The 'Bhojpuriya' Mumbaikar: Straddling two worlds

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Using Cultural Studies as the framework, this study investigates how north Indian migrants living in Kandivali east, Mumbai, exercise agency and appropriate Bhojpuri media texts to maintain their regional identity. Bhojpuri, a dialect of Hindi, has emerged as the lingua franca of these migrants hailing from the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Beleaguered by the identity politics of the host city, the migrants turn to the Bhojpuri media to sustain the shared cultural beliefs that permeate their social relations. Familiar images in the media texts ensure continuity with tradition, feeding the resurgent pride of the community. The migrants' aggressive defence of all things Bhojpuri, as well as their desire to sanitise Bhojpuri media of its bawdiness, is a manifestation of their embattled identities seeking validation.

This article examines how the Bhojpuri media are intertwined with the migrants' everyday realities. The media reinforce gender roles, alleviate anxieties and gratify desires vicariously. Media representations meld cultural memory with the migrants' newly acquired understanding of the metropolis. In the process, hybrid identities are being fashioned by people on different points of the socio-economic axis.

I
Introduction

This study proposes to illuminate the role of the media in maintaining the regional identity of north Indian migrants in Kandivali east, a suburb of Mumbai with a large concentration of people from Uttar Pradesh (UP)

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and Bihar, many of whom speak Bhojpuri, a dialect of Hindi. The core concern of the research is an exploration of how the media nurture and nourish the imagination of the community and unite a public in expression of shared beliefs. It focuses on a section of the internal diaspora[1] and the role of the Bhojpuri media in preserving their cultural distinctiveness. The article seeks to understand the manner in which the migrants engage with media messages, either drawing upon them to consolidate their sense of belonging and 'Bhojpuri' community values, or perhaps resisting them in order to fashion a new hybrid cultural identity. It also examines how they willingly embrace the cosmopolitanism of the host city even as they reaffirm their Bhojpuri antecedents.

The north Indian migrant community has established itself as one of the most outwardly recognisable and vibrant groups in multi-cultural Mumbai. According to the 1991 census, north Indians accounted for 21 per cent of the total population of Mumbai. The Mumbai Human Development Report published by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) along with the United Nations Development Programme states that according to the 2001 census, 24.3 per cent of the migrants in Mumbai are from Uttar Pradesh, while 3.5 per cent are from Bihar.[2] Bhojpuri 'ranges from being seen as a style of Hindi … to a large cluster of dialects spoken natively in Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh and parts of Madhya Pradesh' (Tripathy 2007: 151). The official figures of the 2001 census show 33 million speakers of the Bhojpuri dialect,[3] although it is estimated that the actual number of speakers is around 150 million in India and a further 6 million outside the country (Ager 2012). Tripathy and Verma's study (2011: 94) of the multiple identities emerging in

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[1] Internal diaspora are members of a group who, in search of better opportunities, have voluntarily left their homeland for different regions under the same government. Whether the resettlement is voluntary or involuntary, such movements are called 'internal diasporas'. The people affected may retain their cohesiveness, or may get assimilated into the surrounding culture and lose their identities (Szarmach 2001).

[2] See N. Siddhaye, 'Maximum number of migrants are from state', *Daily News and Analysis* [online], 29 September 2009. Available at http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report_maximum-number-of-migrants-are-from-state_1293650. Accessed on 17 May 2010.

[3] Census of India. 2001. 'Statement I: Abstract of Speakers' Strength of Languages and Mother Tongues—2001.' Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner. Available at http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/Census_Data_Online/Language/Statement1.htm. Accessed on 5 May 2012.

the 'Hindi heartland' highlights the dilemma of those caught between the desire to belong to the majority and the need to fashion a distinct image for themselves. Expatiating on the issue of Bihari identity and the Bihari migrant's 'conflicted sense of nostalgia and allegiance for his birthplace', the authors speak of the difference 'between "emergent identity", a largely spontaneous process, and "willed identity" as a conscious ideological/agitational exercise…' (ibid.: 96).

II
North Indian migrants in Mumbai

Although the influx of north Indian migrants into Mumbai predates Independence, over the last few decades, there has been an exponential increase in their numbers.[4] Their attempts to acclimatise themselves to the frenetic pace of the city, especially in a host state that views them with hostility, is fraught with the trauma brought on by culture shock. Simultaneously, identity politics has fanned the fires of regionalism, prompting the migrant population to reassert their cultural uniqueness. Among the latest additions to Mumbai's cultural subtext, these migrants daily encounter and negotiate different, even contradictory, cultural orientations and norms. At times, the internal diaspora of north Indians has been the target of agitational politics stoked by regional parties such as the Shiv Sena and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), owing to what is perceived as an economic threat to the 'sons of the soil'. At other times, the alarmist approach has been abandoned and political exigencies have led parties to bridge the gulf between the north Indian migrants and the locals in an attempt to weave a broad demographic constituency.

In the last decade, there has been an upsurge of interest in Bhojpuri media, not just in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, but across all Indian states with a sizeable north Indian migrant population, as well as in Bhojpuri-speaking

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[4] 'Migration from northern Indian states increased substantially between 1961 and 2001 and is higher than migration to the city from within the state, and continues to remain male dominated... A large majority of the male migrants (49.1 per cent) coming to Mumbai are employed in "production related" jobs... a majority of them work in industries requiring semiskilled and unskilled workers with minimal educational qualifications' (see S. Parasuraman, 'Uncovering the myth of urban development in Mumbai', *Urban Age*, Mumbai, November 2007. Available at http://urban-age.net/0_downloads/archive/_mumbai/Newspaper-essays_Prarsuraman.pdf. Accessed on 21 May 2012).

countries such as Fiji, Surinam, Mauritius and Trinidad.[5] The phenomenon that has led to the spectacular success of Bhojpuri cinema and music industries (Ghosh 2010; Tripathy 2007, 2012) merits consideration for 'its value as a momentous cultural index' (Tripathy 2007: 146). By expressing the concerns of the illiterate and semi-literate migrants, the media represent the aspirations of the rising middle and lower classes, who are 'more desperately and authentically nostalgic' (Tripathy and Verma 2011: 118) than their educated counterparts. Films bring the 'homeland' into the diaspora by creating a perception of a common culture shared by heterogeneous groups (Mishra 2002: 237). Music and dance too are not merely 'diasporic nostalgia on display' (Shresthova 2004: 100), but become a form of 'cultural memory' in language-specific cinema, facilitating an expression of perceived cultural similarities. Continuation of values in the host city is thus primarily effected through a shared repertory of cultural practices, a 'patterned experience of excitement, suspense and release' (Cawelti 2001: 208). The reassertion of 'Bhojpuriya' roots is achieved mainly through the selection of recognisable themes and scenes, both secular and devotional, which delve into the collective memory of the migrants.

III
Research methodology

This article seeks to offer insights into the interaction and engagement between media experiences and socio-cultural experiences of north Indian migrants in Kandivali east, a suburb of Mumbai. Embedded in research that examines Bhojpuri media as a manifestation of popular culture impacting the process of identity formation among the migrants, it is based on data such as media access, media use, user habits, personal identity, cultural identity and social setting. It approaches the issue of media and migration from an interdisciplinary perspective to understand how north Indian migrants in Kandivali east utilise the media to negotiate between integration in the new city and sustenance of links with the culture of the Hindi heartland.

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[5] In the late 19th and early 20th century, the need for cheap labour led to several colonisers importing indentured labour from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to British and European colonies such as West Indies, Surinam, Mauritius and Fiji. The descendants of these labourers speak a variation of Bhojpuri to date and they form a bulk of the patrons of Bhojpuri films and media products.

The methodology is drawn from the field of ethnographic research strategies, an approach that owes much to the research of DeCerteau (1984), Mankekar (1999) and Morley (1986, 2005). It includes a quantitative approach that enquires into the uses of the media, the migrants' cultural identity and their attitude towards other cultures and a qualitative approach that seeks to examine socio-demographic factors that contribute significantly to differences in media practices. The methods adopted for data collection include in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of the members of the community in Kandivali east, group discussions and observation.

The field study assesses the interrelationship between cultural identity and media products and throws light on the interface between the migrants' socio-cultural experience and their media practices. A small but focused sample was considered suitable for the purpose of the study. The field study was conducted over a period extending from February 2011 to February 2012. The data was collected from primary sources through a questionnaire in order to find out demographic details of the sample and to examine their habits of media use, the reasons for their media preferences as well as their attitudes towards the Bhojpuri and other media. Respondents were selected on the basis of the researcher's familiarity with them. To ensure a fair representation of the population, the sample was drawn from various settlements in Poisar Gaon, Thakur Complex and Thakur Village in Kandivali east, the geographical area selected for the survey.

Kandivali east, a suburb in the northern stretch of Mumbai, has large habitations of migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In Kandivali today, up-market housing complexes rest cheek by jowl with sprawling conglomerations of semi-permanent structures, home to thousands of Biharis and 'UPites'. Even today there are localities in Poisar Gaon with names such as *Bihar Tekdi*, testifying to the presence of a large number of migrants from Bihar. The flat-roofed dwellings with their tiny rooms, the row of common toilets, the congested alleys with children playing 'gully cricket' constitute a quintessential Mumbai shanty town, housing thousands of families precariously balanced between poverty and lower middle class respectability. These areas are not only a hub of economic activity but also politically active constituencies that field a number of north Indian candidates during civic polls.

The interviewees are first/second/third generation migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who live in Kandivali east. They are people who had

responded to the survey questionnaire and were willing to be interviewed or be part of the group discussions. The study draws on results from interviews conducted with 37 respondents: 17 women, 12 men (over 18 years of age) and eight young people (five girls and four boys in the 9 to 17 age group). The men were auto-rickshaw and taxi drivers, electricians, watchmen and vegetable vendors. All the women, except three, were homemakers; their children went to school and, more significantly, to English medium schools. The field study was supplemented by content analysis of media products popular with Bhojpuri-speaking audiences and interviews with seven media producers and executives.

Throughout, the focus was not only on the cultural effects of texts but also on specific ways in which viewers interpret specific themes and images. There was increasing awareness of the connections between the depictions in the Bhojpuri media and the way the viewers perceive themselves as Bhojpuri people. Cinematic and televisual representations of gender and community were counterpoised against the migrants' selection and rejection, negotiation and confrontation of everyday realities. What emerged appeared to ratify that 'meaning is unstable: it is frequently contested by viewers who are historical subjects living in particular discursive formations rather than positioned by a single text' (Mankekar 1999: 8). The viewers are intelligent and sentient, and not mindless consumers of media texts.

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IV

Many voices, many views

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The research indicates that the migrants are constantly attempting to bridge the hiatus between their aspirations and the quotidian realities of their existence in a city that exposes them to an entirely new culture. In all this, the Bhojpuri media play a crucial role, for notions about the north Indian culture are daily being consolidated in popular perception through media offerings in the Bhojpuri dialect. In the process, they are subtly recasting the 'Bhojpuriya' identity and culture. Memories are being transformed and, sometimes, sanitised, while perceptions of community, family and sexuality are being reconfigured through the cinematic and televisual representations of tradition and culture. Analysis of the discourses pointed to variegated reactions to Bhojpuri media. Among other aspects, age, gender, level of education, socio-economic status, marital status, presence or

otherwise of family in Mumbai and time elapsed since arrival in Mumbai mould the migrants' response to Bhojpuri media and accordingly, the dependence on media messages for construction of identity varies within the community as we move from one sub-group to another.

Maintaining the north Indian identity and ensuring the continuation of the ethos, values and traditions of home states is professedly uppermost in the minds of the research participants. The migrants essentially come from a society where a large number of interactions are between known persons, moving into the anonymity of a bustling, cosmopolitan city. For most of them, 'Leaving the frontiers of the village is like being doomed to a lifetime of ethical nomadism that nevertheless has to be "translated" constantly into a rooted existence' (Tripathy 2007: 153). The stress caused by displacement and loss of cultural norms is to a great extent ameliorated by the strong social support systems in the migrants' community. They believe they are able to stay connected to their roots and draw emotional succour from Bhojpuri cinema, television programmes and particularly through music imbued with regional flavour. Several respondents affirmed that their devotional and secular preoccupations, their fantasies and their concerns, all find expression in Bhojpuri music videos and CDs, primarily because 'Unlike film songs dealing exclusively with amorphous sentimental love, regional song texts abound with references to local customs, lore, mores and contemporary socio-political issues' (Manuel 1991: 199). What was apparent was the forceful, often aggressive vehemence with which they asserted their fondness for Bhojpuri media products. *Bilkul acchhe lagte hain* (of course, we like them), *bahut acchhe lagte hain* (we like them very much), *zaroor dekhte hain* (we certainly watch them) were the most frequent responses received from the research participants. Besides, older forms of folk media, redolent of the culture of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, are still popular in Kandivali east and the migrants actively participate in group activities and communal celebrations of festivals such as wrestling matches, *Holi Milan samaroh* (Holi get-togethers), *Chhath puja* and *birha dangal*[6]. Surabhi Sharma, whose documentary film *Bidesia in Bambai* (2013) encapsulates the migrants' deep engagement with music from the homeland, speaks of the unbroken continuity of these musical traditions. In a society where migration and cultural bereavement, separation and its attendant sorrows are an everyday reality, the pathos of birha still

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[6] *Birha* is a form of folk music that expresses the pathos of being separated from one's beloved, while *dangal* refers to a wrestling match. Birha dangal is a folk music contest.

resonates in the Bhojpuri context, although in the urban setting, 'the text of the song gets localised'.[7] Every year, artistes from the home states are invited to perform at public functions arranged by cultural organisations affiliated to political parties, especially in the run-up to civic body elections. The purpose is to drum up regional partisanship and ensure that the distinctiveness of the north Indian identity is kept alive in the psyche of the migrants. For the women, and for the older migrants in general, the cinematic representation of rituals, customs and traditions provides the continuity with the ethos of the home states; they provide pleasurable regression to an idyllic (and idealised) bucolic past; for still others, the films, serials and reality shows are satisfying because of the comforting familiarity of the Bhojpuri language.

Almost all of my informants were emphatic that the Bhojpuri media evoke nostalgia and enable them to draw emotional succour. Sarita, a young respondent who had been married for over eight years, said, *Hum ko toh rona aata hai jab filmon mein wahan ke gaon aur shaher dikhate hain ... hamare ghar ki yaad aati hai ...* (We feel like crying when in the films we see the villages and cities over there … it reminds us of our homes …). Moreover, news on the Bhojpuri Mahuaa TV channel helps them remain connected to their 'home' through information about the contemporary political, cultural and socio-economic developments in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The responses revealed that politics continues to remain of interest to the north Indian migrant even in the host city. Not just the political horse trading in the home states, their interests also encompass the seat sharing and power broking that is an integral part of the city's civic elections.

Others, however, speak of how 'the political muscle and aspirations' of the community fuel anxiety among the local populace:

> ...the migrant from UP and Bihar is different, part of it is his socio-economic makeup; the way he behaves in a small group and his behaviour when he has the numbers, are completely different... Unlike your film stars and industrialists, the Maharashtrian cares how many local corporators or MLAs are from Bihar and UP. So when the

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[7] Filmmaker Surabhi Sharma expatiates on the significance of Bhojpuri music in the lives of migrants in Mumbai in her interview 'Dialogue with Filmmakers: Surabhi Sharma' (2013). Available at http://youtu.be/FYK9tgBsxrQ. Accessed on 19 September 2014.

Maharashtrian looks at this unceasing migration into his city and he does see it as his city, this sense of political power slipping away real or imagined is awakened.[8]

That increased 'group cohesion' is seen among migrants when they encounter hostility (Li et al. 1995) is amply evident in the clannishness demonstrated by the research participants. The stigma attached to the 'Bhojpuriya' identity, namely that of interlopers in a city that has no place for them, further serves to intensify feelings of solidarity. They rally to the assistance of their kinsfolk, not just because of deep-rooted caste and community affiliations but also due to reassurance offered by numbers. *Hamare gaon/biradari ke hain* (he is from our village/community) are words that were heard again and again in the course of interactions with research participants, words that illustrate that close bonds extend beyond the family to include one's village folk and those from the same caste and community.

Caste and class distinctions were scarcely ever discussed openly, but the women research participants made it clear that such matters are of consequence. In one of the homes, a respondent spoke *sotto voce* as she served a glass of tea: *Hum chhote logon ke yahan pani bhi nahin peete* (we do not drink even water in the homes of those who are from lower strata of society). The women were of the opinion that 'degenerate' people from the lower classes throng to cinema halls to watch vulgar films (*ghatiya filmein*). Social stratification manifested itself in subtle ways in the course of the discussions. Binita, a tall, stately woman (among the three women respondents who worked for a living), was acutely conscious of her upper caste, Brahmin status. Saddled with a husband she referred to as good-for-nothing (*nikamma*), she cooked in several homes to provide for her children. However, in her interactions with her neighbours, she exuded a sense of superiority which her interlocutors accepted uncomplainingly, for caste and class superiority are carried forward and maintained even in the host city. Shukla, an auto-rickshaw driver, was the only one amongst the research participants who openly expressed pride in his Brahmin status. He used to be a chauffeur, but he quit his job when asked to salute his

[8] See R.S. Nandal, 'A Clash of Cultures', NDTV.com [online], 25 February 2008. Available at http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/story.aspx?id=COLEN20080042337. Accessed on 15 May 2012.

employer's guests. He explained, *Ab hum unke jaat jane bina thodi na salute marenge? Ho sakta hai unke mehmaan humse nichee jaat ke ho!* (I cannot salute them unless I know their caste, can I? Possibly some of them belong to a caste lower than mine!)

It was not by design that a majority of the respondents were from the upper castes; a large number of the families in the settlement at Poisar Gaon are from the Brahmin or Thakur communities of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The influx of north Indians into Kandivali east began in the mid-1960s after sparsely populated agricultural land was occupied by the north Indian security personnel employed for the very purpose of preventing encroachment.[9] A combination of money and muscle power led to consolidation of their hold over the land. The Thakur family (sons of the erstwhile security official), after whom the locality is named, realised that strength lay in numbers and summoned their relatives to settle in the area; they, in turn, were followed by others from their villages.

Retaining their link with the mother tongue is of prime importance to the subjects of this research. The older generation of migrants in the sample, and even women who arrived in Mumbai after marriage leaving behind their maternal homes, claimed to love the familiar sweetness of the Bhojpuri dialect. But the second and third generation of migrants, more attuned to the cosmopolitan identity of the 'Mumbaikar', preferred being associated with Hindi, projected as pristine mother of all north Indian dialects (Eisenlohr 2004). They seem impatient to step out of the confines of the Bhojpuri identity and shed the stigma of rusticity attached to north Indian migrants in Mumbai. In the process, the Bhojpuri dialect, with its rural associations, is the first to be ejected.[10] Hindi appears to be the language of the workday world for these migrants; Bhojpuri is the language of private conversations (Tripathy and Verma 2011). It is not surprising therefore that many men prefer to access information about the city and the nation through Hindi, a language they understand and use for commerce.

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[9] As recounted by Professor Bhanu Pratap Singh in the course of personal communication with the author on 17 April 2011 in Mumbai. 'Masterji', as he was known, was a repository of information about the locality and had been a resident of the area for over 30 years.

[10] Madhava Prasad (2009) speaks of the emergence of counter trends that indicate cultural assertion and cultural–linguistic recuperation of the Hindi-speaking regions in the popularity of films made in Bhojpuri and other dialects.

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Many of the respondents believed that as long as their core 'family values' are retained, their children can and should acclimatise themselves to the culture of Mumbai. Therefore, multiple cultural identities are viewed as useful in order to gain employment and acceptance in the host society while preserving their cultural distinctiveness. The migrants' responses ranged from a belligerent defence of all things 'Bhojpuriya', to a near total assimilation of Mumbai culture and rejection of their roots in favour of the Mumbaikar identity. This is akin to the rejection of their own foreignness by Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong (Li et al. 1995) and is in tune with the school of thought that posits that the media can both promote as well as subvert social cohesion (McQuail 1994: 71).

While the older, less educated amongst the respondents often appeared to feel threatened by what they perceived to be an erasure of their regional identity, the better educated among the respondents were embarrassed by the charges of vulgarity levelled at north Indian culture and were of the opinion that 'true' Bhojpuri culture has none of the cheapness currently portrayed in the media. They indicated that the original culture has been debased and polluted, its 'purity' compromised in order to cater to the sexually starved young men who consume these media productions. Images of an undefiled, aesthetically pleasing, simple rustic culture cropped up regularly in the conversations. It was a matter of concern for the educated men and almost all the women participants (irrespective of their level of education) that the host population viewed the migrants as coarse on account of indecent lyrics of the item songs and the explicit dance movements in Bhojpuri films.

V
Identifiable male icons

The encounters with the men and women respondents illuminated how the gendering of media content and the positioning of the female subject in the narratives has shaped their perceptions about femininity and masculinity. Without a doubt, the male viewer's perspective is privileged over that of the woman, chiefly because the majority of patrons of Bhojpuri films are men who lead lives of enforced bachelorhood away from their spouses and families. The doughty, *macho*, swashbuckling, 'English' spouting hero, pursued by desirable women, is also a devout and traditional and, above all, an obedient son. He is the ideal worth emulating, for he melds within

him the qualities that are at the core of the 'Bhojpuriya' man's conception of masculinity and the aspirational aspects of his identity. Anthropologists Caroline and Filippo Osella (2004: 143–68) quote Gandhy and Thomas (1991) to drive home the point that cinema acts as 'a forum for collective fantasy' and the film stars are 'dense points of transfer of desire, belief, self-affirmation or transformation'.

Bhojpuri films and reality shows on television perform a crucial function in identity formation as far as the young male audiences are concerned. As Hinerman (2001) points out, while celluloid stars represent the ideal, they also portray the 'typical'. It is through them that we 'learn to trust our own ideals, determine where we "fit" in the global milieu, and formulate our social and cultural identities' (ibid.: 208–09).

One of the issues uppermost in the minds of the respondents in the age group of 18 to 25 was their inability to speak English fluently. Those who could do so made sure that they answered in English, even if the sentences were syntactically flawed. The Bhojpuri media projection of heroes who are rustic at heart but are able to speak English and successfully woo westernised modern heroines was particularly appreciated by the respondents. The protagonists of these narratives, with their command over the English language, serve as icons.[11] Further, the popular Bhojpuri stars who are anchors and judges for reality shows on television liberally intersperse English words like 'cute', 'sexy' and 'hot' in their comments on the participants. The 'Bhojpuriya' youth in the sample group find in these shows a reflection of the identity that they would like to possess: namely, that of the urbane sophisticate, who is rooted in home-grown values and equally at home in Muzaffarpur, Mumbai and Minnesota. A case in point is Dinesh Lal Yadav's character in the film *Nirahua Rickshawala*: the men were impressed by the hero's insouciance when confronted by his social superiors and admired his audacity in kissing the heroine in full view of her family.[12]

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[11] In popular films such as Nirahua Rickshawala (Nirahua, the Autorickshaw Driver), 2007, produced by Ashok Kotwani and Sasura Bada Paisewala (Father-in-law is a Rich Man), 2005, produced by Ajay Sinha and Sudhakar Pandey, the heroes speak English fluently but are embodiments of traditional values.

[12] Incidentally, the word used by the north Indian respondents to describe 'audacity' was *bindaas*, a typical Marathi colloquialism; yet another instance of how the language and the ethos of Mumbai pervaded their consciousness.

Significantly, Bhojpuri media increasingly appear to be evoking nostalgia and cultural pride amongst their consumers to create a distinctive pan global 'Bhojpuriya' identity. The Manoj Tiwari[13] song, 'International Litti Chokha',[14] speaks of how the intrepid sons of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, fed on a diet of *litti chokha* (baked wheat cakes and mashed potatoes), have done their homeland proud and ensured that the Bhojpuriya flag flies high in distant lands such as Surinam and Mauritius (*Ihekhai dada pardada, maati ke saan badhauleho, Surinam Mauritius Jhanda Bhojpuriya lahrauleho*). It goes on to remind listeners of the great heroes Kuwar Singh (one of the leaders of the Indian uprising of 1857), Chittu Pandey (a freedom fighter referred to as the 'Tiger of Balia') and Abdul Hamid (known for his gallantry on the battlefield), who have ensured the glory of the Bhojpuri people. Litti chokha is quintessentially Bhojpuri and the fact that it has crossed national borders and marked its place on the world's gastronomic map is presented as a matter of pride, as well as a lesson in history, geography, patriotism and culture. It is also noteworthy that in *Dainik Yashobhumi*,[15] a Hindi newspaper popular among the research participants who were literate, a prominent place was accorded to a photograph of the prime minister of Mauritius, Navinchandra Ramgoolam, and his wife Veena Ramgoolam, shaking hands with Sonia Gandhi during their visit to India in February 2012. The need to acknowledge shared ancestral roots is part of a larger move to increase the reach and visibility of the Bhojpuri identity, while celebrating the vibrancy of its distinct culture.

As members of a community that is unwelcome in the city, the migrants, especially the men, encounter hostility in insidious, if not overt, ways. The research participants were circumspect in expressing their views on the issue of the skirmishes and acts of vandalism that sporadically erupt in

[13] Manoj Tiwari, who was a popular singer of Bhojpuri folk songs, became a superstar in 2005 after the blockbuster hit *Sasura Bada Paisewala* (Ghosh 2010).

[14] 'International Litti Chokha' sung by Manoj Tiwari from the film *Daroga Babu I Love You* (Police Officer I Love You), 2004, produced by Sudhakar Pandey. Available at http://youtu.be/UiKyYJSv5g4. Accessed on 15 July 2012.

[15] *Dainik Yashobhumi*'s masthead claims that it is part of the second-largest newspaper group in Maharashtra. It belongs to the Ambika Printers and Publications Group, Lalbaug, Mumbai, whose other newspapers include *Punyanagari*, *Vartahar* and *Mumbai Chaupher* (all in Marathi) and *Karnataka Malla* in Kannada. The editor of *Dainik Yashobhumi* is Anand Rajyavardhan and the broadsheet is being published since 1996. As part of the study in which this article is embedded, the contents of this newspaper were examined to understand the reasons for its appeal among north Indian migrants.

Mumbai and which are fuelled by identity politics.[16] Although most were guarded in their comments, the more vocal ones said there was no animosity amongst communities and that politicians with vested interests mislead disaffected youth (*unko bhatkaya jata hai*). Nevertheless, Bhojpuri films and music CDs frequently focus on topical issues; films like *Deshdrohi* (The Traitor), 2008 and *Bhumiputra* (Sons of the Soil), 2009[17] capitalise on the contemporary political situation, as do music CDs such as Manoj Tiwari's *Purab ke Beta* (Son of the East) in order to strengthen feelings of regional solidarity and infuse self-respect in the beleaguered migrants. Pratap Bhanu Mehta pithily summarises an important aspect of the making of contemporary identities as follows:

> … most community identities in our politics are constituted by a narrative of victimhood. A community needs to feel under assault from outside to be given a vividness and salience. And a shared narrative of victimhood is what papers over other divisions inside communities.[18]

The respondents in the sample group did have the perception that they are being wrongfully targeted and it is this that has led to greater cohesiveness amongst them. Ethnic identity is often concomitant with the group's social position and power in the host city/country (Li et al. 1995). Media messages are, of necessity, infused with the dynamics of the power relationships and the 'positionality' impacts the formation of the migrants' identity. The aggressive espousal of all things Bhojpuri that the respondents demonstrated is both an outcome and a cause of such media messages. Television programmes such as *Sur Sangram* and *Dance*

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[16] Even as this article was being written, one of the key research participants, Satish Rai, lay in bed nursing a deep wound on his head. He and his brother Santosh were attacked by a group, purportedly belonging to the Shiv Sena.

[17] Harry Fernandes, the director of *Bhumiputra*, claimed in an interview with the author that he had 'conceptualised' the film on the basis of newspaper reports about the anti-north Indian agitations unleashed by the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena. He quoted a dialogue he had penned for the film, *Rajya se shuru hui ladai, zilla, gram panchayat karte hue, apne darwaze pe aake khadi hogi* (The agitation that began in the states will spread across the districts and village governing bodies, and land up at our doorstep) (Personal communication with the director, 10 October 2011, Mumbai).

[18] See Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 'Comic stripped', *The Indian Express* [online], 16 May 2012. Available at http://www.indianexpress.com/news/comic-stripped/949754/0. Accessed on 28 May 2012.

Sangram (music and dance contests telecast on Mahuaa TV) abound in tributes to the *Bhojpuriya samaj* (Bhojpuri community) and its *sanskriti* (culture). Songs[19] openly challenge the host population to take on the might of the migrant, each of whom equals several men in terms of courage and physical prowess as in *Ek Bihari Sab Pe Bhari* (One Bihari can Defeat All Others) by Pawan Singh. The lyrics assert *nahin chhodna saher* (will not leave the city). Another popular album *Purab ke Beta* (Son of the East) echoes the same belligerence in the song *Hum Bihari* (We Biharis). In this, a group of hooligans is shown harassing Bihari youth, when singer-actor Tiwari comes by, awakening their collective pride. The Bihari youth rally around Tiwari, pushing back the persecutors to the refrain of *Humka mat bujhaav* (do not try explaining to me), while asserting that they are not to be trifled with. It is noteworthy that the song speaks of how the migrants have been slandered (*jhutthe badnaam kariba*). Thus, the Bhojpuri media enhance the migrants' self-image and forge a stronger communal identity, obliterating in the process differences of caste, class and region. Indeed, the common epithet *bhaiya*, the pejorative term for migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, is often appropriated and used as a nomenclature worthy of pride. For the migrants therefore, the media appear to have become instruments of empowerment and enablers of survival. While the realities of the host city often threaten to undercut the migrants' assumptions about the values they uphold, Bhojpuri media reinforce perceptions of a shared, unifying culture. The migrants turn to media representations that valorise the cultural norms of the home states and also facilitate assimilation into the new surroundings.

VI
Upholding the family honour

In Bhojpuri cinema, women are objects of titillation or, at best, portrayed as characters who help take the story forward, occupying secondary position in the narrative. Most of the male respondents noted that the female lead in the films is never important enough to be remembered by her name. Pappu Pathak, a respondent who wielded considerable authority in the community of migrants in Poisar Gaon, said, *Arre, woh toh bhed bakri*

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[19] The songs selected are from the music albums *Bagalwali* (2009), *Purabke Beta* (2009), *Miss Call Mareli* (2008) and *Jaalidaar Kurti* (2007).

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ki tarah hoti hain … aati jaati rehti hain (the heroines are like flocks of sheep/goats … they come and go). There is a dichotomy between the manner in which male viewers look at female stars as objects of desire and perceive male stars as role models to be identified with (Mulvey 1975). Mulvey further points out that:

> … the spectator's position, active and voyeuristic, is inscribed as 'masculine' and, through various narrative and cinematic devices, the woman's body exists as the erotic, spectacular and exhibitionist 'other', so that the male protagonist on screen can occupy the active role of advancing the story line (1987: 6).

It is the screen representations of wives, mothers, sisters and daughters in the films that set the standards of behaviour considered appropriate for women. The men who were interviewed indicated that they uphold these representations as role models, expecting women to be compliant and dutiful. Choosing his words carefully, one of the male respondents said, *Bahut janmon ke baad manushya janma milta hai … woh bhi stree janma … Sita maiyya jaisi honi chahiye aurat jaat ko* (After many lives one is fortunate to be born as a human being… that too as a woman … women should be like Mother Sita[20]). Sita is the ideal of womanhood for him; one that conjures up notions of chastity and sacrifice, underscoring the 'position of women as important to the stability of social formation that is threatened by contemporary representations of femininity' (Narain 2009: 173).

The women respondents, although more critical of the screen representations, accepted the traditional family values that are depicted in the films, aware that submission to patriarchal authority is a way of life for them. They admitted that Bhojpuri films and serials do help in demonstrating to their daughters the deportment and the unwritten rules of propriety that need to be maintained in their in-laws' home. One of the chief concerns was that children must not forget their s*anskar* (traditional values). They emphasised the need for instilling modesty and subservience to authority in their daughters, as girls are the repositories of family honour (*ghar ki izzat*). They observed that insufficient grounding in north Indian values has led many of *their* girls to elope

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[20] Sita is the consort of the Hindu god Ram, the protagonist of the epic *Ramayana.*

with local (Maharashtrian) boys. This has led to allegations that north Indian women are *tez* (fast), a description they find deeply demeaning because it tarnishes the image of the *bhaiya log*.

The women were unequivocal in their condemnation of the *ghatiyapan* (cheapness) in the films and songs, primarily because the explicitness of the visuals and dialogues is discomfiting when the entire family is viewing together. They were also contemptuous and critical of 'modern' attire. Their daughters do wear jeans, but only till they enter puberty, after which traditional *salwar/churidar* (pajama-like pants/fitted legging) and *kameez* (long tunic) with a *dupatta* (long scarf) properly draped on their shoulders is what they are permitted to wear. Cinema and television are different: *Filmon ki baat alag hai … hamari ladkiyan waisa pehnengi toh ghar se nikalna band ho jaayega* (It is different with films … if our daughters dress like that, they will be forbidden to step out of the house). Women have to be mindful of what they wear, particularly so in an 'alien' land, for they are regarded as guardians of the original culture and their appearance represents distinctive markers of identity and of purity (Madhava Prasad 1998). Were the daughters to overstep the limits set down by their in-laws, the blame would rest squarely on their mothers. It is one thing to enjoy Ravi Kishen's vigorous wooing of Naghma on screen; it is quite another when one's daughter wishes to assert herself in matters of the heart. They are mindful of the gap between what is depicted in films and the customs that constrain them. Screen romances may fuel their fantasies, but they are dismissive of attempts made by media to push back the boundaries of social sanction. *Cinema aur serial mein dikhane se kya hota hai? Jaisa sasural wale chahenge waisa karengee … shadi ke baad jahaan jayenge wahan ke hisaab se chalna hoga* (What if films and television serials show these things? Our daughters must mould themselves in accordance with the wishes of their in-laws). They were categorical that, once married, their daughters would behave and dress according to the expectations of the in-laws.[21] Pragmatism makes them reject celluloid dreams as untenable, but also makes them value the freedom that Mumbai offers them from the insularity of the village and stranglehold of the family. One of the respondents was cautiously supportive of her daughter's desire to participate in a

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[21] Thompson's (2002) interaction with South Asian mothers and their daughters regarding media use revealed that watching ethnic films and television programmes was crucial to the construction and reaffirmation of their cultural identity.

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television dance contest.[22] Emboldened by the exposure to media depictions of girls from 'good' families fulfilling their ambitions, they tentatively nurture their daughters' dreams of education and employment.

In most cases, therefore, the women do not take the preferred meaning of cultural texts as expected; occasionally, as in the case of freedom to be accorded to young girls, they choose oppositional meanings. The media may project images of spirited, open-minded heroines, but the mothers rein in their daughters, clearly demarcating boundaries of acceptable behaviour. This does not come in the way of their enjoyment of Bhojpuri movies as, like most Indian viewers, they do not expect films to faithfully depict the complexities of life as it is lived daily. On the contrary, in most situations, they are closer to accepting a negotiated meaning of cultural texts, accepting those media messages that synchronise with their everyday realities and worldview and rejecting those that have outlived their usefulness or those they are not ready for as yet. Women have to be educated, but not too much, or else they will not find grooms; women have to accept the norms prescribed by their affines; and marriage is serious business that is best left for parents to decide. They negotiate a mass of tangled expectations ably, all the while keeping a keen eye on their daughters, who in turn will be the upholders of *sanskar* for the next generation.

Significantly, the women pointed out that innuendos and risqué lyrics have always been a part of folksongs. Earlier, the sexually charged imagery would often escape the understanding of children; people would often fail to grasp the double meaning in the lyrics. Nowadays, the explicit visual fare offered by the suggestive song picturisations bring home the meanings very forcefully. Further, songs with loaded meanings are accompanied by suggestive gestures that leave little to the imagination. By way of illustration, they cited a folksong *Kaanche kasaili ke swad kaisa* (What is the taste of unripe betel nuts), which by itself would have gone unnoticed. The music video features a young *devar* (brother-in-law) teasing his *bhabhi* (elder brother's wife), his explicit actions leaving little doubt about the physical overtones in the imagery. The ubiquity of televisual images has enhanced the impact

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[22] Brara indicates that 'the arc lights attract a small but growing margin of middle-class youngsters who have the requisite talent and are willing to undergo the grooming necessary for item numbers'. She goes on to state that 'transgressive pleasure was apparent in viewing item numbers that contravened conventional attire and gestures or diluted the classical forms of dance and song which were valued by some parents as markers of culture and distinction' (2010: 71–73).

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of these songs. What about the repeated allegations of impropriety and crudeness in the Bhojpuri songs and films? A noteworthy observation was made by the women research participants: the use of words such as 'sexy' and 'hot' or even references to parts of the female anatomy in English are associated with being 'modern' and 'westernised'. Hence, they do not attract censure or give offence. Similar words in Bhojpuri or even in Hindi sound extremely vulgar. No one uses the vernacular equivalents of words like 'sex'; it is almost as if the use of certain words in English immediately accords them a status denied to them in regional languages. They are then lifted out of the realm of the bedroom into the public sphere.

Bhojpuri films, catering to predominantly male audiences, privilege the male point of view. Television shows, on the contrary, viewed within the confines of the home, are geared to the tastes of women and the family as a whole. This is the reason why many of the women expressed a greater liking for music and dance contests and serials on television. As against the secondary position accorded to women actors in Bhojpuri films, women anchors and hosts as well as participants of the television reality shows are recognised, remembered fondly and even looked upon as role models worthy of emulation by young women viewers. The shift from the public gaze associated with the cinema screen to the respectable confines of the private homes in which television is watched appears to invest the very same female actors with an aura of acceptability.

The women respondents thus came across as 'active' users of the media, who do not accept media messages uncritically; on the contrary, they inflect and interpret the Bhojpuri media texts, judiciously selecting that which synchronises with their immediate lived experience and rejecting that which is incongruent with their needs and milieu. This, as suggested earlier, does not interfere with their enjoyment of the media: for there is a tacit belief that the world conjured up by the media is 'unreal', though it provides pleasure. The pragmatism that is demonstrated in their attitude precludes all forms of sentimental wallowing in nostalgia.

VII
Hybrid identities: Survival of the supple

Pushpa Thakur, a feisty 60-year-old, was the portly, bespectacled owner-proprietor of a tiny vegetable stall. She was quite a personage in the locality, for she headed the women's wing of the local Shiv Sena unit.

She served the unit loyally for years and was eventually 'rewarded' by the Shiv Sena corporator when the little alcove was 'given' to her to set up her *bhaji* (vegetable) outlet. Her husband, a former millworker, was a staunch Congress loyalist; her son had joined the Shiv Sena. Despite the political party's professed animosity towards north Indians, she chose to align herself with it. In a matter-of-fact tone, she said, *Bure waqt mein madat milni chahiye; ek party nahin toh doosri madat karegi ... ek hi pe bharosa nahin karna chahiye ...* (What is important is to get help in times of trouble... if one political party doesn't help us, the other will ... it is best to spread one's risk ...). Pushpa is realistic; she understands the importance of acclimatising herself to her host city. She arrived many years ago as a new bride and had been in Mumbai ever since. She spoke Marathi fluently. At the time of the interviews, Holi, one of the most important festivals for all north Indians, was around the corner. Pushpa and her friends (all north Indians) used the word *karanji* repeatedly in their conversation when discussing the delicacies to be made for the celebration. Karanji is the Maharashtrian equivalent of *gujiya*, a sweet made in every home in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh during Holi. Pushpa's life straddled these two worlds where karanji and gujiya become interchangeable; Shiv Sena and Congress make for companionable bedfellows; and her 'Bhojpuriya' identity, which remained at the core of her being, was comfortably attired in Mumbai's cosmopolitanism.

Most of the research participants had adapted their speech to suit the local environment. They interlaced their spoken Hindi and Bhojpuri with Marathi, or words peculiar to Hindi as spoken in Mumbai: for instance, *chalu maal* (substandard goods); *kaandha-batata* (onions and potatoes); *kholi* (room). Fewer words from Bhojpuri have found their way into the local vocabulary: they are used self-consciously and, at times, disparagingly by Mumbaikars—for example, *burbak* (fool); *Gangaghat* (literally, the banks of the river Ganges, but often used to refer to a group of gossiping north Indians).

The discussions with the respondents made it amply evident that while they are fiercely proud of their culture and are assiduous in retaining the core values of their community, occasional pangs of nostalgia notwithstanding, they are happy to be in Mumbai. Exposure to the big city culture has given them an edge over their relatives back in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, not just in terms of coping mechanisms but in terms of the vistas opening out before them. Many of them declared that they are happy to

have escaped the stultifying social set-up in their villages and they viewed themselves as 'superior' to their rustic cousins back home.[23]

The women too admitted that they would not trade the relative freedom of life in Mumbai with their life in the midst of extended families back in the villages. They now find it extremely difficult to adjust to the restrictive norms of the village. Too many dos and don'ts curtail their free movement: for instance, they cannot step out of the home in the afternoons because that is not acceptable, not even when work necessitates it. They value the freedom to move around with their heads uncovered, to choose their lifestyle and to celebrate festivals in their own way instead of being straitjacketed by societal pressure. It is apparent that the women also enjoy running their households and managing their finances without interference from affines. The relative independence of living in a nuclear family is also attractive to them. These are, of course, surrounded by a steady barrage of idealised media images, especially in commercials, depicting a small nuclear family comprising husband, wife and their two children.

This study points to the situation of a shifting, swiftly evolving hybrid identity among the 'Bhojpuriya' migrants, one that is selective about what it wishes to retain of its original identity and looks towards the Bhojpuri media to buttress its notions of kinship and familial bonds, gender defined roles in society and compliance with patriarchal authority. This is also a community that is 'modern' enough to acquire certain characteristics of the metropolis. This new 'Bhojpuriya' identity does not look with suspicion at girls who wish to study further and aspire for jobs; it appreciates the freedom offered by the nuclear family; it realises the value of 'English speaking'; and for the major part, distances itself from what is 'vulgar' in the fare churned out by the Bhojpuri film industry.

The social and cultural milieu of Mumbai has impacted the lives of the migrants in the sample group to varying extents, depending upon their exposure to the world outside their homes (particularly in the case of women), their period of stay in the host city, their age, level of education and their socio-economic status. In answer to the question whether it is possible for

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[23] This is comparable to the experiences of the Hindustani Surinamese who set themselves apart from other Surinamese ethnic communities through Bollywood movies, Hindi pop and Indian attire, that is, a range of identity markers reflective of their Indian descent. However, they insist on distancing themselves from Indians by emphasising their Surinamese identity and acknowledging their freedom from the social restrictions that prey upon Indians even today (Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal 2003).

the migrants to retain/sustain their Bhojpuri identity while turning into Mumbaikars, it can be said that this very identity has undergone subtle changes in keeping with the transformation wrought in the lifestyles of the migrants in the sample group. The identity of displaced communities is a conflictual terrain, wherein new, emergent images battle with old ones, giving rise to layered constructions. Nandy, reflecting on the distinct culture created in urban settlements of uprooted people, maintains that:

> The urban slum consists of people who are uprooted and partially decultured, people who have moved out of traditions and have been forced to loosen their caste and community ties...That does not mean that the slum has no access to cultural traditions… the slum recreates the remembered village in a new guise and resurrects the old community ties in new forms… even traditional faiths, piety and kinship ties survive in slums (1998: 6–7).

The research participants in the sample group demonstrated the adaptability evidenced in all displaced communities who have moved to new surroundings in search of opportunities. They have preserved what they consider the essence of the north Indian ethos: matters pertaining to caste hierarchies and kinship, parental control over matrimonial matters, the extent of freedom to be accorded to women, rituals and communal celebrations, as well as food habits. Many, for whom the process of acculturation is complete, have acquired nuanced, complex identities that merge the core elements of the Bhojpuri culture with features of 'Mumbai' culture, creating hybrid identities in the process. They accept the liberal mores of the host city, cautiously allowing it entry into their homes; equip themselves with a smattering of Marathi, the local language, acknowledging its usefulness in lubricating social interaction during contentious 'run-ins' with bureaucratic machinery; and pragmatically support regional political parties that are hostile to migrants, ensuring their own interests are safeguarded even in times of politically charged agitations. In all this, one also witnesses an aggressive assertion that as Indian nationals, they have as much of a right as the local population to live and work in any part of the country. They are unapologetic about their presence in Mumbai and envision a future for themselves and for their children in the city. Mumbai, with all its ills, is still the *Karmabhumi*, the place of work, of opportunities.

If culture is the sum total of values in action (Inglis 2004), then the research participants from the sample group have most diligently preserved the culture of their home states. However, in the face of the challenges in their host city, some compromises are necessary. In her analysis of the Bhojpuri diaspora as a rich field for acculturation research, Eldering (2005) observed that it is extremely difficult for immigrants to maintain their cultural attitudes and meaning systems, when external circumstances thwart the perpetuation of such practices. Waldron also notes that 'immersion in the traditions of a particular community in the modern world is like living in Disneyland and thinking that one's surroundings epitomise what it is for a culture really to exist' (1995: 100–01). This article demonstrates that the 'diaspora within the diaspora',[24] as represented by the sample group of north Indian migrants in Mumbai, appear to be adapting swiftly to the environment of Mumbai by developing multiple identities, often different for different situations. The daily exposure to life in a metropolis, the overcrowded little tenements they occupy, living conditions that dilute, if not dissolve the distinctions between castes and communities, the constant barrage of media images that bring the world into their homes, the combined force of drastically changed lifestyles: all of these factors have eventually helped them forge newer and more supple identities.

Simultaneously, the migrants hold on to a 'preferred' version of their Bhojpuri antecedents, one that is being consciously constructed by the Bhojpuri media, which draws upon the needs and aspirations of the migrants, even as it capitalises on their nostalgia and assuages their major concerns. Further, an international image is being created for the Bhojpuri-speaking migrant, one that connects him to the diaspora from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in erstwhile European colonies, all the while bolstering the self-esteem of the community by reaffirming its cultural distinctiveness and its ability to conquer odds and establish itself in hostile environments. The Bhojpuri media play a crucial role in helping them carve this space for themselves in Mumbai.

The insights provided by the article are significant as they highlight the dynamics of changing societies and demonstrate how north Indian migrants under consideration are fashioning identities in congruence with

[24] Ghosh (2010) speaks of the need of the 'diaspora within the diaspora', a term used by the social scientist Shiv Vishwanathan, in the course of his conversation with the author.

their multifarious psychological and social needs in the host city. Further, the research illustrates how the interaction between media practices and socio-cultural environment can be an empowering experience for communities battling problems associated with displacement, assimilation and acculturation.

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