her house on the *patta* land with the money earned with hard work. The rural elite prosecuted them. Gajraj fell ill. The people of the village saw Tijiya was in a difficult situation. But Tijiya did not give up. She fought the case for five years and won against the dominant castes. She eventually built her house. She was appreciated by the people in her community for her courage and determination and she inspired them.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters show their collective resistance and faith in social justice in the coverage of stories. The examples cited above show that caste-gender oppression is a collective phenomenon as much as it is individual. In this context, Heera narrates her encounter with Dadua, the dacoit, from an anti-caste perspective.

In her article, “*Jab Khatrnak Dadua se hua mera Samna*,” [When I Happened to Encounter the Dangerous Dadua] Heera Jatav portrays Dadua not as a dacoit but as a *baaghi* (rebel) (5). She highlights Dadua as the resistant figure against the domination of upper-caste landlords, the *lekhpal* and the police in Chitrakoot. She had an encounter with Dadua during her fieldwork in 1997. She did not know Dadua by face but Dadua knew her for her service to the Dalitbahujan community as a social worker. When she happened to meet him at the Markundi bus stand in Chitrakoot, Dadua appreciated her courage to work as a supervisor of the Mahila

²⁰⁵ “Himmat kai ke Lihin Kabja” [Showed Courage and Possessed Land]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 26, 1-15 March, 2004, p.6.

²⁰⁶ “Himmat na Haris” [Did not Give up Courage]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.11, Apr. 2003, p.6.

Samakhya. Heera was unable to see his face covered with a scarf. When she asked him his name, he replied: “*Main Police ka baap hu*” (I am the father of police) (5). She mistook Dadua to be an arrogant man on that first instance and therefore neglected him. She got to know him after the police one day stopped the public bus arbitrarily for hours at Markundi police station on the way to Manikpur block. A woman in the bus was yelling with pain. Heera intervened in the matter but the police were not ready to help the woman. Dadua finally intervened and commanded the driver of the bus to bring the police to him. The police wanted to know who called them. Dadua sent the driver with his final message to the police. His message, Heera writes: “*tumhara baap bula raha hai. Agar bas ko fir roka to aag laga duga.*” (Your father is calling! If the bus is stopped any longer, I will burn you with fire) (5). She found in Dadua a messiah of the poor and an enemy of the state. She investigated about his real life and wrote about the context behind his rebel against the state.

Dadua’s real name is Shivkumar Patel and he was born in a poor family. Some powerful landlords seized the land of his parents with a threat to their lives (5). Shivkumar was forced to run away from his family to save his life (5). Later, he earned the name of dacoit in Chitrakoot. Dadua was killed in 2007 by the Special Task Force (5). He helped the poor families in getting the daughters married, punished the landlords, and plagued the police (5). The installment of the idols of Dadua and his wife Ketki at Kabraha village of Fatehpur district (UP) speaks volumes of his popularity in people’s memory (5). The brother of Dadua, Balkumar Patel, and son Veer Singh held important positions in the Samajwadi Party (SP) led by the OBC leader Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP (5).

Heera attributes a sense of dignity to the history of Dadua in the context of “presentness and immediacy” as argued by M S. S. Pandian (38). In his article, “Writing Ordinary Lives,” Pandian focuses on the “ordinariness” of everyday experiences in the writings of Dalit authors, both male and female. He argues that the Dalit experiences of everyday life can help the scholars break away from the objectivist domination and “authorial neutrality” of social science in the field of knowledge (35). He shows that Dalit texts bring the language of “affect”, “bewilderment” and “astonishment” over the domination of “reason” and “explanation” in the disciplinary regime of social sciences (40).

The story of Dadua challenges the notion of morality encoded by the standard public in standard Bundeli and its cultural politics. It astonishes the standard public with a comeback of the marginalized community to the field of politics. It constructs a new space in the memory of people. The standard public shies away from asserting the ethnic vigor associated with the tales of warrior legends in Bundelkhand. It proposes the events of rebel from a nationalist perspective. It attempts to locate it in the discourse of a distant past. Contrary to the standard public, the question of courage is at the heart of the seemingly “ordinary” Dalit life in Bundelkhand. Pandian argues that the everyday Dalit life world is not determined by the dominant forms of “temporality” in Dalit autobiographies (40). I find the Dalitbahujan women reporters offering the element of courage as an alternative to the element of pride that has been a dominant object of emotion or feeling in the mainstream linguistic movements of India. The element of courage is not pathological; it does not denote a broken, disturbed, or alienated state of mind. The Dalitbahujan women reporters deconstruct the narrative of affect in its ‘moving’ but passively located materiality of body. They embody courage from inside, a subjective experience to the external events of affect and one that moves into the world in a performative sense. They constitute an alternative public by challenging the very constitutive structures of the category of ‘public’ that presupposes given determiners such as literacy, skills, orientation, etc. They learn to place the body and mind as equals than presupposing the categories of dominant political thought. The latter is required to experience, in Pandian’s understanding, the sovereignty “of self” (40) in the body that is loaded with the signified ‘standard’ images of a journalist. Though both are connected, the sense of performance over the sense of obligation or duty to perform the role of journalist can be observed in the interview with the Dalitbahujan women reporters. The view of Sangita is noteworthy in this case. The tone of her language is revealing.

Sehar, a mainstream media feminist asks Sangita about the source of courage among the Dalitbahujan women reporters who are involved in risky and dangerous reporting (“Splice” 1:19:20-1:19:41). Sangita is surprised with the question because she believes that there is no alternative to courage in journalism. She is emphatic in her answer (1:19:41-1:19:43). She says that the Dalitbahujan women reporters have inculcated the element of courage after many years of working as reporters. They have mentally trained themselves not to be scared of the dominant forces (1:19:44-1:19:56). They accept it as a *chunoti* (challenge) of society and of the world to

report stories with no fear of the dangerous repercussions (1:19:56-1:20:01). They are committed to the world and society. Sangita claims that she and the other Dalitbahujan women reporters visit the area of dacoits through the jungle to cover the most dangerous stories (1:20:02-1:20:07). They cover stories of government scams, and they face threats while covering them (1:20:08-1:20:15). She cites the example of Kamna, one of the reporters. Kamna was surrounded by gun-wielding members of a “Gau-shala”²⁰⁷ for reporting against the bad health of a cattle house (1:22:23-1:23:14). She also reported on illegal sand mining in Bundelkhand. She was threatened by the contractors, mine owners, and the politicians (1:21:43-1:22:23). The mainstream media is blind to rural issues and voices. Sangita argues that if the Dalitbahujan women reporters buckle under pressure, it is possible that the voices from rural Bundelkhand remain unheard and unknown to the media space (1:20:16-1:20:27). It is a matter of huge courage for the Dalitbahujan women reporters like her to challenge these people who know them as Dalit women reporters from particular underprivileged caste backgrounds. It is beyond the imagination of the upper-caste mafia to expect a Dalit woman speaking against them. The Dalitbahujan women reporters have learned to live with threats. They are committed to lend voice to the *gramin avaje* (rural voices) in the region (1:23:15-1:23:20). They cannot afford to lose courage in such a situation (1:20:24-1:20:30).

Disha Mullick mentions that the Dalitbahujan women reporters come to know about the production, consumption, and management of news reporting in India after they enter into the media space via *Khabar Lahariya*. They further learn to lead it by themselves. But she discovers that they are “counter-intuitive to everything” (1:21:17-1:21:20). It is difficult for her to translate the “essence” of courage in Dalitbahujan women reporters (1:21:06-1:21:12). It is “in-built” in them. It is something more than “a constant battle” with their selves. It is a constant need to “reaffirm” and “find” that courage to survive in the field and life (1:21:31-1:21:42).

²⁰⁷ Disha Mullick explains the context of cow-politics in Bundelkhand and the Dalitbahujan women reporters’ role in exposing it. As Bundelkhand is a drought prone region, many cattle are abandoned by the farmers. The BJP, the right wing party engage in the politics of cow by using it as a Hindu symbol. They promote cow shelters in their politics. But the shelters are always in a very poor condition (1:23:47-1:24:44). It indicates the fact that the cow politics is a token issue and it does not help either the cattle or the farmers. Dalitbahujan women reporters expose the politics of Hindutva in their context.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters are writing not only their lives but also the lives of the Dalitbahujan women in the field of rural journalism. The act of writing the lives of self and community marks the formation of a new identity for Dalitbahujan women. The Dalitbahujan women reporters offer a new category of *himmati mehariya* (courageous women) in the pages of *Khabar Lahariya*. I argue that the Dalitbahujan women as *himmati mehariya* demonstrate the dynamics that are often overlooked in feminist theory and in Dalit Studies. They are determined to take action for moral reasons despite the possibility of antagonistic repercussions. They are not afraid or doubtful of their actions. This does not mean they are reactionary in their political thought. It marks the re-institutionalization of Dalitbahujan women with the use of the category of *himmati mehariya* as a political idiom in *Khabar Lahariya*. The category of *himmati mehariya* implies a new space made available to the Dalitbahujan women in feminist politics. It stands for the testimony of a collective struggle against the forces specific to the locale of rural Bundelkhand and against Brahminical patriarchy in general.

I elaborate this category in relation to the formation of political identity of Dalitbahujan women. Here, the Dalitbahujan women are emergent figures. I narrativize them as harbingers of social change in rural Bundelkhand with a focus on the stories of Dalitbahujan women Pradhans (the village head) in the following section.

The Stories of Dalitbahujan Women Pradhan

Khabar Lahariya published the stories of women Pradhans to explain that the Dalitbahujan women do not only survive but also thrive against social odds. Rajni Devi, the woman Pradhan of Darseda village in Chitrakoot, narrates her story thus to *Khabar Lahariya*:

My husband died a year back. Since then, the landlords have been troubling me a lot. They obstruct and hinder me when I engage in the works of development of the village. They say that they will not let me develop the village. I completed the documents of one and a half *bigah* land in the name of twelve members of the village. The *dabang* of the village connived with the *lekhpal* and *tehsildar* to cancel the *patta* of this land. I ordered the load of bricks for the construction but they manipulated it and also manipulated the *galla* (grain provided under

government scheme). They threatened to kill me. The DM and the BDO have not heard my calls for intervention in the matter. I will not lose courage and will fight the election again.²⁰⁸

Rajni Devi is a Dalit widow. Her story is significant for its spirit and her will to bring development to the village as an insider. She aims to bring welfare to poor families. She resists the dominant forces with a clear mandate from her community. The mandate of her community inspires Rajni to manage *khatauni* (the list of village lands with details of distribution and assessment) in the interest of marginalized. The thirty-three per cent of reservation for Dalitbahujan women in the local election is a crucial factor in this case. We can understand her story and life as a contribution to Dalit feminist politics. The mandate of community marks the decentralization of power. She is a new generation young woman from the Dalitbahujan community who marks her entry in the public space filled with daily threat and barriers. But she continues to work for the progress of her community.

The editorial, “*Pradhan Pad ka Arakshan Tay Hoi ga Maddai ke Dil ma Uthe Khalbali*,” [Reservation for the post of Pradhan is in Effect: The People Are Really Excited] denotes the celebration of Panchayat election among men and women from the Dalitbahujan community in the villages.²⁰⁹ In this regard, *Khabar Lahariya* published a poem, “*Mehariya Pradhanan ke Ek Awaz*” [The United Voice of Women Pradhan].²¹⁰ The poem predicts the *raj* (rule) of Dalitbahujan women in politics. It promises *aklan* (examination) of all households for *vikas* (development) in the villages. It focuses on the main theme of women’s struggle to build consciousness of *adhikar* (entitlements), *age lai be* (progress) and *himmat* (courage) among

²⁰⁸ “Dabangan ke karan Vikash Adhura” [The Upper-caste Landlords Stand against Development]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 53, 15-30 Apr. 2005, p.5.

²⁰⁹ “Pradhan Pad ka Arakshan tai hoi Ga Maddai ke Dil ma Uthe Khalbali” [Reservation for the Post of Pradhan is in Effect: People are Excited by Heart]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.116, 15-21 Aug. 2010, p.8.

²¹⁰ “Mehariya Pradhanan ke Ek Awaz” [The United Voice of Women Pradhan]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 123, 8-14 Oct. 2010, p.5.

young Dalitbahujan women. It inspires women to nominate and contest in the election and fight against corruption and caste-gender oppression.

The news reports published in *Khabar Lahariya* encourage Dalitbahujan women to work towards the position of the head of Gram Panchayat, a village-level institution of self-government. They establish a direct relationship between democracy and Dalitbahujan women by demanding decentralization of power. They highlight the significance of reservation policy for Dalitbahujan women. In this context, the present section explores the stories of women Pradhan and examines the impact of the Dalitbahujan women reporters on the Dalitbahujan women in asserting their identity.

Shushila, a Dalit woman attended college in Mau *taluk*, Chitrakoot district.²¹¹ She faced pervert harassment on WhatsApp, phone calls, and on the streets. When she decided to contest the election, she faced opposition because she was considered to be from an ‘untouchable’ (Dalit) caste. She contested the election and won the post of Pradhan at Kolmajara village in 2015. She found that people recognized her and started to respect her after her being elected. To a Dalitbahujan woman reporter, this is what she says on education: it is crucial for women to be educated because it can enable them to be even a Prime Minister. The story of Shushila signifies the role of education in the lives of Dalitbahujan women. It can enable them to claim their political rights, to participate in the election and claim a share in the power-structure against caste-gender oppression and work towards development that fosters equality. Her story marks the imagination and ambition of a Dalitbahujan woman. It redefines education as a democratic means of achieving the highest position in the politics of recognition against social hierarchies. However, a majority of Dalitbahujan women, who contest in election, are neo-literate. Gamala and Girja, two Dalit women were educated until fifth standard. But they were determined to work for their people in Mahotara village.²¹² They promised to build roads, toilets, gutter lines and bring funds from the government for the development of villages. I take the case of Sanjo

²¹¹ “Shushila, Mahila Gram Pradhan: Beti Padhao Pradhan Mantri Banao” [Shushila, a Woman Pradhan: Beti Padhao Pradhan Mantri Banao]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 29, 12-18 March, 2016, p.4.

²¹² “Soch Samajh ke Chunab Pradhan” [Vote for Pradhan Sincerely]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.123, 8-14 Oct.2010, p.5.

Devi to elaborate on the significance of a neo-literate woman Pradhan from the Kol Adivasi community.

Khabar Lahariya covers the story of Sanjo Devi, an Adivasi woman Pradhan.²¹³ To collect her story, the Dalitbahujan women reporters visited Gidurha Gram Panchayat in Manikpur block, Chitrakoot. They did not find Sanjo at her residence. In a while, they saw her driving her bike and reaching her house. Sanjo Devi was dressed in a *kurta-payjama* outfit with a scarf around her neck. She had some fifteen to twenty bank passbooks. She returned from the bank after depositing money in the accounts of the beneficiaries under the Vridha Pension Yojana.²¹⁴ The Dalitbahujan women reporters enquired Sanjo about one of the beneficiaries who failed to get the benefit of the same scheme for some reason. Sanjo reported that the opposition misguided the beneficiary against her. It caused fear in the innocent beneficiary woman. The beneficiary woman thought Sanjo stole her money. The Dalitbahujan women reporters investigated the role of Sanjo in bringing about the social change in her village. They discovered that Sanjo is an inspiration to the community. The women of Gidurha village are happy with Sanjo's work as the Pradhan of their village. Sanjo has resolved issues around wells, ponds, electricity, and hand pumps. She is very happy for being recognized as a woman Pradhan. She speaks to the Dalitbahujan women reporters about her experience of patriarchy:

Women are usually dependent on men in our country. It is seen that the husband or *jeth* (brother-in-law) utilizes the position of a woman despite her position as Pradhan. But I work independently as the Pradhan and keep the important documents and stamps with me. I sign myself. I have distributed *pattas* of land, fifty-six *avas yojana* (housing scheme), two-hundred forty-one toilets, and one hundred fifty pensions to eighty people (5).

²¹³ "Sangharsha ke age Jeet Havai" [There is Victory after Struggle]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 95, 22-28 June, 2010, p.5.

²¹⁴ The scheme was introduced in the interest of old-aged women.

Sanjo was honored with the title of *Sashakta Mahila Pratinidhi* (Strong Woman Representative) on 24 April 2010. She can drive a tractor. She countered the dacoits all by herself. The Dalitbahujan women reporters asked her about the *manasva jaise pahnav* (man-like outfit). Sanjo explains:

I started to dress in *kurta-payjama* after joining the Mahila Samakhya. It helps me drive a bike. I cut off my hair after a confrontation with one man. The man wanted to grab my hair and attack me. I cut off my hair since then so that no man can touch my hair to control me. I will fight for the helpless and vulnerable people no matter I win or lose the next election (5).

The stories of both Shushila and Sanjo challenge masculine spaces. Their stories debunk the social hierarchies in the village. Though illiterate, Sanjo uses her experience of work in Mahila Samakhya successfully. She lives with her community in a village of two thousand twenty-two members. She is an inspiration to the Kol Adivasi women like her. She has changed the dynamics of politics as a feminist *mehariya ummedvar* (woman contestant) in the Panchayat Raj system. The men challenged her and questioned her on the ground of merit because she did not attend college like Shushila. She breaks the casteist and patriarchal prejudices which are grounded in the misconstrued notion of merit. She proves that women are not weak and inferior subjects. She drives a bike and a tractor. It indicates her mobility and a status of woman farmer. She transgresses the gender boundaries both personally and professionally—in her decision to have a hair-cut and in her decisions to contest and work as a Pradhan thereby blurring the lines between the personal and political and the professional.

As seen in the above mentioned reports and stories, it is clear that the Dalit and Kol Adivasi women Pradhan make, in Paley's terms, the sense of a "substantive" form of democracy in line with the community practices on the margins. They make sense of the world in their relationship with the land, the forest and indigenous resources. They form a specific concept of language for self-expression in such a relationship. It provides them the discursive elements that help them un-alienate themselves from the pressures of caste-society. The daily experience of caste-gender oppression shapes their sensibility. Twenty-five years old Sonu Devi, an Adivasi

woman, took oath as the first woman Block Pramukh on 18th March 2016.²¹⁵ She won the election for the first time. She wanted to develop each area in the block and help its people. She promised the Kol Adivasi women with employment in the village because they solely sustain the family by collecting firewood from the forest.

In this case, the entry of the Dalitbahujan women reporters and the women Pradhans like Sonu, Shushila and Sanjo reinscribe the history of the women's movement. They comprehend multiple realities in their assertion of identity in the context of socio-cultural and socio-economic development of their villages.

In her article, "Intersectionality as Method: A Note," Catharine MacKinnon argues that social "complexity" demands to note the forms of inequalities—intersectionality—that may work differently in different situations. It may leave the question of Black women's identity in a constant continuum. It may allow us to engage in a "fluidly reversible" mode of interpretation of Black existence (1020). Secondly, Black women's experience of "multiple inequalities" makes them the "real people" in convergence of the forms of inequalities (1020).

In her article "'Real Feminism' and Dalit Women: Scripts of Denial and Accusation," Sharmila Rege defines Dalit Standpoint Theory as a means to interrogate the differences in subject positions of Dalitbahujan women (495). She finds it necessary for communities to be "re-appropriated" or differentiated in the democratization of politics (494). She argues that the Dalit Feminist Standpoint theory would resonate with Jyotiba Phule's vision, that is, to combine the politics of cultural recognition of identity and redistribution of economic rights for Dalitbahujan women (495). In the biography of Phule, *Mahatma Jotirao Phoolley*, Dhananjay Keer notes that Phule's "emphasis on economic betterment and social justice" among Dalitbahujan peasants and mill workers in Bombay is evident in his support to the non-Brahmin colleagues' Din Bandhu Sarvajanic Sabha in 1884 (199).

²¹⁵ "Sonu Devi bani Pehali Darki Block Pramukh" [Sonu Devi the First Head of Block Panchayat]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 58, 26 March-1 Apr. 2016, p.4.

In the Bundeli context, the Dalitbahujan women reporters depart from the standard public in their reconfiguration of the popular icon. They do not subscribe to the memory of literary icons in the Hindi literature and connect it to the nationalist context of anti-colonial struggle. For instance, Heera's coverage of the story of Dadua captures the imagination of the people about the role of Dadua in the wellbeing of the Dalitbahujan community. Unlike the standard public, Heera demonstrates courage in challenging the state. She does not consolidate the valorized status of men and women alone. She locates the past of political units, namely, the SC, the ST, and the OBCs in the present context of Bundeli society. The past of cultural revolt is inseparable from the material redistribution of economic rights in the Dalitbahujan women reporters' enactment of Bundeli identity. The Dalitbahujan women reporters also depart from the primordial notion of Bundeli identity in reporting the stories of Dalitbahujan women Pradhan. The Dalitbahujan women Pradhans celebrate democracy. I find the source of this celebration in the struggle for a claim on ethnicity and reforms among the Dalitbahujan community, and in particular among the Kol Adivasis in Chitrakoot.

The next section deals with the impact of news published in *Khabar Lahariya* on the Kol Adivasi men and women in the context of ethnicity. It explains the assertion of identity by the Kol Adivasis as a distinct ethnic community. It examines their demand for development and claim for an indigenous identity in the context of everyday lives.

The Rise of Kol Adivasi in Bundelkhand

The section elaborates on how Dalitbahujan women reporters share the power-dynamics with the upper-caste male members of the standard public in a multi-layered context. It focuses on caste-gender-ethnicity, the three-fold dimension to unpack these contexts of Bundeli identity. The identity politics function on several registers of language practices—namely, conflicting memories about the region and the registers of local memories that help us against the histories of caste-gender oppression. This section focuses on the domain of ecological discourses that is used to enact and hide the modes of caste violence.

Bundelkhand is described as a drought prone territory in mainstream media. It is described as disaster area in the topographical context. For instance, a well-acclaimed movie,

Kadvi Hawa (2017) narrates the impact of global warming on the farmers in Bundelkhand. Directed by Nila Madhab Panda, the movie uses Bundeli language and also highlights the difficulties of small children, both boys and girls, who struggle to attend school through the ravines in the vicinity. The children face difficulties to commute to school on bike. It is not possible to use car or autos through ravines in the rural territory. A character named Shankar *chacha* picks the five children on his bike to drop them at school. He is forced to manage all of them on his bike. He binds them with a thread to support them against a fall while riding through ravines. He is also forced to make the children help him pass over a high ravine on the way (00:20:46-00:21:57). *Kadvi Hawa* represents the issue of climate change and gender oppression from a child's perspective too. In one of the scenes, a kid is asked by his teacher to mention the names of the main seasons in India. The teacher gets angry on the kid's unsatisfactory answer. The teacher taunts the kid and mocks at him. He calls him a person from Antarctica. The kid explains to the teacher that he experiences only summer and winter because there is scarcity of rain in the region. The teacher is puzzled with the experience of the child against his 'knowledge' on the topic (00:22:34-00:23:39). This scene marks the impact of global warming in a drought-prone Bundelkhand. In the same scene, a relative of a girl enters the class and speaks into the ears of the teacher. The teacher informs one of the girls that some guest has come to her home. He commands her to leave the class and go home along with the relative. (00:23:40-00:24:00). Panda does not make the reason clear behind the purpose of guest's coming to the girl's home. He subtly plays out the problem of child marriage, which is rampant in the villages of Bundelkhand. He mentions that he was inspired to make the film after getting to know that the villages were sunk in water over a period of time in his home state.²¹⁶ However, nowhere does Panda draw attention to the caste-dynamics or the impact of global warming with respect to the caste identity of the people in the village.

The standard public locates the ecological future of Bundelkhand in the 1950s' discourse of state formation in India. In his essay, "*Bundelkhand: Ek Asliyat*," [Bundelkhand: One Reality]

²¹⁶ "Kadvi Hawa director wants people to be conscious about environment." *Hindustan Times*, 10 Aug. 2017, [google.com/amp/s/m.hindustantimes.com/bollywood/kadvi-hawa-director-wants-people-to-beconscious-about-enviorment/story-HEdnpJbVT6K0reVpGAA0TN_amp.html](https://www.google.com/amp/s/m.hindustantimes.com/bollywood/kadvi-hawa-director-wants-people-to-beconscious-about-enviorment/story-HEdnpJbVT6K0reVpGAA0TN_amp.html).

Madbaiya argues that the exclusion of Bundelkhand in the formation of Indian states in 1950s is responsible for the degradation of conditions in Bundelkhand (57). Unlike the standard public, the Dalitbahujan women reporters focus on the reports about drought and water crisis in Bundelkhand from a caste-gender perspective; they focus on the conditions of Dalit and Kol Adivasi as being affected by climate change. *Khabar Lahariya* published the poem, “Thakur ka Kunwa” [The Well of Thakur] by Omprakash Valmiki, the literary icon of Hindi Dalit Sahitya (7). The poem illustrates the slavery of Dalit men and women who are sharecroppers under the landlords in the villages of Bundelkhand. It exposes the dominance of Thakurs (the landowning castes), who never work but have everything in the village. It draws the readers’ attention to the alienation of landless Dalits and Adivasis who live the life of sharecroppers. The sharecroppers plow, plant, harvest and do everything else but the landowner takes it all. They have worked all the time. This condition leaves the Dalits nowhere to go and it leaves them hungry. The socio-political climate in relation to the conditions of the Dalits has been the same from the beginning. Drought is also a construct. It’s narration outside the sociological context is rather entrenched in *savarna* supremacy. It implies that the suffering of Dalit men and women during drought is not a subject of serious concern and its particularities are often erased in the mainstream. In reports, “*Pani ko Tarsa Latoor*,” [Thirst for Water in Latoor]²¹⁷ “*Admi kite sa leabe pibe ke lane Pani*,” [Where should Men Bring Water to Drink]²¹⁸ “*Beghar Jine ko Majboor Bundelkhandvasi*,” [Bundelkhandis are Forced to Live Homeless]²¹⁹ “*Pani ke aas kountan Bujhai Pyas*” [May someone Quench Thirst for Water]²²⁰ the Dalitbahujan women reporters cover issues on drought in relation to its impact on Dalitbahujan men and women.

²¹⁷ “Pani ko Tarsa Latoor” [Thirst for Water in Latoor]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.58, 26 March-1Apr. 2016, p.6.

²¹⁸ “Admi kete se leabe pibe ke lane Pani” [Where should Men Bring Water to Drink]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.93, 19-25 Dec. 2016, p.6.

²¹⁹ “Beghar Jindagi Jine ko Majboor Bundelkhandvasi” [Bundelkhandis are Forced to Live Life Homeless]. *Khabar Lahariya*, vol.1, no. 68, 4-10 June 2016, p.4.

²²⁰ “Pani ke Aas kountan Bujhai Pyas” [May someone Quench Thirst for Water]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.153, no.1-7 June 2011, p. 6.

Secondly, the case of Kol Adivasi women which I discuss later cannot be simply reduced to laboring bodies. It is located in the context of everyday dynamism, the matter of interdependence with nature for the wellness of community in a shared manner. It explains their capacity to withstand the stigma of caste-gender oppression that marks their bodies. As seen in the reports in *Khabar Lahariya*, the Dalitbahujan women continue to sustain their lives without losing heart by attacks and harassment. They live their lives in some or the other possible form. They not only demonstrate the capacity to survive but to thrive against patriarchal biases, oppositions and dominant forces. They pursue a course of action with determination to set things right and live life with dignity after facing violence.

Dalit feminist perspectives are represented inadequately in the mainstream Indian feminism. Mary John, in her work, “Response to Indian Feminists’ Objections,” holds that the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender is an act of naming the problems and not an act that solve them in an inclusive framework (191). It does not mean to understand the experience of torture against Dalitbahujan women in a quantitative sense but in a “*qualitatively different*” sense (emphasis not mine 190). The Dalitbahujan women reporters claim their difference from the feminist politics in this sense of intervening in a quantitative sense. They cover the ground issues of the Kol Adivasi men and women. They being insiders to the community are not apologetic in demanding an ethnic status, even at the cost of giving up entitlements under SC status. Unlike the standard public, the Dalitbahujan women reporters conceptualize the notion of linguistic ‘minority’ in the context of an ethnic-minority identity instead of nationality.

In her article, “*Tendu Sahare ke Chalta Kol Adivasio ka Jivan*,” [The Life of Kol Adivasi is Sustained by the Tendu Leaves] Heera describes how Kol Adivasi women survived. She highlights their everyday life (7). The Kol women collect the *tendu* leaves between May and June. The *tendu* leaf is used in making tobacco rolls and used as an astringent and narcotic vegetable extract to eat along with betel leaf. Both the *tendu* wood and leaf are useful. The Kol women collect leaves on contract from the forest department every year. They avoid collecting leaves in sites close to dacoits’ hide-outs. The dacoits also demand a share from them. The Kol Adivasi men, women and children depart from their home in the early morning to return by

afternoon from the forest. Each member of the family is supposed to collect leaves and tie them up in bundles.

The Kol Adivasi women carry many sacks filled with bundles. They travel from Manikpur taluka, Chitrakoot to Naini block and to Allahabad by local trains. Though they do not pay for the ticket, the TT usually does not disturb them. But the TT never allows their men to travel without a ticket. They even lock them in jail. Therefore, the women carry on the work of selling *tendu* leaves. Thirty-five years old Phula shared her experience with Heera thus:

The work demands five to ten kilometer walk to collect the *tendu* leaves in intense hot without food and water. It is in our favor if the government calls us to work on contract. We can work at our own will without the fear of dacoits. One bundle is made of fifty leaves. We earn fifty to seventy rupees per one thousand bundle or one kg. It takes five days to make one thousand bundles. Sometimes we catch the train after it has started running. We, a family of seven, altogether earn rupees five hundred in two days (7).

Heera intervenes in such case to assist the Kol Adivasi women. She writes about her meeting with Suresh Narayan Tripathi, the superintendent of the Forest Department of Chitrakoot to get details regarding the contract to collect *tendu* leaves. Tripathi informed Heera that the contract is called *fadmunshi* (contract to collect *tendu* leaves) by the forest department in the six forest ranges of Chitrakoot (7). There are three hundred fifty *fadmunshis* in the district. People are paid ninety *paise* per bundle made of fifty leaves. The size of leaves can be smaller sometimes due to drought in the region. There is also the fear of dacoits. Therefore, the department has written to SP to handle the situation.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters fill the gap between the community and the administration. They take note of the grievances of Kol Adivasi men and women. The Kol women cannot find work outside the forest for more than forty days in a year (Jassal 151). They cannot manage anything to eat the next day if they fail to collect firewood on a particular day (Jatav, “Tendu” 7). It demands their children too to help them in collecting firewood. Some *badmash* people (notorious) regularly harass them inside the forest. They assume that the Kol

Adivasis are agents of the police. The forest officers lock the Kols in jail without reporting any crime and demand a penalty. The railway police take away the firewood from them when they want to sell it for their livelihood.

The Kol Adivasis submitted an application to Shyamcharan, the *sansad* (Member of Parliament) requesting to create new opportunities for them.²²¹ But they found themselves homeless and helpless. The Dalitbahujan women reporters talked with the police department. But the UP police turned the blame onto the police in the adjacent border of MP. It is important to note that the border of Bundelkhand region in south UP overlaps with the Bundelkhand region in the territory of north MP. This places the Kol Adivasis in trouble, who have been living in the periphery of both the states. The Dalitbahujan women reporter expose the pervasive discrimination and violence against the Kol Adivasis. They inspire them to organize themselves and bring their demands to the public domain. They highlighted the violation of human rights by the district administration in both the states.

The Patha Dalit Vikash Manch (PDVM) led a program called Uttar Pradesh Bhoomi Sudhar Gram Adhikar.²²² It organized a public hearing at Manikpur. The meeting focused on the rights of Kols over the resources, forest, and land in the presence of four hundred people. The Kol Adivasi organization formed a committee including a retired judge from the Allahabad Court. The members of the organization complained against the exclusion of their people from fifteen hundred bigah land that was controlled by the forest department.

Through organizing and petitioning, the Kol Adivasi assert their belonging to the forest. They were dependent on flowers and fruits like *mahuva*, *tendu*, *charva*, and *avla*, and on the firewood, etc., for their livelihoods.²²³ The court banned the cutting of trees in the forests but the *theke dar* (contractor) cut the trees. The district officers banned the sale of firewood, the dry and

²²¹ “Rojgar ke Havai Samasya” [The Problem of Unemployment]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.14, 1-15 May 2006, p.1.

²²² “Jar Jungal Jamin Hamar hai” [Resource, Forest and Land Belongs to Us]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.11 Apr.2003, p.2.

²²³ “Jungal Hamar Jivan hai” [The Forest is our Life]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 1, June 2002, p.4.

fallen wood sticks. Administration and contractors alike destroyed the Adivasis' alternative source of income. And there was no alternative employment provided. This causes starvation in the community. A Kol woman of Barui village committed suicide with her newborn baby. To challenge their exclusion and suffering, the Kol Adivasis demand their recognition in the tribal category. Twenty members of Gidurha village and Barha village said:

Had we been included in the ST category, our children would have been benefited from all the facilities involving education, ration card, and health care. We have decided to protest if our demand is not heard (1).²²⁴

The Kol Adivasis are accorded with the tribal status in the MP districts of Bundelkhand. However, they are categorized as Schedule Castes in the UP districts of Bundelkhand. They face contradictions in the political demarcation of their indigenous culture in Bundelkhand. They argued that exclusion from the ST category violate their *jangal ka adhikar* (right to the forest) (1). They also discussed issues of better transport, education, health, and ration card in the meeting. They claimed that they formed seven percent of the population in Manikpur block alone. They declared an open boycott of the next election (See fig. 1). The Kol Adivasi use red letters and the indigenous sign of bow and arrow to express their resistance against the state.

²²⁴ “Nahi Milat Jan Jati ka Darja” [Not Identified as Schedule Tribe]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.18, 22-28 Oct. 2008, p.1.



(Fig.1. Kol Ekta Manch Boycotts Voting against Exclusion from Tribal Status at the Entrance of Village)²²⁵

The DM provided this information to the Dalitbahujan women reporters. According to DM, the government has to transfer the order for the inclusion of Kols in the ST category in UP (“Nahi Milat” 1). The firewood collection holds significance for them to survive (Jassal 151). The labor associated with the access to the forest provides the Kol men and women a context of assertion in the form of public meetings. It can be observed from the above that the forest is at the center of the life of Kols.

The struggle for a new political-legal identity is crucial for the Kol Adivasis in UP. The emergence of Dalit and Kol Adivasi women Pradhan in the villages can be located in its ethnic context. The classification of a tribe into the SC category in UP districts of Bundelkhand

²²⁵ *The Wire* an alternative media, includes the reports covered by *Khabar Lahariya* as it is difficult for it to reach the Kol Adivasis being located in the mainstream. See the report, “UP’s Kol Adivasis to Boycott Polls Until Scheduled Tribe Status Demand is Met” *The Wire*, 19 Apr. 2019, thewire.in/rights/up-kol-adivasis-poll-boycott-elections-2019.

provides the Kol Adivasi certain important rights. It indicates the two-way pulls—the give and take of influences—in the reinforcement of a Hindu identity. But it has lowered their status in the caste order and has cut them off from their cultural roots and their access to indigenous resources. The demand for an official identification and recognition into the ST category can provide the Kol Adivasi a decisive edge over their rights to demand development and recognition based on the access to water, land and forest. Their two-fold demand for development and ethnic recognition is at the center of formation of their socio-political identity. I locate the Kol Adivasi members' assertion in the form of a political and cultural break from the dominant Hindu fold.

The Dalitbahujan women reporters use gender and media perspectives as pathways to create a safety net for the Dalit-Kol Adivasi community. It shows that the Dalitbahujan women reporters are engaged in the politics of care as a matter of full commitment to end caste-gender oppression and state oppression. This is evident in the inclusion of Dalit women in *Khabar Lahariya* without looking for the conventional markers of successful mainstream journalism. One of the fundamental elements of *Khabar Lahariya* lies in its Dalit feminist praxis. In this sense, the Dalitbahujan women reporters share a dream of freedom.

Heera said that they lacked enough financial source to continue the publication of *Khabar Lahariya* in print but they did not stop and shifted to the digital media.²²⁶ They have made it profitable for the community. When they report on the field as rural journalists, they post photos that attribute media practices an equally important language of poetics. It signifies a participatory process in the age of social media. Unlike the standard public, such a liberal feature in *Khabar Lahariya* points to the possibility of broadened participation in rural journalism. It is possible to experience the poetics of language even through a seemingly trivial everyday taste and decision-making process. But it contributes to the world of day to day lives, contribute to the way we connect these day-to-day-ness to larger paradigms within a media space. It marks the personal and subjective outlook of the Dalitbahujan women reporters in creating everyday aesthetics unaddressed by the mainstream media.

²²⁶ Jatav, Heera. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 25 Oct. 2017.

I discuss the structure of ‘subjective’ thought in the making of *Khabar Lahariya* in the following section. I deal with its implications for the linguistic politics which is at the center of the rise of ‘minor’ communities in this case.

Implications for Linguistic Politics

In this section, I deal with the relation between land, development, and culture from a linguistic point of view. I extend my focus on *himmati mehariya* (courageous women) further and look at the Dalitbahujan body as primary political category against the dominant narrative of linguistic movement. In the previous sections, I framed the discussion around the narrative of courageous women and located them in the structures of power. In this section, I take up the dialogue between the standard public and the Dalitbahujan women reporters to unpack the symbolic violence encoded in the discourse on civil society and language. I argue that the embodied form of courage in the narratives of the Dalitbahujan women helps us deconstruct the narrative of causality and its affect.

In their article, “Democracy versus Economic Transformation,” Nandini Sundar and Amita Baviskar argue that the possibility of resistance is inherent to the structure of Indian political thought (87-89). In his essay, “Thinking through Hindi,” Alok Rai juxtaposes this possibility of resistance with the available scholarship on the Hindi public sphere. The latter is focused on the formation of linguistic identities within a complex of social institutions. Rai states his particular interest and defines the Hindi region as the following:

When one moves closer, however, as in some natural history films where a vacant scene is suddenly discovered to be pullulating with all kinds of life—one realizes that there is a great restlessness here, a sense of turbulent energies locked as if in some cruel macro-historical gridlock (186).

Rai suggests that the mainstream gaze of the “Hindi” region has overshadowed the aesthetics of minor languages in the sub-regions of north India.²²⁷ He argues for a vitality that is ingrained in the cultural tastes, habits, and attitudes of the speakers of the minor languages. These are more often than not subsumed under the dominant linguistic and cultural nomenclature of the region. The term, *bhasha* in the practice of the standard public is a site of digressive and theoretical domination. It entails the rhetoric of Hindi as *Bharat mata*. It is built on a strategy of assimilation which results in a loss of its related forms of speech. This implies the exclusion of the Bundeli speakers’ cultural citizenship. Dalitbahujan women reporters work as a localized media group but they are anchored in universal themes of equality, justice, and citizenship. They do not share a paranoia for homogenization of diverse voices and subsequent loss of culture. They also maintain a distance from the tendency to hybridize diverse voices that seek and claim a pure nation. It can be said that Bundelkhand throbs with life in the social practices of diverse communities that survive on the margins of the Hindi public sphere. The Dalitbahujan women reporters and the Dalitbahujan women Pradhans embody the creative energies and a political life as representatives of communities in the region. They help us zoom the landscape that makes visible new possibilities for a social change. The latter is tapered off by the dominant gaze of the standard public in Bundelkhand, the territory of upper-caste male.

In her article, “Differentiating the Hindi Subject: Bhojpuri Experience,” Asha Singh explains Rai’s concept of “cruel macro-historical gridlock” in terms of uneven distribution of the “linguistic resources” (2). Language has been a conflict zone over the “distribution of resources and territories” in India since independence (Sengupta viii). Singh argues that Dalitbahujan speakers from linguistic minorities like Bhojpuri cannot be targets of attack against the cultural imposition of Hindi language (2). She suggests that both “the non-Hindi Dalitbahujan speakers in

²²⁷ Anjali Gera Roy distinguishes banished subjectivity from the migrant subjectivity and argues that “the sedentarist relation between people and homeland, roots and nation” is ruptured in Partitioned subjectivities” (200). The ethos of Hindi language in Bollywood industry is highly influenced by Urdu and Persian. But according to Brass, elite language dominates other languages through inferioritizing its speakers’ food, dress, life-style, etc. as markers of “low taste” (57). In this regard, Bourdieu points out that “the status of life-style” is determined by “the distance from or proximity to the ‘legitimate culture’” in the hierarchy of cultural taste (57). Roy’s observation of Paul Brass and Bourdieu helps understand the subjectivity of Dalitbahujan women. Roy, Anjali Gera. *Memories and Post-Memories of the Partition of India*, Routledge, 2020. [libgen.gs/ads.php?md5=d2c8280172d628842efe6c0a1a09915d](https://www.librarygenesis.org/libgen.gs/ads.php?md5=d2c8280172d628842efe6c0a1a09915d). PDF download.

the ‘hindi-imposed belt’ and in south India share the experience of Hindi imperialism in some or the other way” (2). The non-Hindi speakers from linguistic minorities in north India firstly, “lack the fundamental resources” and secondly, suffer with the absence of script to fight back the domination of Hindi (2). Unlike the non-Hindi speakers from the linguistic communities in south India, they are forced to “access modern spaces only through Hindi” given the absence of the “written” script (2) and given the very difficult access to English.

Rai moves beyond ideological paradigms in his argument. He makes a distinction between thinking *through* Hindi (as subject) and thinking Hindi (as an object) “through the process of its formation” (186). The political processes are largely dominated by elites in “procedural democracy” (Paley 474). Rai argues for a form of expression which is “internal” to its structure in a reflexive politics (186). In his article, “Labouring Intellectuals,” Gopal Guru argues for privileging the “labouring body” because the “bodily labour” provides the Dalit and Adivasi women access to “resource for producing knowledge” (58). He finds the collective labour in “paddy plantation, or harvesting, or cotton picking, or grinding the hand mill,” and in participatory and embedded oral folk-songs (59). The women labourers are more than “a mute subject” as they speak from “within” (57). Their knowledge is rural and embodied in a working-class culture. In his text, *Philosophy of Hinduism*, Ambedkar argues that “the Hindu social order” does not believe in equality (106). Brahminical thought from its very beginning has accorded superiority to the mind over body from saying that Brahmins are born from Brahma’s head to the lowering of all labour that involves Dalitbahujans (106). Kancha Ilaiah’s book, *Why I am not a Hindu* which is based on the dignity of productive labour is all about this. Ilaiah argues that “Dalitization” of knowledge is redefined more by “labour power” than by “wealth” in the material base of a society (116). Manual scavenging is the most dehumanizing form of labour but collective labour such as harvesting keeps them alive, creative and productive because “Dalitbahujan knowledge never separated physical labour from mental labour” (121). Rai’s formulation for an ‘inner’ structure of thought and Guru’s expression for the ‘physical’ are similar. Both Rai and Guru are relevant to the case of the Dalitbahujan women reporters and the Dalit-Kol Adivasi women Pradhan. The latter embodies the “labouring body” in the domain of “substantive democracy” (Paley 474). It can be said that they embody a *reflexive body-activism* (Emphasis mine). The body of Dalitbahujan women becomes important in the hierarchy of

bodies. The hierarchy of bodies shape and is shaped by the political processes in the production and management of *Khabar Lahariya* enterprise. The mainstream literacy and gender feminists dominate political processes as ‘resource figures’ under a system of (feminist) political thought and its underlying guiding principles. However, the advent of digital media has laid open the space to Dalitbahujan actors to speak from within and fight back structural inequalities. The Dalitbahujan women reporters cannot be placed in binaries. They offer multi-layered meanings to the reality of Dalitbahujan community. They render the moral attributes of communities visible in the cultural geography of Bundelkhand.

Unlike the standard public, they do not map the Bundeli identity outside the caste social relations. For instance, they capture the event of violence against Dalitbahujan women by using words such as *kabja* (usurpation) *dhamki* (threat) *dabangai* (dominance) in the headlines of *Khabar Lahariya* reports. The headlines of *Khabar Lahariya* reveal the brutality of physical violence to the actual stakeholders. Through this experience, the readers of *Khabar Lahariya* constantly engage with the headlines of the reports in a discursive site of “symbolic violence” on the Dalitbahujan bodies.

Bourdieu describes the notion of symbolic violence in terms of reciprocity in a traditional society, where while receiving the good treatment, the person can be possessed and obliged at the same time. He argues that this reciprocity works as a mechanism of institutions in modern societies. The modern subjects of socio-political institutions inculcate a belief in their values that are in sync between their individual qualifications and cultural capital. They inherit the cultural capital by virtue of their social background (23-25).

It can be said that the members of the standard public (the urban elites) are complicit in the symbolic violence because the domination of ‘standard’ language operates over the lives of marginalized communities. The standard public believes and shares the notion of a consistent binary between Bundeli *bhasha* (standard Bundeli) and Bundeli *boli* (Bundeli-spoken) in the narrative of a Bundeli identity. This puts them in an advantageous position to justify that they are worthy to speak for a Bundeli identity in the existing social order. It plays on the disconnect between the body and the mind by glorifying the superiority of *Brahmin* mind being the standard

and the forced inferiority on *shudra* body that practices a lived-language. Such a symbolic disconnect is evident in the dialogue between the standard public and the Dalitbahujan women reporters on the page of *Khabar Lahariya*.

In the column “*Hamar Dak*” [My Letter] of *Khabar Lahariya*, Kailash Madbaiya wrote a letter to the Dalitbahujan women reporters in Hindi (8). In the letter, he expresses his happiness about Dalitbahujan women reporters bringing out *Bundeli ka akhbar* (Bundeli newspaper). He congratulates them for bringing out *Khabar Lahariya* regularly each week. He introduces himself as *Bundeli ke sirsha kavi aur lekhak* (the main poet and writer in Bundeli) and as *rashtriya adhyaksha* (the national president) of his council. He informs that his council is determined to nationalize Bundeli. He puts forth to the Dalitbahujan women reporters the example of the events of conference and literary gathering that is organized by the standard public at Delhi and Orchha respectively (MP). He claims that he is authorized to certify the standardization of Bundeli language in the literary sphere. He mentions that Bundeli language used by the Dalitbahujan women reporters is spoken in Chitrakoot and Banda. He distinguishes it from the Bundeli language used by his team in Tikamgarh, Lalitpur and Jhansi. He argues that it is not possible to establish Bundeli language into *rashtriya swaroop* (a national form) without its standardization. He requests the Dalitbahujan women reporters to bring *sabhi Bundelio ke swaroop* (all forms of Bundeli) into the space of *Khabar Lahariya*. He offers them his assistance as *atithi sampadak* (the guest editor) of *Khabar Lahariya*.

I discussed the proposal of Madbaiya with Heera.²²⁸ Heera argues that the Dalitbahujan women reporters are not ‘academic’ like the standard public in their approach towards linguistic politics. They are more focused on the field-based method of communicative practices. Unlike the standard public, the Dalitbahujan women reporters are clear about the mission of *Khabar Lahariya*. It aims to follow the tradition of *Mahila Dakiya*, the broadsheet newspaper that was published in a Bundeli that could be understood by all and also in Hindi with visuals designed by

²²⁸ Jatav, Heera. Interview. By Dipak Barkhade. 25 Oct. 2017.

the Dalitbahujan women reporters themselves in the interest of ‘illiterate’ and neo-literate target readers, particularly, the Dalitbahujan women in the hinterland.

Madbaiya is ignorant about the ground realities of the rate of illiteracy and poverty in the entire region. The literacy rate is noted to be the lowest among the Dalitbahujan women in Bundelkhand (Naqvi 36). It is a mere ten point sixty-nine percent in entire UP and four point seven percent in Chitrakoot and Banda as per 1991 census figures (36). In his letter, it is evident that Madbaiya does not reflect on the privileges of his caste/class and male identity; he uses adjectives to introduce his position at the centre; he seeks to legitimize his discourse on Bundeli language and identity; and he speaks to the Dalitbahujan women reporters in a condescending tone. The standard public has stakes in the textual production of a Bundeli culture. The Dalitbahujan women reporters merge two identities of being rural women and belonging to the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy, and being journalists (54).

The Dalitbahujan women reporters offer, what Anupama Rao and M S. S. Pandian call, “radical empiricism” in the feminist politics of pedagogy and development in rural Bundelkhand. Rao uses the term “radical empiricism” to denote the politics of everyday life in the literature produced by the Dalit writers in urban Bombay (152). She highlights the resonance of Dalit Marxism in a vernacular context (154). Unlike her, Pandian places “radical empiricism” in the linguistic context of affect produced by Dalit autobiographies, largely, rural in description (40). The Dalitbahujan women reporters challenge morally and politically to the standard public. The politics of Dalitbahujan women reporters astonish the members of standard public with their impactful change in the public spaces. I use Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence to explain how the experience of violence is reduced and moderated on paper in the mainstream notion of standard Bundeli. I argue that the notional space of standard Bundeli language dominates the readers of *Khabar Lahariya*. The Dalitbahujan women reporters engage in a politics of everyday life against the “theoretical” approach of the standard public. They de-brahminize the notional space of a standard Bundeli language that coincides with the binary of mind and body. They do not alienate their readers/viewers in the rubric of standard; they talk to them in a form of language which is close to them in an emotional and material realm. They unravel the everyday violation of human rights in Bundeli society. They critically step into the material manifestation

of ideas on Bundeli language and identity vis-à-vis the region. They have created an alternative space for the marginal. This is evident in the inclusion of literary pieces, penned by the Dalitbahujan writers and the reports, stories, editorials on caste-gender oppression and reports on underdevelopment in Bundelkhand in the pages of *Khabar Lahariya*.

In their article, “Print and Digital Imaginations: The Post-Colonial Shudra,” Prof. Thirumal P and Smriti K. P. make a comparative analysis of development in Karnataka and Kerala (144-150). The case of the communist government in Kerala is interesting. The communist government promoted development of the state to pursue a place in the global race in the context of the neo-liberal era. But it turned the state “faceless” in its narrative of development; it placed the state in a cultural vacuum (150-154).

In the case of Bundelkhand, Chitrakoot and Banda are promoted as the cultural land of Ram, the Hindu lord, on digital tourist websites in the virtual space (Naqvi 34). But it is one of the “most industrially backward regions in India” (34). The “images of poverty and feudal violence” are marked by scarcity of water and sole dependence/subsistence of a majority of people on agriculture (34-35). In the virtual space, Bundelkhand is a “spiritual” site for Hindu pilgrimage (34). But in reality, it is the site of socio-economic degradation working against the interest of Dalit and Kol Adivasi people who constitute twenty-four point two percent of the total population in Chitrakoot and Banda (36). The Dalitbahujan women reporters counter the materialist vacuum in the state’s narrative and in its other interest groups including the standard public (the urban elites) and the upper-caste Thakur and Brahmin, the rural elites.

The Arjun Sengupta Committee Report published in 2007 and the Social Safety Net report published by The World Bank shows that seventy-seven percent of people are found to be below the line of poverty and more than half of the total number of poor people are deprived from the benefits of government schemes in India.²²⁹ The Dalitbahujan women reporters argue for basic provisions like food, health, clothes, and an average house to live as a primary condition against the expanding gap between the rich and the poor in India. It can be said that the

²²⁹ “Garibi ki Jamini Hakikat” [The Ground Reality of Poverty]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.25, 15-21 July 2015, p.8.

promotion of Bundelkhand as a religious site coincides with a decline in the socio-economic status of the Dalitbahujan communities. The Dalitbahujan women reporters locate this contradiction in their discourse on land rights.

The article, “*Bhumi Adhigrahan Vidheyak*” [Land Command Bill] exposes the state policy of seizing farmers’ land arbitrarily.²³⁰ The land bill leaves the farmers dispossessed from their right against the sale of their land and their right to claim compensation in case they oppose the state’s policy. The land bill is a legal formula to occupy lands forcefully. The government counts the industrialists as real *jan* (people) of the state. It does not provide any room for consultation with the farmers. It adapts the policy of the British empire which enacted the Bill in 1894 to take away anybody’s land anytime in the name of governmental necessity.

Sundar and Baviskar find the state’s welfare measures sanctioned under the rule of law (the location of “civil society”), falling short of many things in the countryside; countryside being the location of “political society”, they counter Chatterjee for the implications of binaries he has used in his theory of social change (87). They argue that the civil society and political society both deserve credit for the new legislation in the discourse of land rights (87). They follow that the Indian middle class has been silent against the persistent domination of the upper-caste elite and the nexus between the state and the corporate firms in rural India (88). In this case, they undo the use of the term, “civil” to counter the thesis of Chatterjee. Secondly, they disqualify his use of binaries— “political society” and “civil society”, against a rapid surge of the fringe elements in both of the spaces (89). They suggest that the use of binaries is not conceptually neat against an increasing commodification and fascism in India (89).

In his book, *The Politics of the Governed*, Chatterjee observes that capital is inherent to the “modern” notion of community/nation (5). The readers/viewers of *Khabar Lahariya* do not read/view socio-political issues like the bourgeois. They are not Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community”. They do not consume news as such. Standard Bundeli language and identity is not

²³⁰ “Jamin Hadapne ka Kanuni Tarika” [The Legal Way to Seize the Land]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.6, 1-12 Mar. 2015, p.8.

a private matter to them. It is not meant to be preserved in the construct of a dominant past. The Dalitbahujan women reporters negotiate with standard Bundeli and inspire the Dalitbahujans to transcend the sanctified boundaries of standard Bundeli for their well-being. The “simultaneity” of space shared in the experience of bourgeois has been revisited by Anderson in his book, *The Spectre of Comparisons* (5). Chatterjee accepts that the temporal dimension of capital or modernity “does not stand still” (5). It may overshadow the potential of marginalized communities.

Dalitbahujans blur the binary of “civil society” and “political society”. The logic of readership/viewership in *Khabar Lahariya* is not anchored in the private domain. I argue that Dalitbahujan women resist the dominant “secular” notion of capital. They can decide what is advantageous and disadvantageous for their future. They experience stakes in everyday life. They exist in multiple junctures of time. They aspire, in Chatterjee’s words, “to affirm an ethical universal that does not deny the variability of human wants and values, or cast them aside as unworthy or ephemeral” (6). They include “them as real historical grounds on which that ethical universal must be established” (6). The demand of Kol Adivasis for tribal status has a materialist logic for the well-being of their community. The feminist politics is redefined against the standard public and it moves beyond intervention of the mainstream literacy and media feminists. Though eclectic, Dalitbahujan women reporters, Pradhans, and leaders speak from all places and construct a critical space for ‘minors’ in one world. However, Chatterjee disagrees with such ‘shadow’ modernity of Dalitbahujans. He takes politics as a means to achieve different ends and locates the nation in transition with its ambivalences (7). I argue that a lack of literacy or a presence of orality should not necessarily entail a “lack” of civility. It cannot be a premise to naturalize Dalitbahujans into “pre-modern” or “pre-capital” categories of time in the project of literary modernity which is dominated by the standard public.

In his book, *Civility against Caste*, Suryakant Waghmore argues that a tendency to reduce Dalitbahujans to the target groups and privilege upper-caste elites as the individual torchbearers of modernity obscures the interface between caste associations and governmentality (21).

Dalitbahujan women reporters depart from Chatterjee's understanding of political society as the "underground" subjects of civil society. The social transformation of Dadua, the rebel into a legacy of parliamentary representation by Dalitbahujan community represents Bundelkhand not as an object of loss in linguistic politics. The examples of mutiny in Bundelkhand can appropriate democratic processes for an increase in Dalitbahujans' political participation. Chatterjee simplifies the experience of caste among the "backward caste leaders" (77). He argues that their opposition against the demand for one third of the seats in parliament for women explains a "conflict" between political society and civil society (77). Dalitbahujan women reporters cover the stories about Dalitbahujan women's participation in electoral politics. They reconfigure the political processes which privilege upper-castes into a civil society, the standard public here. They seek and exploit resources in the state system although they are marginalized in the social system. The concept of civility is reconfigured by their demonstration of ethics and courage in the pursuit of equality and freedom for Dalitbahujans. It does not consist the binary of rural and urban. But according to Chatterjee, a "political society" carries moral qualities with a claim of shared membership in a well-defined colony, which otherwise would not exist (57-58). It is classified into "all demographic categories of governmentality" (59). It fights against violation of human rights but cannot claim citizenship for once and all because it longs for belonging between an urban middle class and a government (60).

The Dalitbahujan women move one step ahead of Chatterjee's thesis by covering news from the public sit-ins of Dalitbahujan women to their contribution in the arena of policy making. They substantiate the ideals of Ambedkarism. According to Waghmore, this facet of Dalit politics is compatible with modernity and public institutions. It reflects the "civility where the Constitution too becomes a cultural and political symbol of protest" (206). *Khabar Lahariya* consists stories of achievement in the domain of public welfare and policy making. The headlines, "*Khabar Lahariya ki Khabar ki Asar se Lag gayi Pyau*" [Impact of Khabar Lahariya: Water Filter Installed],²³¹ "*Khabar ke Asar Bange Sadak*" [Impact of News: Road

²³¹ "Khabar Lahariya ki Asar se Lag gayi Pyau" [Impact of Khabar Lahariya: Water Filter Installed]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 112, 8-14 May, 2017, p.5.

Constructed]²³² and so on highlight reconstruction of space that is concerned with Dalit citizenship and social change in the politics of *Khabar Lahariya*. It is productive and essential to constitute the concept of Dalit citizenship, which perhaps is matter for another dissertation.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the Dalitbahujan women reporters' engagement with civic journalism; the emergence of a new political discourse on courage as a central narrative in the alternative public; the significance of thirty-three percent of reservation allotted to the Dalitbahujan women in the governance; the relation between selfhood of Dalitbahujans and shared ethnicity and deconstruction of Bundeli/Hindi language as the object of affect; prioritizing Bundeli/Hindi language as an embodied subject not restricted to identity politics. The chapter critiqued the absence of materiality in the discourse of development and also critiqued the glorification of a particular Bundeli identity. With the help of interviews with Dalitbahujan women reporters, news reports, editorials, articles, stories and a movie, the chapter argues for the need felt by Dalitbahujan women reporters and the Dalitbahujan women to talk about their experience differently. They dissent against individualistic life-style based on the linguistic movements and the middle-class women's movement. In this case, the Dalitbahujan women reporters break Chatterjee's understanding of separate domains and societies. By doing so, they also break the Bundeli upper-caste's masculine standard public and represent themselves as an alternative.

²³² "Khabar ka Asar Bange Sadak" [Impact of News: Road Reconstructed]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 100, 6-12 March, 2017, p.4.

Appendix

- 1 “Sanstha Karin Janch aoor Bethak” [Organization Investigated the Case and Held a Meeting]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.167, 15-21 Sept. 2011, p.1.
- 2 “Padhe se Jyada Kadhe hoi ka Chahi” [Be Strict more than Learned]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 25, 1-7 Feb. 2011, p.6.
- 3 “Mehariya Sikhain Sabak” [Wives Taught Lesson]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.55, 8-14 Aug. 2009, p. 7.
- 4 “Khader Dihin” [Pushed Away]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.4, Sept. 2002, p. 2.
- 5 “Mukadama Jite ke Bad nahi mila Kabja” [Won the Case but Landless]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.24, 2012, p.4.
- 6 “Himmat kai ke Lihin Kabja” [Showed Courage and Possessed Land]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 26, 1-15 Mar. 2004, p.6.
- 7 “Himmat na Haris” [Did not Give UP Courage]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.11, Apr. 2003, p.6.
- 8 “Dabangan ke karan Vikas Adhura” [The Upper-caste Landlord Stand against Development]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.53, 15-30 Apr. 2005, p. 5.
- 9 “Pradhan Pad ka Arakshan Tay Hoi ga Maddai ke Dil ma Uthe Khalbali” [Reservation for the post of Pradhan is in effect: the People are Excited by Heart]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.116, 15-21 Aug. 2010, p. 8.
- 10 “Mehariya Pradhanan ke Ek Awaz” [The United Voice of Women Pradhan]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 123, 8-14 Oct. 2010, p. 5.
- 11 “Shushila, Mahila Gram Pradhan: Beti Padhao Pradhan Mantri Banao” [Shushila, a Woman Pradhan: Education can Make the Daughter a Prime Minister]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 29, 12-18 Mar. 2016, p. 4.
- 12 “Soch Samajh ke Chunab Pradhan” [Vote for Pradhan Sincerely]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 123, 8-14 Oct. 2010, p. 5.
- 13 “Sangharsha ke Age Jeet Havai” [There is Victory After Struggle]. *Khabar Lahariya*, No.95, 22-28 June 2010, p. 5.
- 14 “Sonu Devi bani Pehali Darki Block Pramaukh” [Sonu Devi the First Head of Block Panchayat]. *Khabar Lahariya*, 58, 26 March-1 Apr. 2016, p.4.

- 15 “Rojgar ke Havai Samasya” [The Problem of Unemployment]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.14, 1-15 May 2006, p. 1.
- 16 “Pani ko Tarsa Latoor” [Thirst for Water in Latoor]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.58, 26 March-1 Apr. 2016, p.6.
- 17 “Admi kete se leabe pibe ke lane Pani” [Where should Man Bring Water to Drink]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.93, 19-25 Dec. 2016, p.6.
- 18 “Beghar Jindagi Jine ko Majboor Bundelkhandvasi” [Bundelkhandis are Forced to Live Life Homeless]. *Khabar Lahariya*, vol.1, no. 68, 4-10 June 2016, p.4.
- 19 “Pani ke Aas kountan Bujhai Pyas” [May someone Quench Thirst for Water]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.153, no.1-7 June 2011, p. 6.
- 20 “Jar Jungle Jamin Hamar Hai” [Resource, Forest and Land Belongs to Us]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.11, Apr. 2003, p.2.
- 21 “Jungle Hamar Jivan Hai” [The Forest is Our Life]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 1, June 2002, p.4.
- 22 “Nahi Milat Jan Jati ka Darja” [Not Identified as Schedule Tribe]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.18, 22-28 Oct. 2008, p.1.
- 23 “Garibi ki Jamini Hakikat” [The Ground Reality of Poverty]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 25, 15-21 July 2015, p.8.
- 24 “Jamin Hadapne ka Kanuni Tarika” [The Legal Way to Seize the Land]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no.6, 1-12 Mar. 2015, p.8.
- 25 “Khabar Lahariya ki Asar se Lag gayi Pyau” [Impact of Khabar Lahariya: Water Filter Installed]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 112, 8-14 May, 2017, p.5.
- 26 “Khabar ka Asar Bange Sadak” [Impact of News: Road Reconstructed]. *Khabar Lahariya*, no. 100, 6-12 March, 2017, p.4.

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Conclusion

In the present thesis, Chapter 1 explains the assimilative tendency of the standard public that aligns with Hindi nationalism. Chapter 2 discusses the contribution of the standard public towards this ideology. It is seen that the standard public achieves its ends in the cultural politics with a note of difference—the difference being its subordinate position to the Hindi/Hindu public sphere. Chapter 3 brings forth the political grammar of the Dalitbahujan women reporters in rural Bundelkhand. It explains how Dalitbahujan women reporters deconstruct the narratives of the standard public and build an alternative public. Chapter 4 illustrates the negotiation between the Bundeli self and the other by focusing on the individual stories of Dalitbahujan women in Bundelkhand.

Language is a modern subject in the context of vernacular politics, aiding in the creation of newer identities, at least since the thirteenth century.²³³ It creates an affect around the Dalitbahujan body. But to argue that certain events of violence can unify emotions of language has its shortcomings (Mitchell 213). It represents the body as an object of experience. This thesis argues that the observed body is also the subject of mother-tongue. The latter experiences language not simply in terms of emotion in its tangible and intangible forms of expression but they do so by placing themselves in history (214). They narrate their experience by making sense of language and identity. In his chapter, “Epilogue: Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life,” Stuart Hall calls it a matter of embarrassment to encounter “oneself from the outside,” to have

²³³ In his review of Novetzke’s book, *The Quotidian Revolution*, William E B Sherman examines the process of “vernacularization” and its “social transformation” from Sanskrit, the language of gods to Marathi, the language of marginalized communities in the thirteenth century western India. Novetzke examines the Marathi texts, *Lilacarita* by *Chakradhar* and *Jnanesvari* by Jnandev in details to reveal the “everyday” politics of language. Sherman, William E B. “Karma in the Public Sphere: Habermas in Ancient India.” *Marginalia*, 16 March 2018, marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/karma-public-sphere-habermas-ancient-india/. Also, Ivan Illich argues for “vernacular language” against “taught mother-tongue” (31). He emphasizes “the critical use of ordinary language” against standard forms of language (31). Cayley, David. *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, Anansi, 1992. *Z Library*, 1lib.in/book/5403802/3b0367.

the experience of “experiencing oneself as both subject and object” and find the self “as another—an *other*—sort of person next door” (269).

In the Introduction to this thesis, I argue that the contingency of my sports teacher’s sudden demise and the subsequent response from his brother in English was unpredictable in a “backward space”. But it revealed a particular structure and pattern in the context of historical oppression. Hall suggests that such event “has everything to do with social practice, with how a particular contest or struggle is conducted” (280). He argues that such event exists in “specific conditions” or “specific conjunctures” against the single narrative of racism (280-281), here casteism. In this regard, the Introduction takes a cue from Hall to reflect on the conditions of my personal experience about linguistic identity and its affect as a Bundeli Chamar. It explains my entanglement with the identity question. The upper-caste community expresses the meanings of my social identity in the casteist mode. I stand outside the ‘given’ social treatment in this sense. I narrate the conflict and contradictions to redefine my selfhood in the process of self-identification by unraveling the “patterns” of my “unthinking” or an “absence” in the experience of being a Bundeli Chamar and its “interconnections” hidden in the context of my ethno-linguistic caste minority. It has been a long and complex transition for me to assert the difference between a Bundeli Chamar and a Bundeli Dalit subject in the political development of my thought process. The category of Bundeli Chamar appears an object of “unthinking” being stuck in time and space. In his essay, “Caste in India,” Ambedkar reflects on the “genius” of Manu, the architect of caste-system and suggests that the Brahmins cannot “fashion” Dalitbahujan society after their “own pattern” for much longer (16). Dalitbahujans cannot be ‘unthinking’ of their subjectivity in the oppressive conditions they live through. The way they respond might be different, some might be visible and some not. They use their agency in different ways, even though it may not change their lives a lot. Guru’s observation on the relation between Ambedkarism and labour can explain this dimension of Dalitbahujanality. The negative pastness harps on Dalitbahujans and dehumanizes their existence (“Labouring” 58). But Guru suggests that the labour of Dalit women peasants can be placed in a creative, collective and lyrical history. Their agency is invisible because they fight “a mute subject from within” (57). The Dalitbahujan women seem ‘unthinking’ but they have changed Bundelkhand by sharing their expression publicly.

The category of Bundeli Dalit signifies the subject of self-affirmation. However, as a migrant ‘Other’, the need to make sense of one’s identity is further complicated by the virtue of cultural and academic practices. It mirrors several contradictions. This is evident in my experience with the standard public. The upper-caste group of male elites ‘want’ me to write Bundeli prose in the standard script. I am a “wanted” subject for the dominant history. I resist the “thinking” thought practiced by the mainstream standard public (urban male elites) and the group of local upper-caste Marwaris (rural elites). Both are found to have ‘looked’ at the body of Bundeli Chamars and Bundeli Dalits in me/us in a manner that emphasizes the vertical hierarchies. The present research project has been part and parcel of my self-care as a radical tool and resistance against the dominant structures of caste system across linguistic boundaries.

Entangled in the subject and object position, I choose a descriptive-explorative framework to discuss features of the standard public in terms of the dominance of “theoretical Brahmin” (Guru 5003) in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. I discuss, in both the chapters, the role of Bundeli elites in the constitution of the standard public and its standard Bundeli. I explain the paradox of linguistic identity in its vertical form of solidarity with the linguistic minority. It is found that the distinction between mind/soul and body is in itself casteist. The mind is construed as that of the Brahmin/intellectual and the toiling body as of the Dalitbahujan. The soul is counted as the foundation of intellect or mind. The difference of the Bundeli ‘other’ is also constructed in the urban context. Both the chapters analyze the idioms of standard Bundeli. The standard public claims that Bundeli belongs to a written tradition; it owns a pastness; it is recognizable; it is public; it embodies civility in expression; it resists dominance. However, the relationship between the mother-tongue and its speakers is marked by the cry of loss, victimhood, possibility of life and death, competition, demand, co-optation with the dominant nationalism—all and more in the narrative of the standard public. It calls the Bundeli speakers to appreciate the subjects of *Bundeli mata* and to attribute meanings of identity to *Bundeli pani* (Bundeli honor) within the measurable boundaries of region and language. It excludes the spoken idioms by compartmentalizing them within *dehat ki boli* (dialect of the village). It includes the dialects as far as it is convenient for the standard public to nationalize Bundeli, to achieve recognition in the Eight Schedule, and for the need to talk about Bundeli movement and its devotion of *Bundeli mata*.

The standard public demands us to sing praises of *Bundeli mata* on grounds of linguistic devotion. It seeks to purify its linguistic identity vis-à-vis ethnic assertion and gender ideology. The standard public deals with the reality of poverty and corruption only within the territory of upper-caste men. It uses sexist metaphors in the discourse around Bundeli identity. Given the rise of Dalitbahujan voices in the political processes, the new representational practices delegitimize the cultural discourse on purity and pollution. The standard public is challenged by the representation of the local ‘rebels’ in the socio-political context of Dalitbahujan culture. The representation of local Dalitbahujan icons is contextualized in the present reality of caste-gender oppression, poverty and indignity. It challenges the situation of, in Aloysius’s words, “internal colonialism” in the heartland of India (3). Mitchell maps out the mechanisms in the representation of linguistic identity (213). She accepts that language as a foundational base may not solely elaborate its effect on cultural and ethnic contexts in twenty-first century India (214). The State Reorganization Committee (SRC) does not mention any provision for the formation of a separate state by reorganizing its “internal boundaries” linguistically (Thirumal and Smriti 148). Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 elaborate the acceptance of Mitchell about the waning relevance solely based on linguistic assertion or linguistic difference in the context of *Khabar Lahariya* and the Dalitbahujan women reporters in Bundelkhand.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 discuss multiple reasons and motives of the rural community in liking and reading *Khabar Lahariya* in Bundeli. It maps the role of the Dalitbahujan women reporters against the dominant logic of linguistic access. The Dalitbahujan women reporters deconstruct the standard public’s experience of linguistic foreignness with *dehat ki boli* (dialect of the village) as a sign of alterity and oppression. They constitute an “alternative public” from the Dalitbahujan perspective. They practice Bundeli language and identity from a caste-gender perspective in the context of acute poverty, illiteracy and socioeconomic inequalities. The material forces determine the logic of access to mother-tongue and a subsequent claim on the identity of a woman writer, reporter, editor, anchor, etc., in the field of rural journalism. The reporting of water-crisis, for example, is one of the examples of contextual and task-specific use of Bundeli language in the enterprise of the Dalitbahujan women reporters (Naqvi 40). It is ‘solutionary’ in the vision of *Khabar Lahariya*. The Dalitbahujan women reporters offer a form of “radical empiricism” (Rao 149; Pandian 40). They emerge as the embodied subjects of

democratic or feminist or anti-caste institutions. They create discourse against discrimination in the areas of employment, educational opportunities and resource distribution.

The Dalitbahujan perspective helps us focus on the inherent possibilities contingent upon the nature of organic life itself, albeit obscured by the historical, socio-political constructs and its affects. I wonder how the political vocabulary of Dalitbahujan self would look like in the habitation of modernity in the twenty-first century. In Mitchell's thesis, the discourse on language overpowers the Dalitbahujan body. She is right to suggest that the Dalitbahujan would invest in reforms for the wellness of a community (216). She finds it important to listen to the participants' vision and claims for change and understand it on their terms (216). But she fails to explain the inherent form of expression in "speakers' relationships" with language and identity (214). In some ways, she suggests that the Telugu language movement will help understand the linguistic identity formation in Bundelkhand. But she is less reflexive on the intellectual division of labor and analysis of the different forms of inequalities. To show that the socio-historical process itself is unequal in the Bundeli context, I take the mundane linguistic exchanges as a reference point. The placement of language question in the socio-historical context, no doubt, is necessary. But it demands to move beyond the primacy of causality in the narrative of a linguistic affect. The Dalitbahujan women reporters allow us to relook at the form of expression which is internal to it. They represent themselves as the self and also as the community embodying the emotion of *himmat* (courage) over the emotion of *thasak* (pride). The internal structure to the dimension of courage is physical more than pathological in the form of Dalitbahujan women's expression. The entry of Dalitbahujan women therefore redefines the contours of Hindi public sphere.

The standard public and the mainstream literacy and media feminists embody textbook understandings of the society. Of course, *Khabar Lahariya* is a repository of *Mahila Dakiya*, the broadsheet newspaper. However, the logic of reproduction of *Khabar Lahariya* is collective and complementary. The Dalitbahujan women embody the news content that is produced by themselves beyond the formal structure of education. The standard public and the mainstream literacy and media feminists are constrained/inspired by virtue of the logic of reproduction of *Khabar Lahariya* in a collective and complementary sense. The Dalitbahujan women reporters

deconstruct the tendency of the standard public and the mainstream literacy and media feminists to translate the world of political minor subjects into the margins of the public sphere; they deconstruct the logic of reproduction of Bundeli language, in what Mitchell calls as motivated by, a “belief in universal translatability,” (218) and “the conversion” of the histories of the local icons “into a single history of a language” (73). They offer an alternative in sharing the wisdom of language and culture more than possessing it in the form of cultural accumulation. They critique the so-called modern outlook of the standard public. The Dalitbahujan icons stand outside the mainstream narrative of cultural history produced by the standard public. The representation of Dalitbahujan icons in the mainstream narrative of the standard public is entrenched in a caste/class supremacy. The Dalitbahujan women reporters imagine history organically to decolonize the Bundeli Dalitbahujan identity in the dominant narrative of linguistic nationalism. They collaborate amongst themselves with different narratives and locally available idioms. They have their own names, backgrounds, stories, concerns, motives, etc., but outside the mainstream narrative of linguistic movement shared among Bundeli elites dominantly.

This dissertation is a thematic study of the standardization of Bundeli (Chapter 1), the personification of Bundeli language (Chapter 2), the role of rural women reporters of *Khabar Lahariya* (Chapter 3), and the stories of *himmati mehariya* (the courageous women) (Chapter 4). In my thesis, I begin by focusing on the practice of a genealogical tracing of the linguistic minor in the context of everyday life. Secondly, I focus on a range of Bundeli texts and analyze the representation of socio-cultural identities using Bundeli as a case study. I place language as a historical entity. But I make a distinction between its “natural” attributes and the unpredictable attributes of nature. Language is a naturalized entity. Its relationship with the nature of life helps us open up the debate on unpredictable events contingent upon certain moments, being already placed in history, in the everyday life.

The dissertation argues for a de-naturalization of the dominant role of the standard public. It shows that political consciousness of Dalitbahujans is largely conditioned by the dominant narratives of history, institutions and society. But the rise of Dalitbahujan women reporters in particular and a leadership among Dalitbahujan women of Bundelkhand in general marks a shift

from generic narratives to narratives driven by an affect. This offers alternative points to modes of discourse around Bundeli identity with regard to the mobilization of Dalitbahujan men and women in an intellectual, political and administrative space and efficacy of India's constitutional democracy.

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Appendix I

Publications

All About Ambedkar: A Journal on Theory and Praxis
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ISSN 2582-9785

Reading *Annihilation of Caste* from a Cultural Perspective

DIPAK BARKHADE¹

ABSTRACT

Annihilation of Caste is a layered text about and against the caste-system. It reveals political thought of Babasaheb Ambedkar in an elaborate manner. The present paper aims at unravelling a multi-layered face of this text and a multi-dimensional nature of the Ambedkarite thought from a cultural perspective. It uses the philosophic letter of Rohith Vemula, film, interview, anecdote, etc. in this regard. It argues that though Ambedkar is impersonal in his mode of writing as a political scientist and a social scientist, he presents his critique of caste problematic with an affective force. While Babasaheb wanted to convey Hindu reformers their intellectual fallacy and an urgency for them to listen his critique of the caste-system, *Annihilation of Caste* illustrates his affective force by inviting readers to participate in the debate on the abolishment of the caste-system. The paper calls for a strong relevance of *Annihilation of Caste* to highlight that this text has a status of after-life and Babasaheb is a larger figure in the arena of cultural studies.

KEYWORDS: caste, culture, Hinduism, Ambedkarism, identity and affect

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MODE OF ASSERTION IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S WRITINGS: A BRIEF COMMENT ON SUBALTERN¹ IDENTITY

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Abstract

With a comparative analysis of Mahasweta Devi's, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (1980) and *Dust on the Road* (1997), the paper focuses on the narrative of Adivasi icon, Chotti Munda and the democratization of tribal voices in the state of Jharkhand in 1970s. It highlights the events of encroachment of land by the British colonizer in the nineteenth century and the ruling castes/class in post-independent India. It explains the struggle and survival of the tribal community, and, thereby, deconstructs the mainstream historiography. The paper shares its perspective that the social change is possible through democratic organization and social movement in India because the exploitation of oppressed communities takes place at a collective level. It deals with the main questions: how is subalternity defined in the writings of Mahasweta Devi? How do her works help us evaluate the mode of resistance against exploitation? What are the implications of Adivasi assertion of identity? How do the issues of caste, gender and ethnicity help us understand to the term, 'subaltern' in her works? The paper argues that Mahasweta Devi is inclined to address the voiceless conditions of Adivasi community but as a creative writer she proves that there is potential in Adivasi polity to bring social change for the future of a larger society. Devi not only represents the tribes in her works but also explains how they embody themselves. Thus the paper aims to create a space for the visibility of Adivasi life and culture from margin to mainstream.

Keywords: resistance, subaltern and identity, adivasi polity, oppressed communities

Introduction

Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016) was a prolific writer in Bangla. She has been awarded Sahitya Akadmy Award, the Bharatiya Janapith Award, Ramon Magsaysay and the Padma Vibhushan (Chatterjee 240). Many of her works have been translated in English and many other foreign languages. She was committed to the documentation of the daily lives of tribes across India both as a social activist and writer both. (Swaminathan) The present paper gives an overview of two of her works, which are translation in English, in the following sections before making critical remarks.

Chotti Munda and his Arrow and Dust on the Road: Mapping the Mode of Resistance

The undertaking of comparative study between fiction and non-fiction is important. Devi's novel, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* is centrally based on the character of Chotti Munda, an icon of Munda tribe. The present paper selects reports from the compilation of activist prose writings with the title, *Dust on the Road*. It highlights the dark conditions in the lives of laborers in Palamau district, the institutional murder of Chhuni Kotal and the demand for separate state of Jharkhand in the background of oppression on the tribal community and subsequent rise of political parties in Bihar in 1970s.

In *Chotti Munda*, the white "Gorman" or the "Diku" land owners of Bihar and Bengal are described as the outsiders, share croppers and traders in the forested territory in the eyes of local Adivasi characters. The character of Dhani Munda represents the memory of Birsa Munda, the legendary tribal leader, who had spearheaded the great uprisings against the colonizers in 1899-1900, in the beginning of novel. Devi creates such characters to glorify the character of Chotti Munda, who is shown to inherit the spirit of resistance against usurpation of tribal lands in his region (13). The symbol of arrow and cultural practices of Munda tribe

¹ The term subaltern has been theorized by the group of historians in the project on subaltern studies. It encompasses the historically marginalized groups. The paper examines how the term is defined in the writings by Mahasweta Devi.

Appendix II

Paper Presentations



Appendix III

Originality Report

Constituting 'Standard Public' and 'Alternative Public': A Study of the Discourse around Language and Identity in Selected Bundeli Texts

by Dipak Bhai Mangal Bhai Barkhade

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