

Folk Music of Assam: Ethnic Discourse on Origin, Practice and Relevance

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Abstract:

Folk music is a significant aspect of folk culture. Dance is said to have originated before song. Even when primitive humans were not able to master the art of living in well-coordinated societies, their painful lives were greatly stirred by the hearts of wild dance. Success in hunting or for many other significant reasons led the exploring human heart to a strange world. Even before they acquired the ability to express attitudes through conversation, primitive humans spontaneously mastered the art of expressing the deepest accumulated feelings of joy through gestures and dance. Music became inseparable from dance. Along with the emergence of dance and musical instruments, songs emerged in human society. There are many different types of dances, songs and musical instruments that have been used in human society since ancient times. The North East of India has a rich tradition of folk music since ancient times. In terms of folk music tradition, other parts of India have been inhabited by ethnic people since ancient times. These early inhabitants the ethnic groups have lived in different parts of the diverse environment of India with their own customs and traditions. The old ethnic music tradition has contributed a lot to the shaping of Indian music.

Key words: folk culture, folk literature, folk life, folk music, heritage, practice.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

Indian ethnic music has carried some peculiarities of its own since its earliest days. Different rituals, festivals etc. are celebrated among the ethnic groups at different times. The folk music created among them is not considered as anyone's personal property. It is considered as a common resource of the community. The knowledge of this folk music is traditionally passed down from generation to generation. With the change of times the tribal society has undergone radical changes. With the advancement of information technology and global communication systems, various social media platform their public life has also become modern. This change is happening rapidly in folk music. If this trend of change continues, there will be no identity and national consciousness of the ethnic groups and their cultural heritage in a very short period of time. Therefore, this paper will attempt to highlight various aspects of folk music heritage, discourse practice and relevance.

IMPORTANCE OF STUDY:

There is a long history of ethnic folk music in Assam but no systematic research studies have been conducted so far. There are many different types of folk music in Assam where it is not easy for everyone to get an idea of this at the same time. The ethnic folk music of lower Assam can be divided into three main categories : *Goalparia* folk music, *Kamrupia* folk music and, tribal folk music. The content and musical characteristics of these three types of songs are in all respects a distinct feature of

folk life and an introduction to their respective regional ideas. Dividing the folk music of Lower Assam into three parts it will have been preserved for future generations if steps taken. Through this paper, there is a need for a literary evaluation of folk music of Assam. This study will reveal many aspects of the discussion and criticism of ethnic folk music of Assam in the field of Assamese literature and culture. This study will pave an important path in the future practice of folk music of Assam and will help in gaining an overall understanding of folk music of Assam.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The study of the discourse, heritage, practice and relevance of ethnic folk music of Assam includes the lower Assam Bodo, Rabha, Hajong, Koch Rajbongshi, Garo and other ethnic groups. These ethnic groups have a systematic discussion of their songs, mainly folk literature and folk dances, as well as their contributions to the socio-cultural sphere of Assam.

METHOD OF THE STUDY:

The data in this paper is limited to the scope of scientific study and collected through field methodology. Alongside the descriptive method for theme analysis, an analytical method has been followed revealing key theme findings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

There are many scholars who have analysed the cultural history and cultural heritage of Assam. These include Culturalist Prafulla Dutta Goswami, Leela Gogoi and Maheshwar Neog, Birinchi Kumar Baruah, Hem Baruah. Prafulladutta Goswami's 'The Ballads and Tales of Assam' is a comprehensive discussion of the folk(Jono) songs or ballads of Assam. Goswami's 'Bihu Songs of Assam' is a comprehensive discussion of Bihu songs. Similarly, Atul Chandra Baruah has highlighted the Assamese folk songs in 'Assamese Folk Literature'. There are many different types of folk songs, including Bihu songs, malitas, karbi folk songs, Mising folk songs, etc. in 'Folk Literature of Assam'. The book also discusses the Assamese Ainaam, Biya Naam, Nichukni Geet, Deh Bicharar Geet, etc. Famous culturalist Hem Baruah has written several articles in English on folk songs in '*The Red River and the Blue Hills*' and '*Folk Songs of India*'. Historian of Assamese literature Satyendra Nath Sarmah has discussed in his '*AsomiyaSahityarSamikhyatmakItibritwa*'. Hem Baruah in 'History of Assamese Literature', and Dimbeswar Neog in his '*AsomiyaSahityarBuranji*', Hemchandra Goswami in his '*Asomiya Sahityar Chaneki*' discussed folk literature and folk songs. There are many different types of folk songs discussed folk songs in '*Rabha Deka-GavorurPronoy Geet*' by Mani Rabha and '*Rabha Loka-AsomiyaGeet-Maat*' by Upen Rabha Hakacham. BhabenNarji introduces the Bodo folk song in his his book '*Bodo Kachari Society and Culture*'. The scholars have continued their study and discussions in the field of Assamese folk literature and folk songs in this way.

INTRODUCTION:

Folk music refers to traditional songs that are being transmitted orally. Folk music lives on in the efforts and traditions of folk society. In the formation of the larger Assamese nation, there are many different types of folk songs that have been prevalent among these ethnic groups in South Assam for centuries, such as religious songs, ritual songs, festival songs, love songs, sports songs, etc. There is a reflection of the picture of life.

The origin and in artificiality of folk music based on various reactions of nature can still be seen in folk music of South Assam. The instruments that are inherently associated with folk life are also simple instruments that are simply prepared in folk music. For many of these reasons, folk music has a distinct

dignity and characteristics. What is sung is the song. A song is a poem or verse sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument while maintaining the melody. There are four main parts of songs: temporary, intermittent, transitory and emotional. It covers the temporary first stage, the intermediate second stage, the transitive third stage and the enjoyment in parallel.

Folk music is a very interesting field in the music world. There is a basic field of tradition and magical aspects. Folk- poems, which comprise a large part of the oral arts has been called folk songs. In this context, Nabin Chandra Sarma says: In the context of oral arts, we do not pay attention to the musical aspect of folk songs, but we see them as poetry. However, in the case of performing arts, we place special emphasis on the musical aspect of folk poetry i.e. in the context of oral arts, we do not recite a folk poem to the accompaniment of melody, rhythm, instruments, etc.; but we read or recite it like a poem. In contrast, in the context of performing art, we sing that particular folk poem to the accompaniment of melodies, rhythms, instruments, so these are folk songs or tribal songs. The term folk songs or folk music can also include tribal songs and tribal music. (*Sarma, Nabin Chandra: Performing Arts of North East India, 2013, p.10*). Characteristics of folk music

- (a) The specific notes of folk music are not available in recorded form. This script is passed on by oral tradition, which leads to translations and variations in the singing style of folk music. There are also differences in the instruments used to accompany folk music, the style of playing and the melody.
- (b) The fixed text or style or singing method of folk music has not been determined as its text and singing style varies from region to region.
- (c) In the Indian musical tradition, folk music has been referred to as '*indigenous music*'. The combination of song, instruments and dance the indigenous song. Folk music or tribal music is the style of music prevalent in countries, the style that is passed down mouth to mouth and ear to ear and the style of music is performed on the basis of memory. This music is prevalent among all classes of people, including peasants, workers, labourers, elites, literate, orphans. (*Sharma, Naveen Chandra Environmental Arts of North East India, 2013, p.10*)
- (d) Singers are unfamiliar with the sources of folk music. On the other hand, if music prevalent in the written tradition also enters the oral tradition in the course of time, it also becomes part of folk music.
- (e) There is no fixed form of melody in folk music, it takes various forms.
- (f) Folk music is also rich in aesthetics. The aesthetic appeal of folk music, its combination of melodies and rhythms has helped to elevate it to a sophisticated genre of music.
- (g) There are two main aspects of folk music. The relationship between melody and instrument depends on the song. For example, some folk songs are sung without any instrumental accompaniment. Most of the songs performed by women in the folk songs of Lower Assam such as *Biyanam, Ainaam, Nichukoni Geet* etc. are sung without instrumental accompaniment. These types of songs are sung with only the vowels '*sa*', '*re*', '*ga*' and '*dha*'. The simplicity of folk song attracts all with its vigorous tune.
- (h) Folk instruments associated with folk music also have a distinct structure. These instruments can be divided into *Sushi badya, Tat badya, Anaddha badya* and *Ghana badya*. The first two types of instruments can be called vocal instruments together and the latter two types can be called rhythmic instruments together. People have a widespread interest in its beats and rhythm.
- (i) When analyzing folk music, some peculiarities were observed in the style of singing of the singers. For example. Innovative voice performance according to the meaning of words, Exceptional word casting, Inherent dramatic expression in the pronunciation of words, Perfect and distinctive pronunciation, Exclusive style.

MAIN TOPIC ANALYSIS:

There is a systematic study of folk literature and folk music in Assam in 1948 from the Gauhati University. A Department of Folklore Research was established here. In 1953, Prafulla Dutta Goswami prepared and published a collection of folk songs and fairy tales scattered across Assam under the department. There are many different types of *zikir* and *zari* of the Muslim community of Assam. From this time onwards, many inquisitive people in the southern and southern regions of Assam have composed folk songs and undertook an effort to collect fairy tales. In southern Assam, Sriram Chandra Das, Arjun Das, Yogesh Chandra Tamuli, Dandiram Dutta and others collected folk songs and fairy tales and in southern Assam, Leela Gogoi, Jogen Chetia, Syed Abdul Malik and others collected folk songs and fairy tales. In particular, Yogesh Chandra Tamuli's '*Assamese Folk Songs Collection*'. He published collections of Assamese Folk Songs, Maniram Dewan's Songs and Bihu Songs and '*Banghosh*' by Leela Gogoi. There are many different types of songs, including the songs of *Nichukni*, *Tokari*, *Manikonwar*, *Phul Konwar*, *Janagabharu*, etc. He was a member of the Sahitya Akademi in 1962. He collected folk songs on about a dozen subjects with the help of various people in Assam and published them under the title '*Bar Mahar Tera Geet*'. His collection includes *nichuknigeet*, *dhemeliyageet*, *biyanaam*, *bhekulirbiyanaam*, *Lakhimi Adara geet*, *Apeswarigeet*, *baramahigeet*, *mahilarbibidhgeet*, *nawariageet*, *dehbisarargeet*, *jikir*, *dhemeliyageet*, *mahohogeet*, *hucharigeet* etc. They include Bihu songs, malitas, tribal folk songs etc. In addition, Gyanadabhiram Baruah wrote '*The Folk Tales of Assam*' in English. He translated some of the fairy tales of Assam into English and published them under the title '*The Folk Tales of Assam*'. Satyen Borkotaki translated some tribal fairy tales into English under the title '*The Tribal Folk Tales of Assam*'. These books of fairy tales and folk songs gave a new dimension to the field of Assamese folk culture. Leela Gogoi's collection of folk songs of Assam contains many folk songs of Upper Assam. There are many *Bihu songs* and *ban-ghoshas* in '*Akul Pathik*' by Dimbeswar Neog. His works include *Bhogjara*, *Putoli* and *Namati*, which include Upper Assam's *nichukanigeet*, *Dhainaam*, *Ainaam*, *Bianaam*, etc. In *Badan Barphukanar Geet* Suryya Kumar Bhuyan delineated the life story of Badan Chandra Barphukan. Sriram Chandra Das has collected '*nawariageet*'. In Durganath Baruah's '*Namati*' there contains the songs of the *Apeswari Sabah* (Fairies' ceremony). In '*Samanjali*' Annada Devi Barkatki has collected *Ainaam*. With the help of others, Phanindra Nath Kalita has collected '*Baramahi Aru Bilap Geet*', where he unified sixty-six songs of *Baramahi and Bilap*. Syed Abdul Malik has published the *zikir and zari* songs prevalent among the Islamic community under the title '*Zikir and Zari*'. By the name of '*Bhaona Geet*', Prasanna Chandra Boruah has published the *songs of NingniBhaworiya* from Kamrup. There are also notable collections of folk songs such as '*Maho-Ho Geet*' by Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya, '*Bahag*' by Nakul Chandra Bhuyan and '*Dubla Shantir Geet*' by Sriram Chandra Das. Dwijen Nath has worked hard to collect and publish folk songs of Goalpara of Lower Assam under the title '*Goalparia Loka Geet*'. Renowned vocalist Pratima Pandey Boruah made '*Goalparia Loka Geet*' famous all over India. In addition, many people have come forward to collect folk songs of tribal communities. Among these, Mohini Mohan Brahma has published a collection of '*Bodo Folk Songs*'. Bhabendra Narji and Benjamin Swargiary have collected some Bodo songs. This study collects information on the preservation and enhancement of folk songs of the Bodo ethnic group, Rabha ethnic group, Rabha ethnic group, Garo folk songs and Hajong folk songs.

The folk music of Assam sings the truth of life, love and the depth of perception of beauty. It is the pulse of the nation, the history of life and the reflection of society. In short, folk music is a golden source of folk literature, a free expression of the psychology of the peasants and the rural environment. It is significant that the popularity of this folk music is declining among the younger generation. If these

songs are not properly preserved, the folk songs of Upper Assam and Lower Assam, one of the treasures of folk literature of Assam, will be lost in the lapse of time.

Many experiments in Assamese folk music have been done through film songs. Folk music has been popularized through film songs sung by many singers, songwriters, composers and music directors. As the *Borgeets of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva* are used, *Jikir, Bangeet, Bihu, Bianam, Kamrupi Folk Song, Mohkheda Geet*, etc. can also be seen its influence in the film songs. Some of the songs are melodic, while others are influenced by Western imitations of 'Rock' songs. Jyotiprasad Agrawal cut the path and film songs developed properly in the 1970s and 1980s, but from the 1990s to the present, only a small number of folk songs have been incorporated into films for various reasons. However, with the decline of gramophone records and the discovery of science and technology, new means of listening to songs also influenced the Assamese film industry in the late twentieth century.

The overall way of life of a society is culture. People's happiness, sorrow, hopes, aspirations, and limitations etc. are inherent in folk music. These folk songs contain detailed accounts of the birth, death, marriage, festivals, etc. of a society. Folk songs, folk dances, etc. created by unknown people expressing happiness and sorrow at a particular moment in their lives have many characteristics when passed down from generation to generation. Through this process, folk music acquires the ability to survive in a changing society. South Assam has long been famous as a fertile region of folk music. Therefore, it is important to take steps to preserve the potential of folk music with various types of dances, songs and instruments inhabited by various ethnic groups through information technology, media, electronic media, etc. to become a place of interest to the younger generation.

It is very important to use modern information technology for collection, compilation and dissemination of folk music of Lower Assam through various media, books, seminars etc. has become necessary. Besides, the study of folk songs and music will be fruitful through various disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, sociology, folklore, etc.

CONCLUSION:

Assam is home to various ethnic groups with distinct social and cultural characteristics since ancient times. There are many ethnic groups in Lower Assam, including Bodo, Rabha, Koch, Garo and Hajong. The paper entitled Preservation and Enhancement of Ethnic Folk Music of Assam attempts to give a clear idea of how folk music has shaped the social, cultural and musical life of Lower Assam through folk literature. In the process of forming the larger Assamese nation, the ethnic groups of South Assam also inspired the tasteful minds with musical consciousness. Music is the combination of dance, song and instruments. Early humans lived completely dependent on nature. Even today, most of the people in rural areas are mainly dependent on nature. The art of living in a vast world in balance with natural beauty and violence is the main driving force behind maintaining the balance of human society. Nature has returned as a powerful catalyst in evoking joy and sorrow in the hearts of men from ancient times to the present. Nature also has a huge influence on folk music. The sounds of rivers, wind, trees, chirping of birds, etc. have given a distinctive volume to folk music. The beauty and rhythm of nature is also the basis of folk music resources.

Art and culture encompass all human thought and action. This creates a healthy environment for harmony between different ethnic groups. Therefore, the main purpose of art and culture is to reflect it in various forms such as songs, plays, poems, stories, novels etc. through the judgment of real life. The ethnic folk music of Lower Assam has also played this role beautifully.

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