

Magahi Folk Songs: Kaleidoscope of Life

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One of the hallmarks of contemporary literary discourse, the world over, has been the spreading out of its ambit to become virtually all inclusive breaking the boundary of language, culture and discipline. It is no longer English Literature as it used to be; it has evolved itself as interdisciplinary, inter lingual, multicultural or even transcultural discipline that has realized the value of social sciences, pure sciences and applied sciences in the discourse of literature. What Coleridge had initiated by including philosophy, aesthetics and psychology in literary criticism is reaching its fruition. It is this width, variety, inclusiveness and open- ended nature that characterizes English Literature in the twenty first century. It has become mature and strong enough to overcome all inhibitions and taboos of linguistic registers, themes, forms and techniques. On the one hand we are going back to tribal literature and on the other we are moving forward with hypertext and technoculture. It is a remarkably healthy emerging trend that critics, academia and literati are trying to rediscover dalit literature, tribal literature and folk literature and to prioritize them. This has inspired us to take time off and look into our own roots and understand our own original native literature. It is in this context that I am trying to introduce here Magahi folk songs which are still vibrantly in vogue, may be with variations and alterations, in most of the religious and social ceremonies held in Magadh region.

Magahi is the upbhransa of the Magadhi or Magadhi Prakrit language, the literature of which was prevalent in written form during Siddha period i.e. 8th century to 12th century. And Sarahpad was its first poet who was recognized for his poetry. The term Magahi also reminds us of Magadh Empire, the king Ashoka and Lord Buddha, and the glorious institutions like Nalanda and Vikramshila. But it had never got the royal patronage as the whole tradition of Siddha literature was anti Brahminic. However, it remained in use among 25 million people with a rich heritage of folk tales, folk songs and other folk arts. Still it has not got attention in academic discourse. The present paper is an attempt to make a classificatory analysis of Magahi folk songs to see how they recreate a vivid pictures of tradition, customs, beliefs, superstitions, practices and way of living of a people in a particular area i.e. Magadh region. In a way they offer us an alternative source of history and also an alternative modernity despite the fact that they lack in scientific documentation and probing. It would also reflect on its (folk song) genesis, development and key features; and how they are relevant to contemporary literary discourse.

Magahi Folk songs are the most vibrant carrier of folk culture, way of living and folk tradition as they are regularly used on different occasions like marriage and other samskars, festivals and on other social occasions. We may use Hindi in communication; the oral tradition of storytelling might have lost its sheen but the songs are there. Emotions are held as the primitive guiding force for the common mass and they find eloquent expression in song and music. So there is a dominance of emotional aspect in Magahi folk songs. So far there are only three collections of Magahi folk songs namely *Magahi Samskar Geet* by Prof Vishwanath Prasad, *Magahi Bhasa aur Sahitya* by Dr Samprati Aryani and *Magahi lok Geet Ke Vrihad Sangrah* by Dr Ram Prasad Singh.

The last one is the most comprehensive collection and compilation of Magahi folk songs on which my assessment is based.

There is no uniform process of classification of folk songs or tales. They are classified differently by different scholars to help them study the subject in a systematic manner. However, they are generally classified under different heads according to themes or areas of concerns. Dr Satendra classified Braj folksongs in two groups: Ritualistic and Recreational. Dr Krishnadev Upadhyay divides Bhojpuri folk songs under six categories: Samsakar Songs, Caste related, Season Songs, Emotion based Songs; Action based Songs and Miscellaneous Songs. This classification takes into account both subjects (themes) and forms based folk songs of Magahi. These songs are part and parcel of everyday life of the people. Most of the songs are participatory in which line dividing audience and singers get blurred for example in Jhoomar or Chhath, Holi songs, etc.

Magahi Folk songs are classified under eight classes:

(1) Region based: Rural, Urban and Forest Songs:

Under the impact of different regions the same song bears some changes in words and pronunciation. Elongation of the sound is typical in rural areas. Songs of Urban area have obviously been impacted by modernity and Khadi Hindi. Take for example:

Pachhim se aawe shri Yamuna he,

Purab se aawe bhagwan, murliya madhur baje.

Jahaan hoti hai meeting Ramayana wahan prabhu aate hai. (urban)

Pachhima se aawe siri Jamuna he

Purwaa se aawe bhagwan, murliya madhur baaje

Jahaa howa he meeting Rmayana, wahaan prabhu aawe he (rural)(Singh, 21)

(Differences in sound and words underlined)

(Where there is meeting of Ramayana, God comes there

From the west comes Yamuna,

From the east comes God playing sweet flute

Where there is meeting of Ramayana, God comes there) (Translation mine)

In forest areas of Chhotanagpur Magahi folk song bears the impact of forest and tribal life, their profession, cultural practices and their relation with 'jal, jungle and jameen'. Notably Chhotanagpuria language is very close to Magahi.

(2) Caste and Craft based songs: Caste plays a dominant role in this region, and traditionally profession has been linked with caste. Some specific cultural and religious practices, songs, proverbs and tales related to respective castes play an important role in creating group solidarity to keep the folk united and aligned. Folk songs are expressions of caste specific Samskars and customs, also. For example songs of palanquin bearers, fishermen, herdsmen, weavers, hawkers and venders, etc. have a reach treasure of profession based songs in which the practices involved in the respective professions are articulated. Here is an example of washer man asking his wife:

Mote mote litiya pakahiye ge dhobiniya se bihne jaybu dhobi ghaat

Taar ke khochariya me tikiya tamakuwaa ge, se rakhijiye saaj ke sambhaar

Hathawaa me lihe dhobin nariyar narbochawa se mathawaa par lihen dhobi mot . (Singh,22)

(He asks his wife to bake thick litti which he will carry in the morning while going to waterside. He asks for some bits of tobacco neatly packed in the pouch made of palm leaf. He also asks his wife to carry in her hand palm brush and wooden thrasher and he will carry the bundle of clothes on his head.) (Translation mine)

(3) Age : Childhood, Adulthood and Old age Songs:

Bal geet or childhood song includes songs sung in Kabbadi, in chakchanda and in other games of children. A popular Kabbadi song reads like this: "Sel Kabbadi aawe de, tabala bajawe de, table men paisa, lal bagaicha- lal bagaicha." Children games are not only entertaining but also educative.

Atakan chatakan dahi chataakan.

Bar phoole baraila phoole, sawan men karaila phoole

Neur neur chor, basila katori,

Basila gela chor, dhar kaan mamori.

Its translation is neither feasible nor desirable as it is basically sound based. Love songs and songs of sringar rasa are usually sung by the youth and they evoke pangs of migration (Bidesia) besides the usual tender feelings of romance and love. Such songs can be found in seasonal songs like Chaita, Sohra or in Holi songs.

Jab se widesia se nehiya lagawali, tadapait-tarasait ratiya gawanwali.

Jinagee jawaniyan bisarai ye Rama, piya nahi ayale.

(Since when I developed love for her husband (widesia) I have wasted my nights writhing and hankering. I have given up my life and youth hi Rama, my husband has not yet come from videsh (a far away place where he works).

Similarly there are songs which are usually sung in chorus or solo by old persons like bhajan, nirgun, etc.

(4) Male and Female Songs:

Some songs are specifically for women like Domkach and Chauhat. Domkach is a performative song that is performed by women in the evening or night on the marriage of a boy when the barat is gone to the bride's place and only women are left in the house. The women of the house and of neighbourhood sing, dance, play and abuse till late night breaking all social and sexual taboos as if they are declaring their complete freedom even enjoying lesbian . In it there is no audience; all are players. Local musical instrumentals like Dhol and cymbal are used. It is meant for celebration of marriage and compensation for their denial of participation in the barat. Chauhat is a ballad in which a woman sings out her tale, her trial and tribulation.

Some songs are only sung by men like Aalhaa, Lorkain, Gopichand and to a large extent Wirha. Aalhaa is a song of chivalry and manliness.

(5) Ritualistic and Seasonal Songs: There is a rich treasure of ritual and seasonal songs in Magahi literature which are sung on different religious and folk festivals and social occasions like birth, marriage, Widai (farewell), several samskars and death.

Similarly there is a rich oral tradition of songs on religious festivals in the region like Chhatha, Holi (Jogira, Kabira), Nagapanchami, Devi geet, songs of family deity, etc. Seasonal songs include Fagu, Chaita, Purvi, Kajari, Barahmasa, Cauhat, etc . Every season has a specific form of song for itself. For example Fagu is associated with the month of Holi starting from Magh Shukla Panchami to purnamas (roughly from mid Feb to mid March) and it is followed by Chaita and Ghatto (from Chait pratipada to Mesha sankranti). Pratipada is celebrated as New Year on 21 March under different names in different parts of India. It is known as Gudhi Padwa in Maharashtra, Ugadi in Andhra Pradesh, Baishakhi in Punjab. They are the songs of spring and hence there is predominance of Sringar. Purvi, Kajari, Chaumasa (July to October) and Barahmasa are sung in rainy season (Asad and savan). They are followed by Chauhat in Bhado, which is a theatrical song. Kajari is a very popular form of folk song in which heroin (Naika) pines for her husband/ hero in the season of Sawan when black monsoon clouds come hanging in the sky and the earth is filled with greenery and it rains pleasantly making her sing 'Aai varsa ki bahar, kahna mano Gopi nar...' It is the season of swing in the garden / orchard and both sing with swings of swing. But viyog rasa caused by the emotion of the absence of her husband is the most prominent and recurrent one in these songs:

'Neek lage naahin saawan men kajariya, sawariya nahin aaye re sakhi' (O friend! Kajari song in Sawan does not sound sweet as my husband has not come yet.)

Barahmasa describes the changing emotion of the heroine with the change of months; she is in perennial pangs of virah (separation):

*Maas asaada sakhi kaise bitaayab, piyawaa gelan pardes he.
Saawan adhika suhaawan laage, rim-jhim barse meha he.
Hum dhaani bhijali apani mahaliya, balama bhejale pardes he.
Bhaado he sakhi raenee bheyaawan, na koi aawe na jaa ya he.
Lokaa je loke Rama bijuri je chamake, binaa purusa ke nari he.
Aashin ye sakhi aas pujaayab, na puje aas hamaar he.
Ee dukh paro Raama kubari dhobiniyan, je piyawaa rakhe virmaaya he.
Kaatik ye sakhi aayo debari, sab sakhi diyara jaraaya he.
Sakhiya salehar Raama penhi patambar, chali bhele Ganga snan he.
Agahan ye sakhi agra mahina, chahudisi upajal dhaan he.
Chakawa chakaiya Ram keli karatu hain, ee dukh sahlo na jaaya he.
Pusa mahina sakhi jaara padatu hain, kaanpal badan hamar he. (Singh, 373)
O friend how will I spend Asaada (July), my husband has gone abroad.
Sawan (August) falls very pretty clouds showers rain.
I got drenched at home, my husband drenched abroad.
O friend Bhado (September) seems fearsome, neither anyone comes nor anyone goes.*

Hey Ram clouds clash, lightings flash, a woman without her man.
O friend Aasin (October) is the month of fulfillment, but my desire is not fulfilled.
Hey Ram, curse be fall on haunch back washer woman who has allured my husband.
O friend Kartik (November) has come once again, all my friends are lighting candles.
He Rama, my friends having worn new yellow saris are going for the Ganga- bath.

O friend, Agahan (December) is the foremost month, paddy crops are grown all around.

He Rama, why are you playing chakawa chakaiya with me, I can't bear this pangs.
It's cold winter in Pusa (January), my whole body shivers. (Translation mine)

(6) Style and Form based Songs:

From stylistic point of view Magahi folk songs are divided into two parts: Prabandh geet that is narrative song and sphuta geet that is lyrics. All folk narrative songs are classified as prabandh geet. Champiya, Maina, Raimal, etc are such songs and they are often sung under Chauhat in Sawan and Bhado in which there is a coherent sequence of events. It is also sung while doing a job like women singing while doing transplantation. Allah and Lorkain also come under this category.

Contrary to it, lyrics comprise all those songs which are response to a scene, an event, and an emotion or to a particular moment in life. Such songs also give vent to the suppressed feelings, desires and intense emotion of the women and the subaltern who cannot express them publicly otherwise. In them there may be some description but there is no story line. They are so flexible that they are amenable to improvisation at the spur of the moment. The singers easily incorporate new names, abuses, items or brief events according to the need of the situation without disturbing the basic form of the song. Most of the songs like kajari, chaita, chak chanda, jhoomar, samskar songs fall under this category.

(7) Miscellaneous Songs:

We can put Jhoomar, Lori, Latipha, Lataka and other uncategorized songs. Jhoomar is the most pervasive of them and defies the given categorization as it is used on different occasions and in most of the celebrations and has varied themes. Dr Ram Prasad Singh classifies Jhoomar in four different heads: Deity related or religious Jhoomar, Sringar based Jhoomar, profession/ craft related Jhoomar, and Samskar and rituals related Jhoomar. It is a group dance and song in which men or women or both holding one another hand forming a circle sway and sing rhythmically.

Take for example **Lokdharmi** (folk) Ram in a Jhoomar sung during marriage:

*Kaisan hathi Raamchandar, kaisan hathi Lachhuman ji,
Kaun baran ke Sita, Janakpur mangal gayab ji.
Sanwaro hathi Ramchandar, gore hathi Lachhuman ji,
Gore baran ke Sita, Janakpur Mangal gayab ji.
Jhar re jharokhe chadhi Sita nirakhathi,
Aba Ram tote dhanush, Janakpur mangal gayab ji.
Tadapi ke Ram ji dhanush utholan,
Dhanush bhaile nawakhand, Janakpur mangal gayab ji.
Aba Sita ke hoihe viaah, Janakpur mangal gayab ji,
Hansa ke Sita mala penhawale, Janakpur mangal gayab ji. (Singh, 450)
How does Ram Chadra look, how does Lakshaman,
What complexion Sita has. Janakpur will sing auspicious song.
Ram Chandra has dark complexion, Lakshaman is fair.
Sita is fair, Janakpur will sing auspicious song.*

Sita reaches up to window and observes
 Now Ram will break the bow, Janakpur will sing auspicious song.
 Ram lifted the bow in agony,
 It broke into nine pieces, Janakpur will sing auspicious song.
 Now Sita will marry, Janakpur will sing auspicious song.
 Sita garlanded him with a smile, Janakpur will sing auspicious song.

(Translation mine)

Among other Lori is well known elsewhere also as a night song to make a child sleep. Lataka is commonly sung by hawkers to attract customers and sell the goods. For example: " Mera chanaa banaa hai arre, khate bade-bade aphasarre.

Kalam chalate sarasar,

It must be made clear here that these songs are prevalent in other regional languages like Bhojpuri, Maithali, Angika, Chotanagpuriya. You may find some of them elsewhere as well. For example Jhoomar is said to have its origin in Balooch, Pakistan. But the present discourse is mainly region and language specific. These folk songs might have travelled to this region from some other far off places or they might have originated here in a different area of research. The streams of folk culture and classical (Shist) culture have been coming down the ages since the Vedic period; and have naturally been influencing each other, though often at odds in relationship. This cross cultural fertilization in different genres of literature is a fertile area of research. For example a reading of Jayasi's Virah Geet is incomplete without an understanding Virah Geet of Baramasa. Phaniswar Nath Renu's *Maila Anchal* requires knowledge of the folk culture of the region. Since these folk songs offer an insight into the spirit and psyche of the people of the region not to be found in any history book besides a kaleidoscopic picture of their social and cultural life, they assume importance not only for a sociological, cultural and historical study of this region, its present sociological problems but also for any literary recreation involving this region, people and its history.

Work Cited

Singh, Ram Prasad. *Magahi Loka Geet Ke Vrihad Sangrah*. Magahi Akademi, Bihar, Patna, 1999.