



'Bhawaiya' the Folk Culture of the Rajbanshis Society: The Affluence of North Bengal (West Bengal)

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Abstract:

Rajbanshi is the most influential caste among the Hindu ethnic groups of Eastern India. They live mainly in the northern parts of West Bengal, Rangpur in Bangladesh, East Dinajpur, North-East of Mymensingh in Rajshahi District and parts of Bogura District, Lower Bhutan, Assam, Meghalaya, Bhadrapur, Jhapa of Nepal and More Districts and East Purnia, Katihar and Kishanganj Districts of Bihar. The Bhawaiya is the folk songs of Rajbanshis. In Bhawaiya, the main inhabitants of North Bengal have mixed their own language. Thus Bhawaiya, the mother tongue of Hindu-Muslim, Rajbanshis, is a necessary reform. The eminent bhawaiya artists were - Surendranath Roy Basuniya, Abbasuddin Ahmed, Shailen Roy, Jeeten Maitra, Shivendra Narayan Mandal, Shasadhar Bhattacharya, Harishchandra Pal, Nayeb Ali Tepu, Pyarimohan Das, Tulsi Lahiri and others. But today Bhawaiya is no longer limited to regional areas but accepted in the international arena. Partition of India (1947) introduced this Bhawaiya to the international arena. This Bhawaiya song is also getting priority in various government functions. The Bhawaiya is associated with Rajbanshis in every step of life of the society. Hence Bhawaiya songs are also sung in various puja parbans, deities, marriage ceremonies and various cultural and family rituals.

Key Words: *Rajbanshi, Hindu-Muslims, Bhawaiya, puja parbans, regional, cultural family rituals*

Rajbanshi is the most influential caste among the Hindu ethnic groups of Eastern India. They live mainly in the northern parts of West Bengal, Rangpur in Bangladesh, East Dinajpur, North-East of Mymensingh in Rajshahi District and parts of Bogura District, Lower Bhutan, Assam, Meghalaya, Bhadrapur, Jhapa of Nepal and More Districts and East Purnia, Katihar and Kishanganj Districts of Bihar.¹ There is evidence of their living in Tripura. Judging from the numerical point of view, the Rajbanshis occupy the third largest section of the Hindu society. According to the 1961 census statistics, Rajbanshi people lived in all the districts of West Bengal except Purulia district. The identity of the Rajbanshis is known from the writings of over a dozen different national and foreign (colonial) researchers. According to many indigenous experts, the Rajbanshis are the descendants of the

Kshatriya caste, who for some time abandoned their Kshatriyas and felt comfortable calling themselves Rajbanshis. Colonial sociologists, anthropologists, publishers like Hodgson, Buchanan Hamilton, Herbert Rizley, Edward Dalton, etc. called the royals descendants of the Bodo-Koch caste. Even in Suniti Kumar Chatterjee's work, the identity of the Rajbanshis is said to be that they are mostly of Bodo origin or a mixture of Austric, Dravidian, Mongolian and feel comfortable calling themselves Koches.²

But the Rajbanshi writers, intellectuals have claimed that they belong to the Aryan race and the language belongs to the Indo-Aryan group. From this ethnographic dispute, the claim as Kamtapuri identity from the Rajbanshi Kshatriya caste is rising from time to time. Regardless of the dispute over the identity of the Rajbanshi nation, political ups and downs took place in this region of North-East India and its impact was also observed in the public mind. Eventually, the Kamarupa Koch dynasty was established under the leadership of Vishwa Singha and paved the way for a political and cultural renaissance among the Cloches. Vishwasingha was the first to abandon the Koch identity, embrace Hinduism and identify as a Rajbanshi, and Cloches came to be known as Rajbanshis.³

From ancient times, the north-eastern part of India was known as Pragjyotishpur, Kamrup, Kamta-Koch Kingdom, Kamtapur, Paundravardhan etc. Sukumar Das in his book 'History of Northern Bengal' states that the region was ruled by various races of Negroes, Austrics, Mongols, Alpines and Dravidians.⁴ The most important and largest group among them is the *Pundrakshatriyas*. Concept of modern scholars is that this *Pundrakshatriyas* are known as today's Rajbangsi's where are people with Austric, Dravidian and Mongolian traits. But above the debate about their true identity, it can be said that the Rajbanshis are the original inhabitants of the region and are flexible and can easily adapt to anything. For this they were able to easily accept Aryan language, religion and culture. And later became able to identify as a developed nation.⁵ According to the *Puranas* and *Tantras*, the Dravidian race originated from the ancient *Pudrakshatriya* Aryans. In this context, Acharya Suniti Kumar said - The Aryan culture of Bengal started in the 4th century BC during the Maurya period and culminated in the Gupta period in the 7th century AD. According to him, Aryan language, religion and culture developed in the northern part of Bangladesh during this period.⁶ Despite the spread of Arya culture among the Rajbanshi people, their own culture, customs, clothing, food habits, and entertainment were somewhat different from other ethnic groups. And from this sense of individuality, the fundamental qualities of Rajbanshi are known, which are helpful as one of the elements of national history formation. An attempt has been done to establish this issue in this article.

II

'The history of a nation is present in literature and culture' can be found when the tradition, history of a nation is revealed through a folk culture. According to Ashutosh Bhattacharya, the essence of the culture of the Bengali nation can be found in the folk culture of Bengal.⁷ Folk culture hides the deep identity of a people or the unquenchable desire to express the longing of its soul and the unfulfilled effort to expand self in the country - Richard M. Dorson said in his book *A Foreward on Folklore American Lore (1959)* "Folklore is a word with short but turbulent history".⁸ According to famous sociologist H. W. Odam "Folk is the basis to all cultures".

Yajneshwar Barua in his book "Folk Element in Ramasarasvati- A Major Neo-Vaisnavite Poet of North East India" rightly said "The Study of a culture cannot be fruitful and perfect without the study of its folklore, because folklore is intertwined to culture." From this culture all other cultures are derived. Folk literature contains touching pictures of people's daily life, social, economic, religion, human-to-human relationship, love, sympathy, so it can be said that if literature is the mirror of a nation, if folk culture is the backbone, then the folk culture of Cooch Behar i.e. the Rajbanshi people of North-East India - the importance of *Bhawaiya* is immense.⁹

In the words of Professor Maxmuller, the people of the country who do not take pride in remembering their ancient history and ancient literature must admit that they have lost the main source of national character. In this context, he gave the example of the German nation. When the Germans fell to the lowest level of degradation, they were inspired by the ancient literature of their homeland. The ancient culture or literature of North Bengal barely covers a large part of it.

“Bhawaiya in the North,¹⁰

Bhatiali in the East,

Jhumur is in the West

Baulalli in the South.”

Among all of them, *Bhawaiya* is the king of folk songs. Because, what is not in Bhatiali-Jhumur Baul is only in *Bhawaiya*, the main inhabitants of North Bengal have mixed their own language. *Bhawaiya*, the mother tongue of Hindu-Muslim, Rajbanshis, is a necessary reform. And now that has become a dangerous property as its tune, melody, is being altered day by day. Therefore, this cultural heritage is in dire need of exploration, preservation and appreciation.

Due to the lack of written literature or printed books in the Rajbanshi nation, the researchers in most cases rely on Oral traditions, mythological stories, songs etc. to uncover the history and culture of the Rajbanshi nation. The social, economic condition, kin-relative relationship, hero-heroine's romance, trickery, activities of political leaders, the natural environment, houses, fields, rivers, mountains serve as a basic element of Rajbanshi nation in *Bhawaiya* song. In short, *Bhawaiya* songs are involved in all aspects of life in Rajbanshi society. This song was sung from village to village, from house to house, which spontaneously evoked the emotions of the soul. There is life's hope, aspiration, pain, self-sacrifice to nature in soulful tunes - this is *Palligeeti*, this is *Bhawaiya* song.¹¹

III

There are different opinions about the exact meaning of the word *Bhawaiya* and the classification of the song about the true origin of this *Bhawaiya* song. Harish Chandra Paul, the famous musician and preserver of *Bhawaiya* however, says *Bhava* → *Bhawa* or *Bhava* → from Bhao to Bhawa (Bhao < Bhawa), from Bhawa to Bhawaiya (Bhawa < Bhawaiya) can be originated in this way.¹² However, there is doubt in this regard because the reasonableness of the origin of 'Bhava' from 'Bhawa' is a matter of thought, although 'Bhawa' is the value of this song. But a review reveals that it is not possible or realistic to make a song without feeling. Because no song is possible without emotion. And in some regions this song is called "Patharia" song. The harmony of the words 'Bhawa' can be found with this "patharia" i.e. *Dhudhu* wilderness song. The *Kash*, the swamps of reeds or vast

chars are called 'bhawa' in the village area. Hence the songs sung in the deserted fields may have been termed as *bhawaiya* at that time.¹³

It can be said that the origin of *Bhawaiya* song is from 'Bhava', the theme and melody of this song is deeply expressive, all these songs leave the listener's mind in awe. Again the word 'bhava' means affection or love. This *Bhawaiya* song is about affection or love – “ O Mor Bhabher Deora ” – which means “ Oh my beloved brother in law (*Deor*) ”. So *this* songs can be called *Bhawaiya* because they are related to womens' love and the common meaning of the word *Bhawaiya* is 'forgetfulness' i.e. the song which makes people 'forgetful ' and makes the mind leave the house can be called *Bhawaiya*. So the meaning of *Bhawaiya* song is exciting i.e. the song which makes people forgetfulness and exciting and leaves the mind from home can be called *Bhawaiya*. So it seems more reasonable that the meaning of *Bhawaiya* song is 'song of forgetfulness and exciting'.¹⁴

Others think that this region was full of numerous rivers and streams. "The rivers originating from the Himalayas used to create erosion in the region. People living on the banks of these erosions were very painful. Hence, the word 'Bhangniya' or 'Bhawiya' is derived from the word 'Bhangniya' or erosion'.¹⁵

It is not possible to determine the exact time from the beginning of this music. The 'Dotora' made of jackfruit wood is the only vehicle of the *Bhawaiya* song. It is in the kali of this song that one hears - 'Mok Karlu Jarmer (Janmer) Baudiya.' *Bhawaiya* songs are related to 'Dotora' as fish are to water and fragrance are to flowers.

On the other hand Dwigbijay De Sarkar says, "Before the Turkish invasion in the 13th century, no one spoke of the 'Dotora' instrument. 'Sani' came to this country with the Muslim invasion. This time the 'Dotora' instrument came under the name 'Dotra'. The common proverb is also a testimony to this 'Dotra Haram Khor'. This history of 'Dotora' is related to the birth of *Bhawiya*. There are many conjectures about the naming of 'Dotora'." ¹⁶However, Muslim association is a big fact in this *Bhawaiya* song of sailors. "From the late nineteenth century till the time of research by English scholars, the folk songs here are called *Bhawaiya*. According to Mr. Grierson, the most popular folk songs of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri district are Rajbanshi language songs.¹⁷

IV

This folk song of North Bengal is in Goalpara district of Assam adjacent to Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Bihar, West Dinajpur (North and South Dinajpur), Alipurduar, Darjeeling plains of West Bengal and Rangpur, Dinajpur, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Bogra, etc. districts of Bangladesh. The *Bhawaiya* is called the song of Cooch Behar. The reason for saying this is that this song was first played by some prominent artists of Cooch Behar who played a prominent role, they are - Surendranath Roy Basuniya, Abbasuddin Ahmed, Shailen Roy, Jeeten Maitra, Shivendra Narayan Mandal, Shasadhar Bhattacharya, Harishchandra Pal, Nayeb Ali Tepu, Pyarimohan Das , Tulsi Lahiri and others.¹⁸ But today *Bhawaiya* is no longer limited to regional areas but accepted in the international arena. Partition of India (1947) introduced this *Bhawaiya* to the international arena. The late Abbasuddin Ahmed came from Balrampur village to Berlin, the capital of Germany and was able to collect certificates from music lovers of western countries. Late Harishchandra Paul came and settled in Dinhat before partition. He traveled around the village of Bengal and collected songs and compiled them. Before him, no

one thought that *Bhawaiya* song could be collection of songs and be published in printed form.¹⁹ Once upon a time, North Bengal's home-to-home song has moved from country to country. This *Bhawaiya* song is also getting priority in various government functions. *Bhaway* Academy has been established under the patronage of the government of neighboring Bangladesh. Subsequently, the then high-ranking government official of the West Bengal government, Dr. Sukhabilas Barma's hand in *Bhawaiya* song gets a new dimension. Presently in North Bengal every year State *Bhawaiya* Sangeet Competition is organized by the State Government which was started 1989 in Block Level.²⁰ In addition to this every year Naib Ali Tepu, Parimohan Das commemoration, cultural programs are being celebrated for two or three days. As I mentioned earlier, the *Bhawaiya* is associated with Rajbanshis in every step of life of the society. Hence *Bhawaiya* songs are also sung in various *puja parbans*, deities, marriage ceremonies and various cultural and family rituals. Here some of the different forms of *Bhawaiya* are mentioned.²¹

1. *Bhawaiya* songs of *Puja parban*:

In this case, singing *Bhawaiya* songs is to meet the daily needs of social life; *Bhawaiya* songs are sung to various deities to appease the gods and goddesses associated with the forces of nature or to protect them from various natural calamities. Such as *Katipuja* song, *Sitol Puja* song, *Sonaraya* song, *Gorakhnath* song and *Madankam* song, *Subachani* song, *Tistaburi* song or *Mecheni* or *Jag* song, *Satyapir* song, *Huduma* song also wedding songs.

2. Devotional Songs:

Devotional songs are composed based on general Sufism and Neo-Vaishnavism. Sankaradeva's influence on the neo-Vaishnava movement can be seen more than that of Sree Chainyadeva. Besides, *YogaDharma*, *NathDharma* which are examples in *Mainamati* song, *Nayansari* song, *Manai Yatra* etc. They are staged in the form of plays which is better known as *Palagan* of North Bengal. In this category of *Bhawaiya* songs, the influence of *TantraDharma* is also found in *Mainamati* songs and *Nayansari* songs. Apart from this, influence of *Mangaldharma* reflects in *Manasamangal*. The most popular folk drama in *Mansamangal* is the Song of *Vishara* or *Padma Purana* which is based on the story of Chand Saudagar's son Laxminder and Behula.

3. Folk –Drama based Songs:

Folk dramas or *Palagans* of this stage are: *Dotora Palagan*, *Kushangan*, *Kangpanchali*, *Khaspanchali*, *Khanghan*, *Dhua* and *Payar gan* etc. In this song, the *chatka* melody of *Bhawaiya* song is reflected.

4. *Bhawaiya* means love, *Bhawaiya* means pain, parting and separation.

The central theme of *Bhawaiya* is union and separation. In this song can be found the emotional tone of the *mahut* and *maishal* (one who oversees the elephant and buffalo respectively) and the carter (cow cart driver) for their lover. In this song it comes the sorrow and separation of a *Sangani* (married woman without a husband).

Again sometimes the love of a woman who is attracted by the *dotora* of *Gariyal*, *Mahishal* and *Mahut*. Such kind of song is-²²

“O ki Garial bhai

Kata rabo aar panther dike chayare//

Je din gariyal Ujan jay

Narir nana more jhuriya raya re//

O Ki Grial bhai

Hakao gari tui Chilmarir bandare

Aar ki kabo dusker jwala

Garial Bhai, gathiya chikan mala re//

O ki Garial bhai

Kato kadim mui nidhua pathare //

.”

[Free Translation: Oh Gariyal Bhai, how many days can I looking for you . On the day when the carriages go up, the woman's mind remains in her heart as you are at the port of Chilmari. What will I talk about the pain of mind by garlanding of flower. O Garial bhai how long shall I cry at lonely place!]

The troubled youth in the heart of a woman is as turbulent as the Torsa river, so the youth-thirsty woman sings – ²³

“ Torsa Nadir Utal Patal kayba chale nao-

Narir man more Utal Patal karba chale chao.

Sona bandhur bade re more keman kare gao re.

Torsa nadir Utal patal re.

Bandhua more banij gaiche Ujaniyar dyashe

Jeina dyashe purus bandha pare narir kyash re

Nanan janer nanan katha shonong na karong rao.

Torsa nadir Tutal patal re.

Ekana Tara Dukna Tara Tara Jhilmil kare

Eman majar rati jayre man na ray ghare re

Manote more laskha re katha kar baa age kno

Torsa nadir Tutal patal re”

[Free Translation: "Torsha River's turbulent bottom is gone, the mind of a lover is also like turbulent of Torsa river and become very exciting. Her mind is very exhilarating friend like turbulent of Torsa River without her dearest. Her friend has gone for business to Upward country, where men used to fell love with women. So she is hearing different news from different persons but does not talk at all. However, her mind is like turbulent of Torsa River.]

A woman's love for the *mahishal* and her worries are revealed when the *mahishal*(buffalo grazes) does not return at home for months after months-²⁴

“Mahis charan more mahishal bandhu re

Bandhu kon ba charer majhe

Ela kene Ghantir bajan

Na shong mui kane maishal re//

Adiya adiya jan more maishal re

Maishal dotora bajeya

Kon ba kathay hichen gosa

Na dyekhen firiya re//

Takhane na kaichong maishal re

Maishal na jan goyal para

Goyal parar chengrigula

Jane dhula para maishal re//

Takhane na kaichong maishal re

Maishal na jan maisher dhura

Chhal kariya karia nibe

Hater dotora maishal re//

[Free Translation: A woman addresses the Mahisha, her lover, where is he grazing the buffalo as she does not hear the sound of the bell. Playing dotora you are going another path. I don't envisage by which word you have felt anger and don't look back to this way. Then I had told that you don't Goyalpara as the women of Goalpara know the knowledge of misleading and she also forbade the Maishal not to go to buffalo field as they shall take dotora from your hand by streaking you.]

And when a woman falls in love with a man, she asks where his house is and who is there. The lover then sings to the *mahout* friend –²⁵

“Aare gaile ki asiben

More Mahut bandhu re/

Tomra Gaile Ki asiben

More Mahut Bandhu re//

Hastire naran Hastire Charan

Hastir glay dari

Ore satyi kariya kanre Mahut

kon ba dyashe bari re//

Hastire narao Hastire charao

Hastir Paya beri

Ore Satya kariya kailam katha

Kuchbihare bari re//

Hastire naran Hastire Charan

Hastir glay dari

Ore satya kariya kanre Mahut

Ghare kayjan nari re//

Hastire narao Hastire charao

Champa nadir pare

Satya karia kailam kanya

Biyao nai kari re//

Tomra gaile ki aasiben

More mahut Bandhu re”

[**Free Translation:** If you have gone will you come again, my mahout friend? You graze Elephant, moves Elephant and fence the elephant's legs. Please tell the truth where is your home? If you have gone will you come again, my mahout friend? You graze Elephant, moves Elephant on the bank of Champa river. Please tell the truth how many women are there in the house? If you have gone will you come again, my beloved friend? I graze Elephant,move Elephant on the bank of Champa River, I truly speaking that I had not married yet. If you have gone will you come again, my beloved friend?]

]

Women's love has a special place in Bhawaiya songs. The lover does not understand situation. What else can she do for his vision? There will be water on the way. As soon as you step into the water, the sound of; Getting off the couch and turning to the side there is also sound. There is no way to meet with the lover. The mind is only at home and outside—in this heavy rain where is he?²⁶

“Prem Jane na rasik kalachan O more jhuria thake mano²²

Katadine bandhur sane habe darashan bhandu he---

O bandhure nadir opare tomar bari Jaoya aisar anek deri

Jabo ki rabo ki saday kari mana

Hatiya jeite nadir jal

Khaklau ki khuklong ki khalaou khalaou kare re

Hay hay praner bandhu re//

O bandhure ekala ghare shuiya thakong, palang upare

Mano more abil bil bil kare

Gorot firite marar palong

Kyarot ki korryot ki karau karau kare

Hay hay praner bandhu re//

O bnadhure tomar ashay basiya thakong Batabriksher tale

Man more Urang Parang kare

Bhador masiya deoyar jhari

Tappas ki tuppus ki jhamjhameya pare re

Hay hay praner Bandhure.//”

[Free translation: Lover doesn't know how long my heart will be with you. How many times after I shall meet with my friend. Oh dear life friend there would long time to go and come as your house is on other side of the river. So, there is a confusion whether I shall go or halt. Walking in water there is a sound of 'Khaklau ki khuklong ki khalaou khalaou' oh my life friend. Oh my friend, sleep alone in the house, my mind is on the couch, and I am dying. Getting off the couch and turning to the side there is also sound, 'Kyarot ki korryot ki karau karau' oh my life friend. Oh my friend, sit in your hope under the banyan tree, my mind is electrifying by the storm of Vadar Masi(month of August –September) falls as drizzling and extremely (Tappas or tuppus or jhamjhameya) on my life friend.]

Not only the love of women is in love, but also the sadness and sorrow of women are known in *Bhawaiya* songs. When a woman's husband falls in love with another woman; His negligence fueled the heroine's suicide –²⁷

“Kiser more randhan kiser more baran

Kiser more haludi bata

More pranath anyer bari jaya

More angina diya ghata

O pran sajani , kar sange kabo dusker katha?

Aro jadi dyakhong aro jadi shonong

Anyajner sange katha

Ei heno joubana sagare bhasabo

Pasane bhangibo matha

O pran sajani kar aage kabo dusker katha//

Nider alise hat pare balishe

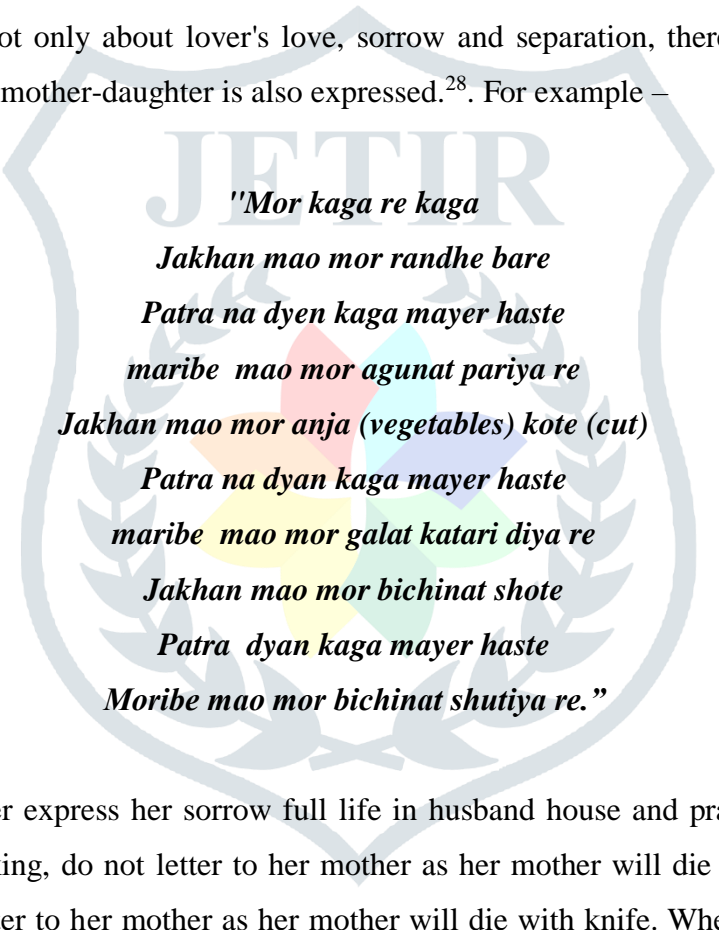
Mane karang bandhu bujhi aachhe

Chyatan haya dekhong bandhu nai bagale

Buk khan more chhhangchhanga haiche//”

[**Free Translation:** What is my cooking, what is my growing, what is my turmeric crashing, my life partner (pranath) goes to another's house, my courtyard is the way(ghata). Oh my friend, with whom do I talk about my sorrow? And if you see and if you listen to someone else's talk, I will float my life in the ocean, I will break my head on a rock. O my friend, before whom will I talk my sorrowful life? When I sleeps my hand goes to the pillow assuming my friend is there, but when I felt my friend is not with me, my heart becomes very cold(*chhhangchhanga*)]

Bhavaiya songs are not only about lover's love, sorrow and separation, there are many songs where the eternal love of father-son and mother-daughter is also expressed.²⁸. For example –



"Mor kaga re kaga
Jakhan mao mor randhe bare
Patra na dyen kaga mayer haste
maribe mao mor agunat pariya re
Jakhan mao mor anja (vegetables) kote (cut)
Patra na dyan kaga mayer haste
maribe mao mor galat katari diya re
Jakhan mao mor bichinat shote
Patra dyan kaga mayer haste
Moribe mao mor bichinat shutiya re."

[**Free Translation:** Daughter express her sorrow full life in husband house and prayed to her relative as kaga- When her mother doing cooking, do not letter to her mother as her mother will die on fire. When her mother is cutting vegetables, do not letter to her mother as her mother will die with knife. When her mother laying on bed, letter give her as she will die on laying bed.]

Bhawaiya song not only conveys the relationship between men and women, but also conveys social ethics through in it.²⁹

Pran sadhure

Jadi jan Sadhu Parabas na Karen sadhu parar aash

Apan hate sadhu randhiya khan bhata re

Pran sadhure

Kocher kari sadhu na Karen byay

Parer nari aapan naya
Paranari badhite pare paran re
Pran sadhure
Pube na Paschime Bao
Ghopa Chaya sadhu nagan nao
Dari majhi sadhu aaken sabdhane re.

[Free translation: Oh dearness, if you want to travel to another country, do not expect other help. Kook yourself and eat with his own hand. Oh dearness doesn't expense your money and don't belief other man's wife as they are not your kin. Other man's wife can be caused danger to your life. Oh dearness, either East or west you have to choice a right place to land and be cautious regarding your belongings.]

Bhawaiya music reflects the love of nature and man, the picture of eternal love emerges. Some songs give detailed descriptions of nature. Through this song, a complete picture forest, mountains, tea gardens, rivers, canals, fruits, fairs, foods (chira-muri), curd etc. of North Bengal. *Zamindars, Jotedars, Chukanidars* and other land owners of North Bengal are known, while a man from the *Garial, Mahishal, Mahut* etc. class comes up. In addition, North Bengal namely the river of Kamrup originated from mountainous areas, they are not very wide, but due to severe speedy stream, the rivers of North Bengal are flooded every year during the monsoons and cause a lot of damage. Some of the names of such rivers are – Teesta, Torsa, Gadadhar, Kaljani, Dharla etc. These rivers have destructive forms as well as calm forms. Rivers dry up a lot in summer and winter. Village - People of Bengal catch fish in dried up rivers. The terrible form of river erosion seen in North Bengal is captured in the song

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“Man mor kandere Gadadharer Bhanginere Dakhiya
Bari Ghar Mor Bhangiya Re Nilu Dakhiya Dakhiya
Man Mor Kande Re
Aji Ghargirsthi Mor Bhangiya Nilu re
O Nadi Tui Bhangiya Nilu Par
Vaat Nai kapar Nai Mor Thakang Parar Ghar
Mor Man Mor Kande Re – ”

[**Free Translation** :My mind is crying to see the devastating erosion of Gadadhar river. Houses and rooms are enrooted gradually by seeing and seeing. My mind is crying. Today my household are enrooted. O river your erosion broken both the banks. There is no rice, no cloth and living other's room. On my mind is crying]

The song of undivided Goalpara district was called Goalpariya folk music. *Bhawaiya* of North Bengal and Goalpariya of lower Assam speak to the heart of the people, speak to the soul and take away the mind and soul. Thus *Bhawaiya* Sangeet has been increasing in popularity from the seventies to the present day. But once this

song was the home song of 'Bratya Baira'. There was a time when the *Baudia* – song is now especially popular in the learned society. But once upon a time it was saying-³¹

*“Sarinda bajay saud sodagar
Bashi bajay chor
Byana bajay tyana pinda
Dotorā haramkhor”*

[Free Translation: Saud Saudagar plays *Sarinda*, Flute is played by thief, *Byana* is played by tore wearing cloths and *dotorā* is played by mistrust person(*haramkhor*).]

Bhawiaya is currently competing at the international level in the world court. *Bhawiaya* music has a special place in any official function of West Bengal. It is being spread in folk society through electronic instruments. State *Bhawiaya* festival, *Tistaganga* festival is being celebrated every year from the nineties till today with government funding. Artists are being selected through competition, the new talent that is emerging may be held by their hands and the music will be more appreciated. In some places may be private initiative and in some places government initiative *Bhawiaya* training center have been established in different parts of North Bengal.³² Apart from academy or Parishad, many *Bhawiaya* School have been established in North Bengal. From there, efforts are being made to teach and practice the original tunes of *Bhawiaya* to *Bhawiaya* artists. But *Bhawiaya* Sangeet lacks a center for perfect reading and grammatical practice. That is why inconsistency is being noticed in the melody, rhythm, choice of words etc. in *Bhawiaya* songs. And on this occasion, efforts are being made to commercialize *Bhawiaya* music. Many music brands continue to distort *Bhawiaya* tunes and call them modern music. It is normal. In this context, Dr. Ashutosh Bhattacharya has written in the preface to Uttar Bengalar Palligiti (*Bhawiaya* Khanda) (ed) Late Harish Chandra Paul - "But one of the main features of regional folk music is that, apart from the singers of its particular region it cannot be performed properly in the voice of a singer from another region."³³

Therefore, caution is essential in the propagation and preservation of *Bhawiaya* music. The most important thing is the correct practice of musical tone, diction, rhythm, grammar rules. Experienced artists, *gidals*, play writers, song writers should come forward together. Government and private initiatives are particularly needed.

The good news is that the present West Bengal Government is providing musical instruments to encourage folk music artists by forming various national development councils/boards. The government has also introduced monthly allowance for folk artists. (Rs.1000/- per month). In Cooch Behar district total 9093 number of *Bhawiaya* artists were enlisted and 8630 *Bhawiaya* artists out of 9093 are getting monthly allowance.³⁴ Apart from this, the **West Bengal Rajbanshi Development and Cultural Board**, Government of West Bengal enlisted 700 *Bhawiaya* Artists for providing musical instruments without any cost. The board has already distributed 120 Dhol Ps, 100 Ps

Harmonium, 80 Ps dotora, 10 sets(1 set contains 10 Ps of flute) flute, Juri 10 pairs and Khol 50 Ps to Artists in North Bengal.³⁵ Many artists of the state have been enrolled under this scheme. The Government has established Rajbanshi Bhasha Academy for development of the Rajbanshi Language. Every year, the Rajbanshi Bhasha Academy felicitates “Rajbanshi Bhasha Samman Award” on 28th October for special contribution to Rajbanshi language. In 2017, Late Harish Chandra Pal was honored “ Rajbanshi Bhasha Samman Award” posthumously on the ‘Rajbanshi Samman Divas’ for the preservation and compilation of his *Bhawaiya* songs and in 2018, Sri Harimohan Barman was also awarded the ‘Rajbanshi Bhasha Samman’ award for his special contribution to the Rajbanshi language and the preservation of music. This may encourage future emerging artists and learned persons. Very recently Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University has introduced the Rajbanshi Certificate Course and Diploma Course on Bhawaiya in 2018 and 2020 respectively.³⁶ Here a huge number of students enrolled every year to learn proper pronunciation of Rajbanshi language, its grammatical rules, as well as correct practice of musical tone, diction, rhythm, grammar rules of *Bhawaiya* by the eminent Bhawaiya artists and Professors. It is to be mentioned that the Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University has first time introduced such type of courses in academic level. We hope the future of the Rajbanshi language and *Bhawaiya* song will reached its highest glory through the endeavor of Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University.

Finally, it can be said that *Bhawaiya* is the song of heart, the song of the soul and the song of the soil of the people of North Bengal and North East India. There is no way but to be emotional if you listen to it. And in this song one can be found the words of love - sorrow - pain - separation of men and women of this region, also matches the image of the social environment and socio-economic condition of North Bengal.³⁷ Deities, *Puja-Parvana*, *brata katha*, spiritual, devotional songs are invaluable elements of folk culture. In this *Bhawaiya* music, one can find the deep identity of the soul, hidden within it is the ultimate desire of the people of Rajbanshi to survive. In conclusion we refer the words of great poet Rabindra Nath Tagore –

"If the commodity in the mines of the country cannot be recovered, the poverty of the country is the same as the poverty of the country is more serious if the gem of energy in the heart of the country cannot be discovered and acknowledged."(Ghare Baire)

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