

Folk Culture of Rabha Tribe: Changes and its Preservation

(Special reference of Folk-Songs)

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ABSTRACT:

Culture is the mirror of a society, which includes folk literature as an important aspect of a study. Assamese society is a combination of different caste and tribes among which the Rabha community is very rich in its folk culture and literature.

In this research paper, the investigator will try to collect codify and preserve the same through modern electronic process. Field survey method will be observe in collecting the data's and analytical method will follow.

KEYWORD:

Culture, Rabha, Folk-literature.

Introduction:

The epoch making experiences and expressions of the knowledge of folk life can be referred to as folk literature. The various feelings of human beings such as happiness-sadness, pleasure-grief, hope-aspirations, social image and diverse natural images are reflected through folk literature. Human brains are the storehouse of the folk literature. Many years ago, before the creation of the written literature, various songs-verses, stories, proverbs, charms, riddles etc. have been introduced orally among the rustic people. The folk literature is made rich with the characteristics like- density of emotion and feelings, simplicity and natural expression of subject matter, era-impartiality, exaggeration, musicality, universality etc.

The real nature of folk culture is reflected in the mirror of folk literature. The folk literature became more lucid on the flow of time. The feelings which was created in the sensible minded people that they lived amidst the colorful and beautiful nature could give birth to some characteristic songs, charms etc. The folk faith, religious and social behavior and programmes, purification; besides these all, a clear image of folk art was there among them and this can be known from the prevailing songs-verses, proverb-simile, example, stories of the people who were remain unaffected by the outer civilization or culture. In this way folk literature is that kind of literature which has been flowing from mouth to mouth from a very ancient time.

Many terms have been used to mean the concept of folk literature. William Richard Bascon used many terms such as Unwritten Literature, Popular Literature, Mass Literature, Ancient Literature, Oral Literature etc. to mean Folk Literature. (W.R. Bascon; Contributions to folkloristic, p.67)

Folk society (group of ethnic people) is the background on which the folk literature is introduced and developed. Through the literature of a nation, the happiness-sadness, hope-despair, proverb-simile, example, story etc. of all classes of people can be known. The language of folk literature and its expressive style is direct. Not only the folk society but there are also some descriptions of various elements of nature which made the folk literature bright, such as river-stream, fruits-flowers, trees, hills-plains, birds etc.

0.1 Objective of the study

The true identity of a nation is reflected in its folk literature. Rabha tribe is very rich with its rich folk literature. Various materials of folk literature have been propagating and developing from very ancient time by way of flowing from mouth to mouth but in the lack of research or study on them, many of them are about to lose its existence. Moreover, at the present time, it is very important to preserve them. My discussion is prepared with this objective.

0.2 Scope of the study

A brief introduction of the folk literature of the Rabha tribe is given and a discussion is made briefly as to which causes are behind to effect on its society and culture and cautions needed to be adopted in this regard as well.

0.3 Methodology

Throughout the preparation of this discussion some relevant books of Assamese and English language are taken as well as a field study in Darrang, Udalguri and Goalpara district is also made.

1.0 Habitation of the Rabha Tribe and their Society System:

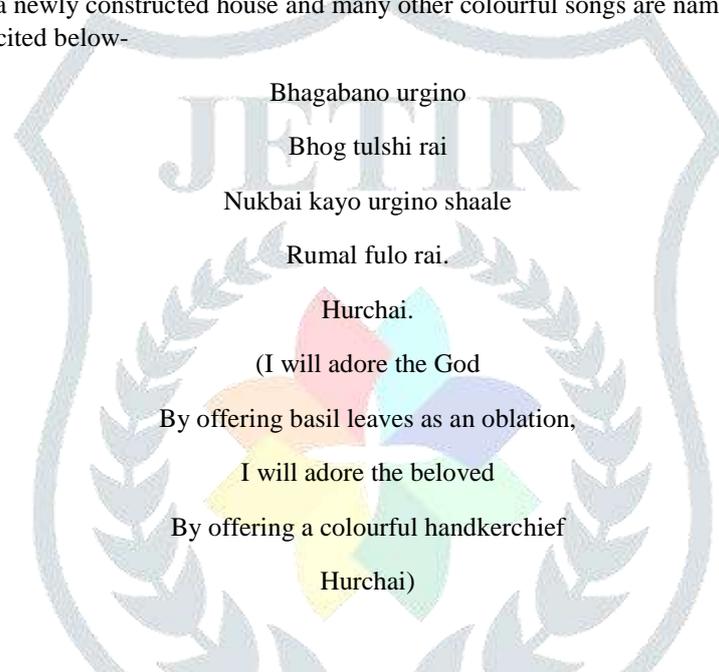
The enlisted Rabha tribe in the schedule tribe's list of the Constitution of India is of Tibetan-Burma origin. These people are mainly found in the lower Assam and in the various districts of the East Garo Hills as well as in the districts of Sivasagar,

Lakhimpur, Darrang, West Bengal, Kochbehar, Jalpaiguri etc. Initially, matriarchal family system was followed but now it is changed in to Patriarchal system. Their society system is fully regulated under Democratic System. Both Rabha man and woman are involved in cultivation, fishing etc. The Rabha Tribe is mainly divided into eight clans—Rongdani, Maaitori, Pati, Dahori, Bitoliya, Tutla, Shunga and Hama.

1.2. Folk Song

Various traditional songs have been prevailing among the Rabha Tribe from the very ancient time. But the songs were performed with some definite purposes. Many folk songs have been performed based on some festivals and programmes of religious, social and personal life of the Rabha Tribe. These songs can be referred to as ‘Institutional Folk songs’. Most of these songs are related to dance. The rustic Rabha folk society worships different gods and goddesses with a vast musical way hoping a protection of the crops from insects and ants, to get rid of diseases, to save the domestic animals from disease and misfortune, to protect the village from epidemic disease and to live affluently and geniality.

The Sathargeet of the Baikhu festival, Hurshai songs, cultivation related songs of the Hasong worshipping, marriage related songs of the Tutakami song, death and funeral ceremony related Farkanti or Tarangkaji song, Maroi or Maare songs of Bikhkori worshipping, Tukuria Song of Tukuradeu worshipping, Greembuda song of autumn festival, Huyomaru song of Runtuk worshipping etc. are some of the examples of their institutional folk songs. Moreover, songs relating to the ceremony of welcoming the paddy as per their faith believing it to be similar to the welcoming of goddess Lakshmi, Mahoho or Mosquito scare away songs, song of snake worshipping, Juna Songs, Baramahi Songs, Leguabikai songs, Nook Jumkai Sai songs performed in the reverence before entering into a newly constructed house and many other colourful songs are name worthy folk songs of the Rabha Tribe. A line of Sathar song is cited below-



(Before mentioned, p.16)

The songs which are composed on the basis of a tale or story can be said to be Akhyanmulak or Legend based (songs related to that particular legend) or Kahinimulak songs or Story based (songs related to that particular story). The songs on King Ban and Dadan which have been prevailing from very ancient time flowing from mouth to mouth among the Rabhas, the details of the birth of Karhabahi, song of Bahurangee Khaparangee, Tukura bura songs, songs on the story of Noboinee and Herkapeta, Sristi Patani songs. Khupe Necher story based Dadan songs, Nirmoni-Nirjuri songs, Langa- Raja/ Bakhra Baiyoni Chaikhar (Langadeu or Jhakuadeu's Pachali) Sodagoroni Goorai Badangkai (songs which are sung trailing the image of a horse into those songs at the gathering of merchants where they drink wine) etc. are some of the songs which have been following by the Rabha Tribe. These songs can be said to be the glory of the Rabha Tribe which brings them an adorable sense of pride. A line of a song on the king Dadan is cited below—

Aato Tema Zoorazoo Chamkroong Raja,

Aato Tema Zoorazoo Bangkroong Raja.

Uyan Dodani Shakai Rongkai Naiyan Chamkroong Raja,

Uyan Dodani Shakai Rongkai Naiyan Bakroong Raja.

(Before mentioned, p. 21)

The songs which have been passing from mouth to mouth traditionally on the basis of a legendary tale or hearsay songs can be named as Legendary or Hearsay songs. Propagation of this type of hearsay songs are also found among Rabha Tribe. The song of Rondona-Chondona, song of Nalua-Chalua, Hoimaru song, Deudhoni song of Khookchai worshipping etc. are some of the songs which were created and followed by way of hearsay method.

In Rondona-Chondona's songs there are the mention of establishing a relation between god and man and it is expressed by way of long stories in it, ascribing human quality in the birds, the introduction of Rabha dance, as to how the worshipping of

god snake was introduced in the Rabha society, all these stories are explained in a lucid way. A line of Rondona-Chondona's song is mentioned below—

Rondona aar Chondona Bhai Brang
 Mayo Kantra, Ji Kranta Bana-
 Kirayomane Bakk Chikar Jayokranga Renga.
 (Rondona and Chondona are brothers.
 Only plain rice is served on the dishes,
 So let us go for Hunting of a pig
 With the help of our dogs.)

(Before mentioned, p.22)

The rustic village people sing some sort of songs to lessen their tiredness or to increase their enthusiasm while they work. These types of songs can be referred to as songs relating to their respective works. The main purpose behind these songs is nothing but to enjoy while they work enthusiastically or to lessen their tiredness. Simple and sweet imagination and miracle is found in these songs. Different work related folksongs are found in the village life of the Rabha Tribe. The songs which are sung by the village Rabha people while they work not only lessen their tiredness but also their national culture is reflected through those songs. Rung Tankai Chai or Bar Kamla songs which are sung at Badabor (temporary shelter made by some foreign merchants of boat and of wood), Na Bookai song relating to fishing, Bharang Nekai song which is sung at Jhum cultivation field when they take care of their Tongighor (a one or two storied house built near cultivation field with bamboo and wood so that the farmers can take care of their crops by scaring away harmful birds or other animals from their crops), Bang Diyaor Lakhor Chai song of cowboys, Marang Mathang or Hurayachook-Mandaichook song sung while they go for hunting, Nukhaerengkai Chai (lullaby) and also those songs which are sung while playing different games such as— Chua Kherekai (the game of touching each other), Nachar Guti Kherekai (a game of hands putting on the upper side a stone then through it up to catch with the other side of that hand), Kakorek Kok Kherekai (hide and seek), Kokumai Kherkai etc. different work related songs have been prevailing among the Rabha Tribe from a very ancient time. Also among the Patirabha (a clan of the Rabha Tribe) there are the introduction of different songs such as song of boat game, song of spinning wheel, song of plough, song sung while cutting down a tree, song of bear dance, song of Kati worshipping etc. A Na Bekai song which is prevalent among Rongdani and Maitori society is cited below—

Riba, riba o' na bona riba
 Na bona jupung jupung
 Na bijan jupung tupung
 Mandai nemen cithoa
 Na chungkai rume rango
 Ornganse sana nemo
 Na sabra tarumre
 Orngare sa thosare
 Khukdur funge na bano riba riba.

(Come out for fishing

The fishes are making noise in the water.

Let us catch some fishes by using our Jakoi (a kind of triangular bamboo scoop for fishing)

Take only the big fishes and not the small fishes.

Big fishes are very tasty.

Come out for fishing and

Let us fill up our creels.

(Before mentioned, p. 27)

2.0 With different characteristic ancient material of different Rabha class, the Rabha folk culture is rich and developed. In this discussion, the materials which have been written in Rabhamese are also taken into the count of Rabha folk literature which may convince the Rabha society and culture. Moreover, most of the materials used in this discussion is not only the materials of the

Rabha society but similar to the common literature of the entire North Eastern region. In the combination of different races-tribes thoughts-languages and experiences give birth to a thoughtful form in the charms.

2.1 Reason of Changes

The greater Assamese society is formed through the harmonious combination of various races and tribes. Among them an inseparable part is undoubtedly the Rabha tribe. So, a similarity is seen between the Rabha folk culture and other non-tribal or non-Rabha people in Assam. Though the Rabha people are look like conservative but in the gradation of time they managed to give up those rigidities of prior ideology and they are now seen to believe in co-existence. Modern education, impact of globalization, western civilization etc. are making the young generation doubtful to its own tradition because of which the appreciation of the folk literature to some extent is decreasing.

Many materials of Rabha culture are related to the agricultural festivals and programmes. At the present time due to the increasing population, people are obliged to build their houses on the fields which were previously used for cultivation only. As a result land for cultivation is decreasing. On the other hand; their agriculture based festivals by name Baiyokhu or other festivals or programmes as well as marriage ceremony, funeral ceremony etc. are very expensive. In such a case, those who are not so economically sound are now restraining themselves from organizing these sorts of festivals or some of them are though organizes these festivals or programmes but not very elaborately organizes them. Because of which the prior tradition and custom cannot be preserved and the heritage is going to be endangered in this way. It can be felt that economically suffered Rabha tribe has lost their enthusiasm to use proverbs, telling stories, singing folk songs while they work. Now the grasslands are used for constructing houses or transformed the grasslands into agricultural lands for which the place for and people for fostering of cattle are decreasing which demolishes the permanent cowboys. As a result the songs which were once sung by the cowboys are now gradually dying.

Some of the modern educated Rabha people are seen to restrain themselves from their traditional folklore exercises. Initially Rabha people used to sacrifice animals for gods and goddess to get rid of some fatal diseases. But now most of them are interested to the modern medical science instead of sacrificing animals. Most of the Rabha women feel shame to used their traditional proverbs, to obey rituals, to sing their traditional folk songs because of which the materials which had been passing from mouth to mouth are now about to lose its existence.

Besides, the young generation is seen to be interested in organizing competitions of Bohurongi or Bogejori Songs and dance, Sathar songs and dance etc. because of which although they are getting expansion but not in the prior traditional style but they are now made to take the second existence. It is seen that the Rabha culture is affected by various sides of non-Rabha Assamese people such as dress, ornaments, festivals, instruments building style of houses, marriage etc. Rabha women are seen to use both their tradition attire such as Patani, Kambung, Pajar and non Rabha Assamese people's attire made of Muga and Pat thread. In case of ornaments besides their traditional Bri, Bola, Nambri, Nakarputi and Nakbali on nose, Hanchahor around the neck, Shikihar, theng chela on legs etc. they are seen to use some of the ornaments of non-Rabha Assamese people such as Junbiri, Golpata, Chain etc. Apart from the traditional festivals of Rabha tribe, the three Bihu festivals of non-Rabha Assamese people are also popular among the Rabha tribe. Again in case various traditional instruments of Rabha such as Karha-Nol, Badung Dunga, Kham, Dhak, they use Dhol (drum), Pepa (a wind instrument), Tal (a cymbol), Khool (a kind of musical instrument) etc. Initially the Rabha people used to reside in nearby areas of hills where they made their house. And these were built on a raised bamboo platform. But these people after becoming educated and also coming to the contact of non-Rabha Assamese people are now seen to live in pucca structured houses which are made of brick, sand, cement etc. Initially, matriarchal family system was there in Rabha society. But, at the present time, this system is transformed into patriarchal family system. For which the prior Ghor Junwai (The man who lives in the house of his father-in-law) tradition has now decreased to a greater extent (*Malina Rabha p.342*). These all facts prove the natural love of Rabha tribe for non Rabha Assamese culture. To some extent, religion also affects the Rabha folklife. Many Rabha people are accepting Christianity, Vaishnava, and Krishnaguru religion. For which an effect is seen on their society, culture and religious faith. Because of this reason their tradition of sacrificing animal is given up and instead of that worshipping to gods is done only with flowers and other offerings. It is quite natural that with the changing time, some tradition may change or there may be a pressure on its transition of age old traditions. But it is important to note that the existence of the very own traditions never get harm by change or transition of it. The Rabha tribe should aware of it.

3.0 Means for Preservation of Folk Culture: The folk society is the ground of the creation, growth and development of Folk culture. The folk culture is developed by some rustic talented persons. It is propagated and expanded by way of Sruti (What is heard) and Smriti (What is remembered). Because culture is an identity of a nation. The heritage of a nation is reflected through its culture. But due to the change of time, the valuable materials of folk culture is about to disappear. So, it is needed that these should be preserved. An effort is tried below as to how these materials can be preserved.

3.1 Awareness: Unawareness may lead the culture of a nation to an endangered phase. Because of unawareness many clans of Rabha Tribe are giving up their own culture, folk literature. But the Patirabhas are trying to aware of it. Rongdani and Maitori are rich in respect to this because of their conservative nature. Some illiterate Rabha people are abandoning their very own culture. Many educated Rabha youth suffers from inferiority complex with their culture. They should be made to understand that their culture is the best and they should be made interested towards their traditional culture. Moreover, Rabha people should be encouraged to exercise their own culture in their own language of every clan. They will be more interested if they can exercise these all in their own dialect instead of any other standard language.

3.2 Propagation: Most of the materials of Rabha Folk literature are related to their various festivals or programmes. Unsound pecuniary condition of some Rabha people made them to celebrate some festivals not in an elaborate way instead of a grand celebration. Caution should be taken on this regard. Some festivals or programmes should be organized and the Rabha culture, songs, dance, drama etc. should be performed therein so that these will get propagated or published. If this kind of programme can be organized then they will be aware of their own heritage and by this the various materials of their folk culture will be preserved.

3.3 Research: Though many researches on Rabha folk culture are done yet there is a lack of systematic or scientific study on it. There is an effort to write their materials on demand of need and advancement of civilization but still most of them are remaining unwritten and unpreserved. So there should be research on them and as well they should be collected and make them written.

3.4 Use of modern written language: An another way to preserve the materials of a folk culture is to express them through various branches of modern literature such as Drama, poetry, story, novel etc. Already some efforts are made in drama and poetry by named Prasanna kumar Pam, Ganpati Pam, Forsing Banthu, Hareshwar Rabha, Upen Rabha, hakacham etc. have created some dramas based some folk stories and folk songs of Rabha tribe. In this way the use and expression of materials of folk literature in literature should be made perfectly.

3.5 The use of Modern Technology: The Rabha tribe is very rich with their folk literature. But due to the lack of research or some other reasons, the existence of them are about to disappear. At the present time, by using modern technology, the various materials of Rabha Folk Culture can be preserved. These can be publishes and preserved by making proper documentary, recording audio and video but should be easily accessible for everyone through internet or publishing through other print and electronic media as well. You tube is another way to preserve and publish them as it is a widely popular way to do so among various groups of people.

3.6 Organising Discussion Centre and Workshop: Various discussions, workshops and speech programmes can be organized. To such programmes, knowledgeable and experienced people in Rabha folk art should be invited as resource person. So that everyone can learn from them and thus, an exercise to know about the valuable Rabha materials can be made. This will be successful if exhibition after the end of such programmes can be organized.

3.7 Role of National Institutions and National Organizations and Parties: National institutions such as Asom Sahitya Sabha, Sahitya Academy, Rabha Sahitya Sabha etc. can take important roles for preserving the materials of Folk Art. Through these institutions, arrangements for research on those materials can be made as well as by publishing them in their own journals can draw the attention of the public. There is a scope for national institution and organization to take necessary measures for the protection of respective culture.

3.8 Governments Support: It is very important to preserve the folk culture of every race and tribe. Government's initiative is very important in this respect. If the folk culture and its materials can be propagated and extended through various governmental schemes then these can be successfully preserved. If the endangered culture of the Rabha tribe can be displayed in the national or international programmes then the tribe and its culture will be introduced to the whole world.

3.9 Museum System: The tribal attire, instruments, day to day used things can be preserved in museum. This will be beneficial for new generations.

3.10 Role of Universities: The Universities can take important role for making study or the materials of Rabha Folk Cultural and can take important role for preserving them. The universities can open a separate department for the Rabha Language and can include this subject in their syllabus. Through there is no separate department of Rabha language in Assam University but it is seen that some efforts have been made by MIL and Cultural Study department. Now, the cultural study centre of Gauhati University has introduced a curriculum on Rabha language. This Kind of initiative may bring positive results.

4.0 Conclusion: Happiness- sadness, hope- despair, sighing, scarcity-complaints, love-separation, socio-economic, cultural and religious image of a nation is reflected through its national literature or folk literature. The Rabha tribe is very rich with their rich folk culture. All assets of the Rabha folk culture are not yet disclosed to the limelight and those which are brought to the limelight need more and proper analysis. For the advancement of the modern education some conscious people have been trying to preserve them but only these efforts are not sufficient. The prior picturesque environment of rustic village life is not to be found at the present scenario. So, no youth of this generation sings amidst the Kanhua-Birina (a kind of white soft and tender flower bearing plant, Scientific name- saccharum spontaneuss and Birina is a kind of long grass) on the bank of a river, under a Peep tree or a Silk Cotton tree(Bombax ceiba) or in an open field. Now the lyricist and music composer composes an artificial Bihu song sitting in a room and records in a luxurious studio in a city. And thus, they artificially create the environment of a village and visualises accordingly. So, in such a situation there is a lack of the real season to sing- "we keep singing the seasonal song".

Society is bound to change. The Rabha tribe is not an exception to it. It is quite natural that, with the passage of time there may be a change in the tradition and a pressure may be there in its transmission. But everyone should be cautious so that no changes or transmission of it can harm its main foundation of the tradition. Everyone can understand that only their own tradition can preserve the ancient cultural identity of the Rabha tribe. Still the effect on them is seen. Effect of globalization, modern education, western civilisation etc. are making the young generation doubtful immensely.

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