

Marriage Songs of Sarukshetri Region : An Important Component of Assamese Folklore

Popee Bhuyan

Research Scholar

Mahapurush Shrimanta Sankardeva Viswavidyalaya

Nagaon, Assam

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Abstract : Marriage songs are one of the rich components of Assamese folk songs. Assamese weddings are no less than grand musical events. The songs sung weddings have enriched Assamese folklore in various ways. Many traditional rituals such as *joran*, *paani tola*, *doiyon diya*, *aakhoi tola*, *hom jagya*, etc. are observed in an Assamese marriage. Songs sung in these rituals beautifully portray various socio-cultural elements such as, family morals, values of conjugal lives, etc. Hints of women-centric traditions are also seen in these wedding songs. In Assamese culture, the marriage of ‘*Har-Parboti*’ (God Shiva and Goddess Parvati) is the best. Wherein, the bride and groom are portrayed as Parvati and Shiva in the marriage songs.

Like other regions of Lower Assam, the Sarukshetri area has a very rich tradition of wedding songs. As there are variations in the dialects, customs, rituals, etc. of different places within a geographic region, the marriage songs of Sarukshetri are also different in music, lyrics, and rhythm. Famous for the brass and bell metal industry, this region’s marriage songs, sung in its distinct dialect, add to the cultural richness of the locality. Now a days, the wind of westernisation is slowly pushing ethnic practices to oblivion. This research work is an attempt to collect and describe various unique marriage songs sung during different rituals at a wedding.

Introduction : Humans are social creatures. In the prehistoric era, humans were not much different from other wild animals. However, the anatomy and intellect of mankind gradually developed and shaped them as the best of all creations. The primitive men who lived in their caves or huts used various tools and weapons for hunting or defending themselves. They used various premeditated hand or body gestures while wielding these weapons during hunts and showed them back at their gatherings. Moreover, they used different vocal notes, signs,

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and gestures to communicate. These vocalisations and gestures might have helped to create songs and dances in due course of time.

Gradually, mankind was forced to follow agriculture as their occupation and live in a society. Adequate harvests boosted the energy of human civilization. Some rules and customs had to be enacted for the smooth functioning of society. These customs and rituals shaped the way of expressing human emotions and desires. Thus, the seed of creation was sown in the beautiful minds of mankind, and the concept of culture took birth.

Marriage is probably the most significant custom and establishment, involving not one but two families. The traditional customs and rituals associated with marriage are accompanied by different songs and music. These songs, created by unknown folk artists, are full of fun - frolic as well as the sorrow of parting with the bride.

Importance of the study : Folk songs have an immense contribution towards enriching folk culture. Assamese folk songs are carriers of age-old Assamese cultural traditions. Marriage songs, a major constituent of folk songs are valuable cultural resources of the Assamese community. Varying from region to region, these songs reflect the socio-cultural attitude of a locality. Therefore, the study of the marriage song is very significant to understanding and preserving the cultural identity of a community.

Marriage songs of Sarukshetri : Culture is also an aspect of identity for a community. Traditions and beliefs, rules and rituals, art and literature, practices of farming or other professions, belief systems, education, etiquette, etc. of a community are encompassed by culture. Assamese culture is a culture of harmony. Its scope is very large in nature. Likewise, Assamese folk culture also has enormous dimensions. The researchers of folklore generally divide folk culture into four types :

1. Oral literature
2. Social folk customs
3. Material culture
4. Folk performing arts

The basis of oral literature is folk society. In general, folk societies are agrarian and traditional. In a folk society, the peasants generally take the help of songs and poetry to express their innate thoughts. As these are circulated verbally among the folks, they are named folk songs or folk poetry.

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Assamese wedding songs are an important component of Assamese folk songs. Assamese weddings are no less than grand musical events. The songs sung at weddings have enriched Assamese folklore in various ways. Many traditional rituals such as *joron*, *paani tola*, *doiyon diya*, *aakhoi tola*, *hom jagya* etc. are followed in a Hindu Assamese marriage. Songs sung in these rituals showcase different socio-cultural elements, family morals, values of conjugal lives etc. Many hints of women-centric traditions are also seen in the wedding songs. Notably, in Assamese culture, the marriage of 'Har-Parboti' (God Shiva and Goddess Parvati) is considered the best. Wherein, the bride and groom are portrayed as Parvati and Shiva in the marriage songs. Moreover, in areas with strong *Vaishnavite* influence, the marriage songs incorporate stories from the lives of Shri Krishna and Shri Ramchandra as well. These songs are sung in association with various rituals and activities taking place in a marriage. The talent of women singers singing a specific verse that is relevant to the moment, just like an extempore speech is laudable. These songs bring both smiles and tears to the audience present at the wedding.

The way Assamese wedding songs are based on Shiva and Parvati, likewise the songs of Bengalis and Odias also mention various deities. These songs and their themes are perhaps universal. When an Odiya mother of the bride bids farewell, she sings -

*"Nayane kajjala dei,
Ashta alankara khassili nei lo mo jibana,
Tohar no babu nahi mo jibana."*¹

Similarly, in a Bengali marriage, the mother sings sorrowfully -

*"Adhek gange jharabrishti
Adhek gange biyare
Sundar mayanamati re,
Mayanare se niye gelo
Chiler chou diya
Sundar mayanamati re."*²

Sarukshetri is situated at the LAC in the Barpeta district of Assam. The inhabitants are primarily Hindu and Muslim Assamese, Bengali, and Bodo people. The region has been famous for the brass and bell metal industries since ancient times. Just like other areas of Assam, Sarukshetri is also very rich in regional wedding songs. The marriage songs of Sarukshetri are different in music, lyrics, and tones. Sung in its distinct dialect, they add to the cultural richness of the locality.

¹ Goswami, Prafulla Dutta. 1962. *Baro maahor tero geet*. Guwahati, page ii

² Ibid

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In Sarukshetri, the ritual of preparing grinded rice is performed five to fifteen days prior to the wedding. The ceremony is called ‘Aula Sandah Kuta’ in the local dialect. In that ceremony the women sing the following songs to gratify Lord Krishna -

*“Jayo Hari bola
Jaya Jaya Jaya parama mangala ae,
Hari krishna ae,
Jaya Jaya Basudeu oi raam Doiboki nandan Krishna ae.
Jaya Jadupati Krishne moro goti ae Hari Krishna ae.
Charanate karo sewa oi raam Doiboki nandan Krishna ae.”*

The preceding day of the wedding is called ‘telor bhaar’ or ‘joron’. On that day, the groom’s family takes sweets, apparel, and various other ritualistic items to the bride’s home. Sometimes, the bride’s family also gives return gifts to the groom, which is called ‘oolta (reverse) telor bhaar’. When the groom’s family arrives with items, the women in the bride’s home sing -

*“Ram ram aagor khan bharote,
Ram ram ki ki aanise,
Ram ram bhareli ghorote thoa he.
Ram ram maajor khan bharote
Ram ram ki ki aanise,
Ram ram suda narikolor laaru he.
Ram ram sensor khan bharote,
Ram ram ki ki aanise,
Ram ram samajar majote thoa he.”*

(What is in the first load? Let it be kept in the storeroom. What is in the second load? oh, only the coconut sweet balls. What is in the third load? keep it in front of the people.)

The next day is the day of the wedding. To ritualistically bathe the bride or the groom, the women, including the mother, go to a nearby river or pond to fetch water. This ritual, called ‘pani tola’ is full of songs as follows -

Intro : *“Uile ana tamar kalah,
Bhanga futa sau,
Maire/bapure bibahor pani tuliboke jau.”*

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(Bring out the copper pots, let's check for cracks. We are going to fetch water for the bride/grooms marriage)

Verse : *Pukhurire pare pare khagorire bera*

Doli mari pelai dilo fotikore mala.

(There is reed fencing around the pond, we are throwing crystal garlands in the water) If there is a temple en route, the women pray to the deity singing -

“Fagun maahot mair/bapur aaji biyar din,

Gosai ghorot sewa kori aturoke jin.

Sakal phul phuli ase nai phula dubori,

Gosai gharat bohi ase jibor adhikari”

(Today, on this month of our son/daughter's marriage, we pray to the deity by sitting here, who is the master of all creatures, so that all the evil may go away)

Khisa geet is a type of wedding song that is filled with humour and sarcasm. They are also called '*joranam*' in some places. These are sung by the groom and bride's friends poking fun at each other. These songs are funny and witty in nature. The creativity and presence of mind of the singers are also showcased in these songs. The sisters of the bride tease the groom as follows –

“Vindeu tumi ahila vaal kaam korila,

Jagannathor panda keitak kio logot anila.

Pindhi aahisa terylene,

Ghohi aahisa Borolin,

Tothapi aamar vindeu baideur logot nimilil.”

(Thanks brother-in-law, for coming, but why have you brought the temple priests of Jagannath with you? You have worn terylene clothes, did make-up, still, you are not at all matching with our sister)

Similarly, the women tease the mother of the bride/groom with these songs. Following is an example of humorous *Khisa geet* targeted at the mother:

“Eitu aali o hari bol,

Banse kon dhengari o hari bol,

Bor bor kodal dhori hari bol.

Koinar/dorar mayeke sengrar dol,

Koinar/dorar mayek petli o hari bol,

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*Khos khos ke beg di o hari bol,
Gharat dim sandahor bati hari bol,
Koinar/dorar mayeke sengrar dol.”*

(Oh, who constructed this huge road, on which the pot-bellied mother of the groom/bride is trotting to get grinded rice)

There is a ritual called ‘suag jara’ where the mother goes outside right after the ceremonial bathing of the groom/bride. On that occasion the women sing as follows:-

*“Bohi thaka maai/bapu tumi matir moilam sai,
Tomar mayer saddha lagse hafla diba jai.
Hafla diyate hafla diyate samuke katil vori.
Gharat jai koe tai jwor utha buli.”*

(Be seated, dear bride/groom, your mother is in a hurry. Snail shell has cut her feet while going outside)

*“O kalar bera,
Koinar/dorar mayekor
Mukhot tala mara
O berar kami
Sabi diya aamak
Tala kholo aami.”*

(Oh, the mother’s mouth is locked! Give us the key, we shall open the lock)

The songs sung in the Sarukshetri during the time of the ceremonial bathing of the bride/groom are as follows:

*“Olai aaha aaideu/bopaideu duwardolir baaj,
Mayere dhuwabo tomak nokoriba laaj.”*

(Come, dear son/daughter, come out of the doorstep, your mother will bathe you, don’t be shy)

*“Aare kiba sorai hagi goila,
Aare sekura sekuri pani ae,
Aare kolor gurik aaha aaideu,
Aare fekuri fekuri Sashi ae.”*

(Oh, dear bride, come under the banana tree although you are crying)

Another significant marriage-like folk custom of Assamese society is the menstruation ceremony. It is called '*tolani biya*' in Assamese. When a girl realises puberty, many rituals and customs are followed to celebrate this coming-of-age event. The ceremony is also known as '*prothom biya*' (first marriage), *saru biya* (mini marriage), *suwa biya* (impure day marriage), *santi biya* (peaceful marriage), etc. from place to place. In Sarukshetri region, it is simply called "*Dhueni*" (bathing ceremony).

The ceremony is observed on the fourth day of the first menstruation cycle. One day before the ceremony, a ritualistic package called '*jopa*' or '*japa*' is kept in the maternal uncle's or a neighbour's home. This is to announce that the girl has attained puberty. The neighbourhood women and girls merrily sing the following songs while going to keep the *japa* -

*"Japa jori shrihari jai ranga kori he,
Gaji o - haar goralo sepeta sepeti
Gaji o - madoli goralo gota he
Gaji o - iskulor kasedi pohre loi ahilo
Gaji o - sithi lekhba para kori he
Gaji o - khuwe loi aahiso aula pithaguri
Gaji o - dhuwe loi aahiso vori he"*

(Necklace is made flat, locket is made round, our daughter is made literate in the school, we have brought her well fed and washed)

Next day when the *japa* is brought to the girl's home, the women sing -

*"O poka bilahi natiyek aniso
Agbarhi niyahi.
Tal po panite o poka bilahi
Mair bibah milile o poka bilahi
Mukhore nuguse hahi he o poka bilahi
Natiyek aniso aagbari niyahi."*

(We have brought your grandchild, come and receive it)

*"Aji dekhon gajir abuyek
O tor saalot kapur mela,
Natiye boribak lagi
Kiyo iman hela."*

(Is the grandmother drying clothes? Why is she delaying receiving the grandchild)

The women sing to the girl while bathing her under the banana tree -

*“Oi aare sonare batite maah-halodhi,
Oi aare rupare batite til naal o,
Maat ki bosone rohila o,
Oi aare melki mayeke melkhan patise,
Tok kolor gurit thoi naal o,
Maat ki bosone rohila o.”*

(We are ready to bathe you, your mother is busy with gossip, leaving you here under the banana tree)

After the ceremonial bath, the girl is brought to the courtyard. A fruit is wrapped in an ‘*anakata*’ (woven as a single piece so that it does not require cutting) cloth, and she is asked to turn three times while holding it. This package is believed to be the symbol of her future children. During this ritual the women sing -

*“Ghurbi maai ghurbi
Vaal ke ghurbi,
Aapa jodi kera hoi
Aamak nodoxbi.”*

(Turn well, dear girl, turn well. If your son is born cross-eyed, do not blame us)

Many rituals and traditions like these are followed in an Assamese first menstruation ceremony. These marriage songs, prevailing verbally in every marriage function, beautifully reflect the cultural specialities of a region.

Conclusion : Folk culture carries the identity of a community. The marriage songs have an immense contribution towards enriching folk culture. Marriage songs are the sole property of the womenfolk of a community. The songs of the Sarukshetri region are very melodious. Unfortunately, these beautiful songs are almost on the verge of extinction. Now a days, most marriages are conducted in ‘modern’ ways. Hindi or English songs blaring from the music systems are slowly replacing traditional marriage songs. New-age girls and women seem to be oblivious to the musical beauty of these folk marriage songs. Therefore, it is the need of the hour for younger generations to practise and preserve the folk marriage songs of their locality.

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