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## Manbhumi Jhumur: A form of Cultural Counter-Narrative

### Introduction

Speaking of music as a political language, Robbie Liebermann says that songs offer “internal cohesion” for various groups “by reaffirming beliefs, building confidence and unity, and by providing historical memory and alternative visions”(1989:164).

Following the above statement, we can say that any form of music, especially folk songs are the best means of accomplishing covenant and impelling public opinion among largely pre-literate people. Generally, when we talk about folk songs or folk literature of Purulia or the Manbhumi region, we refer to the forms of Bhadu, Karam and Jhumur. The tune of a Jhumur song dissolves language barriers and offers a point of association to people of different ethnicities.

### Contextualising Jhumur within the Social, Cultural and Political History of the Country

In Kurmali there is hearsay about Jhumur – ‘sengesusun, kajigedurang’ meaning ‘song in words, dance in movement’. Various known as Jhumur, Jhumuir, Jhumri or Jhumoir. this form of song is



lowest foot in its musical harmony. Secondly, the balance between the crescendo and the base note remains unchanged (“Jhumur Song - Banglapedia”).

Jhumur songs have a close connection with Lord Krishna. Most of the jhumur singers were influenced by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a 15th-century Indian saint who is considered to be the combined avatar of Radha and Krishna. They mainly sang about the divine love story between Radha and Krishna. The most notable singers of this time were Tulsidas, Surdas, Jaydev, Bidyapati. A Jhumur song Expresses the immortal love story of Radha Krishna:

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*Shun Shun pran sakhi amar jeevan pakhi go  
Hriday pinjar kati pakh ikotha udilo go  
Tar bine paran amar gelo. (Dey et al. 29)*

(Oh listen, my life companion, my life bird  
where has the life bird flown cutting the cage of my  
heart  
without you, my life perishes)

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Later, Jhumur tasted the touch of modernism in the hands of Bindiya, Gourangia, Bhabaprita, Ramkrishna, Jagatchandra Sen, Barjuram, DwijaGadadhar and Durjodhan Das. The themes of Jhumur songs are not confined to mundane problems, but also address complex philosophical questions from the Vedas, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata. This has allowed for Jhumur songs to achieve the status of classics. Some of the Ragas which are included in the classical Jhumur songs are- *TilokKamod, Behag, Imon, Bhupali, Mishra Pahadi, Jhijhoti, Jayjati*etc. Though many varieties of Jhumur can be found in Manbhumi region which are yet to receive a formal classification, some of the well-known classifications of Jhumur songs are-

1. Kalbhede (Time)- Bhadariya, Chaitali, Ashadiya, Raramashva

2. Sthan/Place: Patkumya, Baghmudiya, Tamadiya, Jhaldoya, Shikhriya, Nagpuriya, Barabhuyaana, etc.
3. Sur/Musicality: Darbari, Bhadariya, Chaitali, Mudiali, KirtanChoya, BaulChoya, etc.
4. Bishoy/Theme: Udassya, Nidannya, Nirgunnya, Dehatatva, Pauranik, Sanketic, Tatwik, Dadaswakhari, Batrishakhari, etc.

To the people of Manbhum, Jhumur is the very expression of life; it is as natural an activity as breathing. They voice the uncertainties of their lives caused by the lateritic soil of the region, the abundant presence of ferocious animals and reptiles around them, etc., through Jhumurs. The most popular Jhumurs, therefore, are the Hanka Jhumurs; 'hanka' in local dialect means shouting. As shouting of ecstasies mostly take place in mounds (dungri), barren lands (tairh) and rocky surfaces (tikarh), such widely sung Jhumurs are also called 'Tairh' jhumurs. It is undoubtedly the most primordial form of Jhumur.

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Then comes the 'Danrshariya' or 'Danrh' Jhumur. This form of Jhumurs evokes a stick, which in local dialect is called 'danrh'. The stick is not only the most primordial weapon that people of the region use for their protection, but is also the baton used for rearing cattle. Moreover, in this form of Jhumur the singer stands straight (in local dialect, 'danhrano' means to stand up).

'Bhadoriya' Jhumur is a form of Jhumur originally meant for and sung during the Bangla month of 'Bhadra' which in local dialect is 'Bhadar'. Finally comes the 'Darwari' or 'Boithaki' form of Jhumur. It is the most refined form of Jhumur that had found recognition in the courts of provincial lords and zamindars. This development of form clearly suggests how Jhumur originated out of the daily life of the aborigines, became individualistic or tribal,

then turned time-specific and ritualistic, and finally found wider social acceptance with a greater sense of musicality and instrumental accompaniment.

Mostly, Jhumur songs are popularized by the female dancers (who are known as *Nacnis*) of the Manbhum region and these dancers belong to subaltern society. Since the prosperity of local landlords declined under British rule, they could not afford to visit the *Baijis* who were high paid dancers of Thumri and Khayal. The Nacnis were thus trained to dance to '*Darbari Jhumur*'. Nacnis describe the sufferings and sorrows of Krishna's consort to Radha, who stands for the human soul, which desperately wants to unite with Krishna's supreme soul. They also sing about the lives of the peasants and their daily struggles for existence.

After Independence, the Government of India croaked the land of most of the landlords. Their declining economic positions made it difficult for them to sponsor the Nacnis and as a result, the Nacnis had to resort to entertaining people in a cheap way to be able to make a living. With the passage of time, Nacnis are termed as prostitutes and became an object of hatred in society. People were starting to see both Nacnis and Jhumur in a derogatory manner. After the independence, Jhumur gets revived by the hands of Sunil Mahato, Subhash Chakraborty and Kuchil Mukhopadhyay. Ranjan Sen says in his book, *Jhumur: Music with Roots*.

The Modern era of Jhumur started after India's independence. There are two trends we observe during this period. One is the emergence of powerful lyricists and singers like Sunil Mahato, Subhash Chakraborty and Kuchil Mukhopadhyay and the other is the loss of traditional patronage of feudal landlords and local kings with the breakdown of old social structures (36).

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## Thematic Traditions and Formal Qualities of Jhumurs

Jhumur is basically a simple lyrical poem with a structural uniqueness. Generally, there is a refrain which is called 'rong', and this refrain creates an intrinsic rhythm. At the end comes 'vonita', a sort of finale, with the name of the writer as part of the rhythmic song. In the song of Madhab Paramanik:

*Desher PM Modi, bolchhen nirabadhi  
Lockdown cholo mene heh  
Tobe hobe heh binash corona virus  
Mukto hobe kichhu din heh -  
Dakbhai Sri Madhusudane  
Bhabo keno akaran heh. "Jhumur song on"*

(PM Modi continuously warns us  
To follow the basic principles of lockdown  
Then alone can we eradicate Corona.  
Emancipation (from Corona) is not far away  
Pray to Sri Madhusudan  
Don't be panicky without reason...)

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It is a short Jhumur with a very pertinent topic: COVID19. The poetic message through this jhumur has wide social significance. Here the first section is repeated twice as 'rong'. And, at the end comes the 'Vonita'. The Jhumuria's name, Madhab, means Lord Krishna. He inserts himself in the Jhumur in a witty manner by using the name Sri Madhusudan, which is also another name for Krishna.

Jhumur song on Corona virus by madhab pramanik



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As the structure of Jhumur songs changes with the passage of time, the thematic development also shows interesting socio-psychological changes. In their first phase, Jhumurs were impassioned songs of religious and mythological themes. These were orally transmitted from generation to generation. Then came the social and domestic issues. With the passage of time, political issues also crept into the field.

A hundred thousand Jhumurs, oral and written, can help us understand the changes in our society and people's responses to these changes. Modern Jhumur songs are also used to spread awareness regarding the problems faced by women. Many policies of the government like *Kanyashree*, *Swaccha Bharat Abhiyan*, *SabujSathi*, *Jubashree*, etc., are also celebrated in modern Jhumurs. The following Jhumur realistically states the cruel situation of women in society:

*Shansh Shashure deore Bhashure*  
*Thakurji, Nanade Genjlai mare*  
*Bhabi Bhabi Bhela tanu je Khin*  
*Ajo nari swadhine paradhin* (Mishra 91)

(Getting harassed by the in-laws  
Made my feeble body to think  
That till today, women are colonized.)

The above lines talk about the jeopardized situation of a woman who is sandwiched between the pressures her in-laws force upon her. The artist also questions the true nature of women's emancipation.

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These days, almost all the songs are sung to spread awareness about social issues. People of the Purulia and Manbhum region suffer from a scarcity of food because the land is barren. So people try to leave their homes in order to search for their bread and butter. Often the only job that is available to them is to work in the tea gardens of Assam.

*Chal mimi asam jab, deshe bada dukhre  
Asam deshe re mini cha-bagan hariyal* (Chandlya and Hazra 141)

(Let's go mini, too much pain here  
Lots of greenery in the tea garden in Assam.)

So the workers both male and female, become 'kuli-kamin'(bonded labourer) and take the 'kuligadi' (1891-1901) to reach Assam. The train which runs from Bengal via Chotonagpur Plateau to Assam, generally used to carry the workers to eastern India, is known as *KuliGadi*. Another song says:

*Mone kari asam jab*

*Jada pankha tangaib*

*Sahib dilo kodaler kam*

*Re lapta shyam*

*Fanki diye chalaale asam*

*Amara duti ma biti*

*Sara rati cha kuti*

*Kutite kutite pade jay gham*

*Deen narottama bhane*

*Je jabe he bhai asam bane*

*Pun na firibo nija dham* (Chandlya and Hazra 141)

(Thinking to go to Assam and installing two fans  
Ironically boss has given the work of spading  
Oh shyam

We have reached Assam being cheated.

Both mother daughter process tea whole night

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Till we sweat  
Oh God! Whosoever will go to Assam will  
Not reach their home.)

In the above song, the artist portrays the shattered dreams of the workers who expected to receive a comfortable job in the tea garden but were given hard work instead. A mother and daughter spend an entire night sweating from the labour of processing tea leaves. In the last line, the artist describes the pangs of the workers by saying that there is no escape from their endless toil as they can never go back home. The journey of the workers from one place to another, and the pain of homelessness and displacement, are reflected in other Jhumur songs as well. The workers used to go to Dhanbad, Marafari or other places. In the Jhumur of Ramkumar;

*....bayid kheteo gelo mari*  
*Baihal gelek range jari*  
*Sheshe fanki dila barishang*  
*Dhani chale ge Marafari jab khatlei...(Chandlya and*  
*Hazra 142)*

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(The fallow lands get dried  
The arable lands get infected  
Rain also has cheated atlast  
We should move to Marafari to work for rice.)

In the above song, the singer depicts the pain of the people due to insufficient rainfall. The fields are dead because of the heat and their crops are being destroyed by insects. So they decide to go to Marafari in search of a job.

In the words of Bijay Mahato—

*Byasam bandhye de go*  
*Kaj karte jab hamra dujane*  
*Dhanbader Kavla khadane (Chandlya and Hazra 142)*

(give me my breakfast  
we shall go to work together  
in the coal mine of Dhanbad.)

In the above song, the singer says please pack our food and clothes as we are going to work in the Dhanbad Mining.

Sunil Mahato, a Jhumur singer, also portrays the political tussle between Bengal and Bihar regarding Purulia:

*Bengal bale tuichata*  
*Bihar bole durhato*  
*Purulyakijhanpdibekjale?*  
*Bangalibhai Bihari bhai*  
*De-n tukubaile....*(Chandlya and Hazra 143)

(Bengal says you are small  
Bihar says go away  
Will Purulia jump in the water  
Please tell me my Bengali Bhai and Bihari Bhai)

In the above song, the singer depicts the *in-betweenness* of Purulia. Neither Bengal nor Bihar wanted to accept Purulia as their own. What was Purulia to do then?

Kiritibas Karmakar writes a jhumur to remind the people of Jharkhand of Birsa Munda's fight against the British Colonial masters:

If I Throw a net in the sky  
I can catch the moon  
To catch the moon is marvelous  
I will give you something  
And you will never forget me  
Kiritibas has this power  
My dear, don't worry, listen  
If we want, we can make fire on water (Mahato 114)

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The above Jhumur expresses that Birsa Munda was said to have magical powers which made his men stronger than the British. This Jhumur reminds the locals of their history and struggle.

In the Jhumur songs of Manbhumi, one can find the combination of Karma, Dharma and Jeevan. Nowadays Jhumur is not known only as a love song; rather it addresses contemporary issues like famine, drought, dropping of arms in Purulia, Kargil, the war between Iraq and America, and Kashmir. Each and every aspect of the life of Manbhumi is discussed in Jhumur. The continuity of Jhumur in the lives of the people is appreciated by folk pundits.

### Conclusion

Through this paper, I explore the question of why Jhumur, and find that Jhumur is an unending sea into which thousands of rivers flow. It is a culturally rich folk tradition whose deceptively simple form belies a deep-rooted counter-narrative. It is a spontaneous overflow of the feelings of a people whose collective wisdom, though neglected, warrants exploration. Since Jhumur is designed as Gurumukhi (orally transmitted from generation to generation) and there is a dearth of active attempts to preserve and archive Jhumur songs, the original music and songs of Jhumur are being forgotten or destroyed.

Today Jhumur must also contend with the wave of dominant cultural forces and find a way to still remain true to its essence, as opposed to being absorbed by these forces. A lack of proper education of Jhumur songs and their history makes the young Jhumur artist weak. Naturally, they turn to Bollywood songs and try to sing Jhumur like them. The basic difference between the classic Jhumur and the modern Jhumur is in the language.

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Nowadays Jhumur songs are written in a common language in an attempt to appeal to a wider, and mainstream audience. Modern Jhumur artists are not so imaginative. They almost rejected the idea to follow the conventional singing which is called “hanka’ (High Pitch). They are more concerned to attract the audience rather than following the conventions of the folk form. It is true that Jhumur is now a lost art but will survive as the songs are enriched by human experience and nature.

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