Chapter VIII

ORAL LITERATURE: MARRIAGE SONGS AND SONGS OF A LYRICAL NATURE.

I. Marriage Songs
   (a) General Introduction

Marriage songs enliven marriage-proceedings in almost all parts of India. But, the importance attached to their singing seems to be particularly great in Assam, and Goalpara is no exception in this regard. Songs are sung at almost every stage of the marriage starting from the pre-nuptial rites to the post-nuptial ones. In fact, the singing of the songs is intimately connected with the various customs and rites, often giving an insight into their nature. There is a big volume of such songs avidly sung in the various parts of the district by the womenfolk. Although local variations do occur, all these songs have much in common in the matter of the sentiments expressed and the technique adopted in making them effective. In fact, such songs have a kind of generality about them. These songs are the creations of the unsophisticated village women and while many of them betray the lack of polish, they are not devoid of literary value. Their great charm lies particularly in their ability to create mood and atmosphere with rare piognancy using simple home-spun words and imageries.

Such songs are generally called git or gid, and the women who have a special knack of singing them are called gidālis (or

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1. It may be mentioned here that dialectal variations are most pronounced in the marriage songs of the western and eastern parts respectively, while some variations are also noticeable in the rhyming and musical modes of the two regions.
The songs are always sung in chorus, led by an expert singer. Although there is some little improvisation here and there, the practice of impromptu composition, so popular in upper Assam, is rarely to be found in Goalpara.

A study of the marriage songs of Goalpara cannot be complete without some special attention being paid to what may be termed the Muslim marriage songs. In fact, singing of songs forms as much a part of a local Muslim marriage as of a Hindu marriage and practically many songs sung by the two communities are identical. However, there are songs which are exclusively sung by the Muslims, the most important of them being the ones that are sung to the accompaniment of dancing, a delightful speciality of Muslim marriages.

Besides, the Bodos and Rabhas have their own marriage songs in their respective tribal languages.

As hinted earlier in course of our general remarks, the language of these women's songs, even of those of West Goalpara, is remarkably free from the East Bengali influence that is so common in many other types of folksongs of this region. Only slight traces do occur here and there. A few songs also have some structural likeness with a few East Bengal types. The East Goalpara songs, on the other hand, are both linguistically and structurally more or less akin to types of the Kamrup region.

It may be pointed out here that while the practice of incorporating allusions to popular characters and events from the epics and other popular religious lore, so common in the marriage songs of
other parts of Assam, is followed to some extent in the East Goalpara songs, it is rarely resorted to in West Goalpara songs. The following are a few specimens of songs from the eastern parts with such allusions:

Sita has a jelled jethi on her forehead,
From Ajodhya has come Ram and has broken the bow.

[A jethi is an ornament for the forehead]

Also:
Sitadebi is sitting on a mat
And thinking to herself
Ram from Ajodhya has come
And is trying to listen to her thoughts.

The more popular practice in the western region is to refer to the bride and the bridegroom in terms of various endearing names. Thus, Ratn, Mair, Nilmani, Golap, Lalita, Kuili, Kanchan, etc. are popular for the bride and Nilman, Nimai, etc. for the bridegroom. But the more commonplace terms are koiria (endearingly called mai, dear girl) for the bride and bar (endearingly called bapu, i.e. dear boy) for the bridegroom in East Goalpara, and koina (endearingly called bali, the maiden, and aiyo, the dear girl) for the bride and boru, daman and gabru for the bridegroom in West Goalpara.

The singing of songs starts soon after the negotiations for a match are completed and the formalities of presentation of gift (jwaran) to the bride is in progress.

1. K. Nath and others (ed): Goalparar Loka-Sahitya, pp.18-19. A few specimens are also available in D. Nath 'Goalparar Sahityar Chamu Abhosh' in Amar Pratinidhi, Year 9, No.10.
The following song gives an imaginary picture of the developments leading to the gift-presenting ceremony:

Twelve hundred labourers and thirteen hundred spades,
With them the high path has been built for Mainā,
Mainā is playing below that path.
The merchant's son sees Mainā while going along the street
[And now] the ceremonial gifts have come [from him]
with such splendour.¹

Mainā is the bride and merchant's son alludes to the bridegroom.
Look at the subtle hint at the tender age of the bride and her attractiveness.

The gifts have come with the traditional guā-pān for the bride's father, the acceptance of which means the finalisation of the deal.

The juran has come from Nilman, mounted on a blue horse
Go and tie the horse near the bride's father's gate.
Put the guā on a golden tray and the pān on a silver tray
And place them before the bride's father,
Let him give his consent with a smile.

But immediately there is an appeal on behalf of the bride that the guā-pān should not be accepted, for such acceptance would mean the prospect of separation from her family:

We won't eat your guā, O Nilman, we won't eat your pān
Do not accept the proposal;

¹. From the collection of Sm. Niharbala Barua of Gauripur. This and many other pieces from her collection have been included in A. Bhattacharya (ed), Loka-Sangit Ratnākar, Vol.III.
Sweep away the guā, sweep away the pān.
Throw away the lime from the jugi's place on the street.¹

[Jugis are men of the Nath community, many of whom formerly prepared lime]

Songs like the following are sung while collecting and decorating the various articles in preparation for the marriage, revealing the care and concern which go behind every article collected:

'I shall cut a sal tree and make a plank
On which to wash Nimāi's shirt',
Thus thinks the washerwoman to herself —
'How shall I dry Nimāi's shirt,
If I put it on the roof, thatch particles will stick to it.
If I put it on the fence, crows will spoil it.
O, I shall dry it on an elephant's back,
O, I shall dry it on a buffalo's back.'²

Much good-humoured teasing and leg-pulling take place while such preparations are afoot among the women, mostly relations, who gather for the purpose.

This one centres round the bamboo sieve (chāilon) used in the auspicious rites:

Who is the artful Domona that made this chāilon
He has worked on it a design
Resembling the vermilion mark on the bride's hair-parting,
On seeing the chāilon the sister of the bride
Has turned all but mad,

¹ From the collection of Sm. Niharbala Barua, see Ibid.
'What do I care for my sister's marriage, says she,
I am going away with the Domona.'

[Domona or Dom: a man of a low caste of that name. Members of the caste are experts at wicker work]

And the next one is about the ceremonial pot (ghat):

Who is the artful potter that made this pot?
He has painted on it motifs of geese, peacocks and peahens.
On seeing the pot the wife of the bridegroom's elder brother has turned all but mad.

'What do I care for my brother-in-law's marriage, says she,
I am going away with the potter.'

The following two songs, sung respectively during adhibās and at the time of smearing of turmeric before the ceremonial bathing, contain patches highlighting the special kind of relationship between mother and daughter and the painful prospect of separation between the two. In the first song the bride is referred to as Golāpjān:

To-day is Golāp's odibās, tomorrow will be
Golāp's bāsi-biyāo [post-marriage rites]
The crying of Golāpjān's mother
Brings the lean river into spate

And:

Turmeric, 0 turmeric,
Where did you get the turmeric?
I got turmeric by hiring out my aunt as a maid.
0, how bright the turmeric looks.
Some smear it on the hands, some on the feet,
The mother smears it on her moon-like face.

3. Ibid., p.1400.
While the bride is being dressed for the big event, such songs are to be heard:

'With nārāyani oil from Nārāyanpur
and the wooden comb from Bishnupur
Comb your hair well, O maiden, tie your bun tightly.'

When the bridegroom's party arrives at the bride's place, the singers on the bride's side sing such songs directed at the bridegroom:

There is the kori plant
At the entrance of Lalitā's father's house,
It is all abloom, and the air is filled with its fragrance.
Why are you so late, you wicked bridegroom?
Our tender bride is so restless with hunger.

The suggestion that the bridegroom has been attracted by the sweet smell of flowers at the bride's place is interesting.

The following song gives a charmingly realistic picture of the moment of the arrival of the bridegroom's party and apart from the sympathetic strokes with which the sentiments of the bride's mother are painted in it, the first two lines also have a richness of sound, appropriate for the description of the occasion, which cannot be brought out in translation:

Sounds of band music to the north,
Sounds of band music to the south,
The sounds are coming in gusts.
On hearing the sounds the bride's mother sits and weeps,
'Ah, they have come to take away our maiden.'

From the time of the ceremonial reception of the bridegroom at the bride's place, women of the bridegroom's party also start singing, although keeping to themselves:

... With what will you receive our dear boy?
Bring a golden ring,
With what will your receive our dear boy
Bring a golden fan ...

When the bridegroom has taken his seat in the pavilion, women from the bride's side sing:

(Ram-Lakshman), the two banana plants stand at the gate,
Look, here comes your son-in-law mounted on a white horse
Look, 0 ladies, at the beauty of the son-in-law,
His two eyes are like the sun and the moon,
And his face is crimson-coloured.

And the following one is sung when the bride is brought out from the inner apartments to the pavilion for the performance of the final religious rites:

The pretty maiden has come out seated on a litter,
The bridegroom is happy to see her.
Have good look at her by the light of the lamps,
Blessed is the mother who has given birth to her.
Kājal has been applied on her eyes,
On her neck, she has a chandrahar,
And it is dazzling in the light of the lamps.

The doleful sentiment of a song, like the following one sung during the very important sampradāna rite, is most touching:

1. Ibid., pp.108-109.
2. From the collection of Sm. Niharbala Barua. See A. Bhattacharya, op.cit., p.1421.
There is the myrobolan tree in front of the bride's father's gate, 
He plucks fruits from the tree and performs the giving-away 
rite with them;  
He gives the bride away, and both his eyes are filled with tears.  
'Do not cry, O father, looking at me,  
If you have love for me, I shall come back  
If you have affection for me, I shall come back.'

And finally, when the newly-married bride takes her leave 
from the members of her family, a song like the following one not 
only picks at the 'heartlessness' of the parents in sending her away 
but also hints at the new status that the bride has acquired as a 
daughter-in-law in another family:  

The mother calls out, 'O fair Kānchān,  
Pay me the debt you owe me for the milk.'  
'Don't remind me so harshly, you being my mother,  
When I am about to leave.  
My husband's family has a pair of cowsheds,  
From those shall I pay back your debt.'

The father calls out, 'O fair Kānchān,  
Pay me the debt you owe me for the rice.'  
'Don't remind me so harshly, you being my father,  
When I am about to leave.  
My husband's people have a pair of granaries,  
From those shall I pay back your debt.'

(b) Teasing Songs

A most interesting feature of the marriage songs of Assam, 
including those of Goalpara, is the fact that a sizeable proportion 
of them, either wholly or partly, are meant for teasing. Such

teasing songs are called jora nām in upper Assam and khichā git in lower Assam. We have already given specimens of songs in which the womenfolk indulge in good-humoured leg-pulling amongst themselves by introducing a teasing part in a song. But the more pungent teasing songs are sung at the marriage pandal.

The officiating priest (bāmon/bāmun) is a very favourite butt of ridicule and banter, as he is in other parts of Assam:

The mango branches are crooked,
And the Brahman is slovenly,
So the homa fire is not burning.

The Brahman is [pretending to be] worshipping Hara-Gauri,
And he is looking askance,
He is skinning the bananas from the offerings made to the gods,
And he is eating them.
You have taken puffed rice made from bomi rice, O Brahman,
And you have added acid curds to it.
You have mixed the whole thing up,
But you are not eating, O Brahman.
Do you expect a beautiful woman to help you with it?

Much fun is also made at the expense of the barber who comes for the ceremonial pairing of nails:

The wicked barber, he knows well how to pair
The nails of the barber's wife.

2. From the collection of Sm. N. Barua. See A. Bhattacharya (ed): op.cit., p.1456.

Here are two comparable specimens from Upper Assam:

The Brahman reads the recipe and stops occasionally,
He is reminded of his pot-bellied wife back at home.

And:
Our preceptor Brahman has an out-size belly
It will make a fine drum to beat upon.
While going to pair the finger-nails
He pulls at the toes.

He goes from house to house with a razor for each,
He can't walk, for he has nepurs on his feet.

Pair the nails carefully so that our bride is not hurt.
Otherwise we shall tie a bunch of bananas to your moustache.

If you do a good job of it, you will be paid well,
And your dear wife will embrace you smilingly.¹

But the most pinching of the teasing songs are those exchanged between the parties of the bride and the bridegroom after the bridegroom's party arrives at the marriage pandal. Each party attacks the other with much mock-seriousness. For example the bride's party accuses the bridegroom of being late in arriving:

'Why are you so late, you cattle-tending bridegroom,
Our bride is down with hunger and sleep.'

'Cattle-tending' (goru-charā) is a term of abuse and such terms, or even harsher ones, are freely used.

The bridegroom is also rebuked for the presents he did not bring, or for the worthlessness of those that he did bring:

Bridegroom, you have a big name and you make a big noise,
But where are the ornaments for the bride's ears?
And where are the sāris for her waist?²

1. From the collection of Sm. N. Barua. See A. Bhattacharya (ed): op.cit., p.1382.
2. From the collection of Sm. N. Barua. See A. Bhattacharya (ed): op.cit., p.1410. Compare the following specimen from Upper Assam:

We heard the sound that the groom's family is very wealthy,
That they have pairs of elephants.
Now we find that they are poor.
It goes on in this vein mentioning other item of dress and ornaments. Here is another specimen:

The looking-glass and the comb are from across seven rivers. Could you not bring a close-toothed comb? You have brought such vermillion that it doesn't look nice on the [bride's] hair-parting. You have brought such khirals that they do not look nice on the [bride's] ears.

The singers of the bridegroom's party retaliate by finding fault with the supposed miserable reception they have received from the bride's side. They are equally unsparing in the use of uncomplimentary epithets:

Guā is dear, pān is dear, so are dried areca-nuts. Where is the bride's sister, the beloved of the Domona? She won't give us guā, she won't give us pān.

The guā pieces are small, the pān leaves ripe and bad; Where is the brother of the bride? Catch him by the hair and bring him here, He won't give us guā, he won't give us pān.

The local Muslim custom of the bridegroom's party carrying sweet-meat or sugar and guā-pān, and offering them to the bride's party at the marriage pandal is the subject-matter of many teasing songs like the following:

With a small quantity of sweets
The bridegroom has come to the pandal.

And they only talk big ... etc.
- See P. Goswami (ed) : Bāra Mahar Tera Git, p.36.
And the stock has run out
Even before the in-laws have had their shares.
In shame the bridegroom has stood up
Do sit down, O bridegroom.

Some of the songs current among the Muslims occasionally contain some Islamic flavour as in the following:

The water lilies on the bank of the river
Hāi Allah, they are all abloom ...

But there are others in which occur the names of popular Hindu gods and goddesses—:

_Hari bolān diyā ki o soi_
_Krishna bolān diyā ki o soi_.

Uttering the name of Hari, O friend,
Uttering the name of Krishna, O friend ...

(c) Literary merit

The specimens we have cited so far must have given flashes of literary excellence occasionally shining through these homely pieces. Occasionally such a flash can be scintillating. In one particular song, for example, there is an expression _dewā-chilki_, an epithet to describe the bridegroom's elder brother's wife (_bhāuji_). _Dewā-chilki_, which may roughly be translated as _lightning_-natured, is an expression which at once brings to mind a woman of dazzling beauty and electric personality.

To take another example:

While putting on the _mekhelā_,
She is perspiring
It is dazzling like a snake's body
And a gentle breeze is blowing.

The comparison of the brightness of the body of the bride glistening with perspiration to the slippery glossiness of a snake's skin is certainly striking.

Poetic imagination of a high order is also evident in many compositions. Note the delightful romantic element that has been introduced into the relation between the bride and the bridegroom in the following song, although there is little scope for the kind of romantic encounter it so lovingly describes:

In the months of Choit and Boisāg [Choit: March-April
Boisāg: April-May]
The mango fruits are immature and green in colour.
What mangoes are you plucking, O tender-aged groom?
Our bride is asking for two ripe mangoes.

'I shall give not two, but a thousand mangoes,
Only if you would lift your face and look at me, maiden.'

And that exchange of glances is so momentous that it causes a veritable mishap to the bride, which in turn provides an opportunity to the bridegroom to come to her rescue:

While looking up and accepting the mangoes,
The gajamati necklace on the maiden's neck gets broken.
'There's the goldsmith at Salkocha and there is charcoal at Bilasipara,
With them shall I get the necklace repaired.'

In pieces like the following two, in which the pathos of the beloved daughter's separation from the family is brought out
with unusual tenderness, there is the most effective use of the bird-imagery. (In the first song the bride is called Kuili (the Koel) and in the second, Muniyā (a small multi-coloured bird).

Koel, O Koel, the many-coloured Koel
The Koel sits on the branch and cries out five times
The Koel's father is heartless.
He has given her away in marriage, who knows why?
He has given her in marriage to a lowly farmer.
The farmer will come back from the field and beat her with goad.
And tears will drop from the koel's jewel-eyes.

The little Muniyā, she has two red beaks.
She flies and settles down on her mother's lap
'0 dear mother, keep me inside the cage.
A merchant from a foreign land will empty the cage today.'

II Songs of a Lyrical Nature: Bhawaiya and Chatka

Bhawaiya and chatkā are the two types of songs extremely popular over an extensive tract covering most of North Bengal and Goalpara. Essentially lyrical in character, these songs have no

1. A song from Kamrup uses very similar imagery and sentiments—

'Clinging to her mother's neck
The little maiden weeps and laments,
(0 plumed bird!)
'Don't go, O child, to another family.'
Clinging to her father's neck
The little maiden weeps and laments.
(0 plumed bird!)
'Don't go, O child, to another family.'
'You gave me girdles and breast-cloths
You gave me rice to eat,
religious or ritualistic association and are sung and listened to with great relish among the peasantry, both Hindu and Muslim, throughout the year. They are sung in the presence of company on formal or informal occasions to provide entertainment, or one sings them to oneself while working, or relaxing, or simply for the pleasure of it. The lone farmer tilling his field at midday or keeping a watch over it at night, the veteran old singer, dotārā in hand, surrounded by eager listeners, the odd group of young men out for some fun in the evening — the bhāwaiyā and chatkā pieces are favourites with all of them. Even women enjoy singing them when they are alone. Such pieces are also incorporated into the Kushān and other folk-plays for dramatic relief. Bhāwaiyā and chatkā songs are thus very much a part of the life of the village folk of these regions. Though often sung in chorus, these songs are particularly suited for solo singing and are characterised by an intensity of feeling and delicacy of tune. In fact, bhāwaiyā and chatkā are terms that as much indicate two distinct types of lyrical compositions as also two distinct melodic patterns particularly suited for singing in solo to the sole accompaniment of the dotārā.  

Don’t drive me out at this hour of midnight
You will be committing a sin.*


2. Most of the songs cited in this section are well-known. Therefore even though many of them have been published in a number of collections and magazine articles, no references of such publications of individual items have been given. However, we are giving below the names of a few compilations in which specimens of such songs are to be found:

S. Mandal : Palli-Giti
N. Barua : Prāntābasir Loka-Sangitāt Ebhumuki
D. Das : Goālpariyanā Loka-Git.
Love is the principal motif of most of these compositions, especially in the bhāwāiyās, for there are some chatkās with themes other than love. But whereas the wordings of the bhāwāiyās are steeped in seriousness and the tunes have a plaintive air about them, the chatkās are mostly light-hearted songs, with an eye to the funny and the hilarious and they are also set to tunes and rhythms correspondingly light and fast.

(a) Bhāwāiyā

There is no definite knowledge about how the term bhāwāiyā came to be used. Several explanations are offered. But the one that is most convincing is that it has been derived from bhāb (Skt. bhāva) which means attachment or affection since bhāwāiyās are songs of love and longing, of attachment and passion.

Love as depicted in the bhāwāiyā songs is not the tender romantic affair between two young hearts. What we have in them is rather the expression of physical longing and even passion, mostly of the young woman whose desire has remained unfulfilled. Occasionally it is the unmarried maiden lamenting over her fate at the passing away of youth that cries for fulfilment through marriage. As a song says:

Do give me in marriage, O elder brother,
I cannot contain my youthful desire.

Sometimes it is the young wife separated from her husband pining for his company:

My loving one has gone abroad without telling me
How long shall I keep waiting for him.
In some songs the husband is directly referred to as patidhan (husband the treasure) but even here the suggestion is not of spiritual bond between husband and wife, not of fidelity and constancy, but of female youth and beauty seeking male companionship for fulfilment.

O my treasured husband, I am burning with the Fire of youth — I am dying. What use are the pigeon-cotes If there are no pigeons in them? What use is the beauty of a woman If her husband is not with her?

The suggestion is even more direct in songs like the following:

O my magpie-robin, for whom do I save my youth? As the water-lily grows luxuriantly in the hollows So also grows woman’s youth from day to day. The sandpiper cries lying in the sand, The woman with the fullness of her youth also cries lying in her bed.

What is more, in the same song a reference to the outside male (parparush) creeps in:

The Athiyā banana I do not consider to be a banana, It is full of seeds, The outside male I do not consider to be a man, He leaves at the time of trouble.

The undesirability of the outside male is not because of her fidelity or attachment to the husband, but because of the

1. In a big number of bhawaiya and chatka songs the lover or the beloved are referred to indirectly by such names as doiyal (magpie-robin), bhelowa (pelican), bagila (crane) and kuruwa (osprey).
undependable nature of such a male. In the context in which this reference appears, the woman does not seem to be averse to the idea of enjoying the company of the outsider only if he could be relied upon to be faithful.

Some songs express the passionate yearning of the love-lorn woman for the man of her dreams:

The silk-cotton tree spreads its branches in the sky,
How long shall I keep my ripe youth, being but a woman?
The crickets chirp in the hills, my mind all but fleets.
The outside male is like a lotus flower,
I am constantly reminded of him
The rainy season has set in, the rivers have swollen up,
My mind wants to fly away, but alas, the Lord has given me no wings.

There are others in which there are clear suggestions of love-meetings between the woman and her paramour. The husband here is referred to as the neighbour (parashi):

The 'neighbour' is not near and dear to me, my friend!
The fire of the nal grass smoulders, the fire of the khagrā grass burns quickly,
Who will put out the fire burning in my mind - hapless as I am?
There's the thick jungle of dal grass, where the tigers lurk,
Why did you come, O friend, I would have gone to you.
It is raining in a pleasant drizzle and a gentle breeze is blowing,
Come crossing the eaves my friend, and wipe your feet on my bun.

The extra-marital infatuation may be due to the husband being old or handicapped or mentally unbalanced, as is evident from the following song:
Come and see me once, 0 my golden moon!
The kāsiyā flowers bloom in the fields,
The water lilies bloom in the pools,
My parents have married me off
And my husband is a lunatic,
Even as people keep a myna confined in a cage
So have I kept my youth tied up.
My friend, you go by the other side of the ditch,
And you don't even cross over,
Let alone giving me any presents,
You are not even to be seen.
I have no wings, I have no branches to hold on to;
A woman's youth is [perishable] like the stalk of the betel leaf,
How long can I maintain it?

There is an indirect suggestion here that a pre-marital love-affair is involved. But in the following song the suggestion is open:

Don't cry, 0 pelican, at the dead of night,
On hearing you cry, my mind does not rest in peace.
Had I not told you earlier not to go to the in-laws?
For they won't let you come back!
Even the little birds live in pairs,
But alas! cruel fate has never desired our union.

(b) Chatkā

Chatkā songs have more varied themes than the bhāwāiyās and are not preoccupied with love alone. A big many of them are popular as pure comic songs and a few are simple pieces giving innocent enjoyment.

The chatkā songs dealing with love are much more direct and forthright than the bhāwāiyā songs with the same theme. In place of
the delicate suggestiveness and plaintive seriousness of the bhāwāiyās, we find in the chatkās an air of down-to-earth directness and even of flippant casualness.

In the following songs there is an attempt to create an atmosphere of frivolity by the repeated use of queer-sounding onomatopoeic expressions:

The lovable Kalachand does not understand love.
When shall I have a meeting with him?
O my friend, your house is on the other side of the river,
To go or not to go to you —
This always restrains me.
While crossing the river on foot
The water sounds kḥāplāng-khупlung and kḥālāu-kḥālāu ...

O my friend, I lie on the bedstead
All alone in my house,
My mind frets and foams.
While changing posture,
The wretched bed squeaks
And cries keret-keret and kārāu-kārāu ...

Some chatkās that purport to be dialogues between the dewar (husband’s younger brother) and bhāuji (elder brother’s wife) are particularly outspoken and often verge on downright ribaldry. In the following song, the dewar plainly cross-examines the bhāuji about the extra-marital relationship he suspects her to be indulging in; and the bhāuji answers him in equally plain terms and unabashedly brags of her power to appease the elder brother with her erotic charms:

'Your hair is dishevelled, O bhāuji
Why is your back earth-stained?
Who is the lover that made love to you
And broke your necklace O bhāujī.'

'The cows kicked me, O deorā,
While building a smudge in the cowshed
I ran on seeing my husband's elder brother,
And thus my necklace got broken.'

'Let my alderman brother come back, O bhāujī
I shall report it to him,
He will give strokes
On your fair body.'

'Let your alderman brother come, O deorā
I shall seat him on a morā
He will play on the dotarā
Leaning on my breast.'

Some songs suggest a secret relationship between the two,
and in a few, like the following one, the bhāujī's infatuation with
the young deorā even in preference to her husband, is expressed in
no uncertain terms:

They have all gone out fishing
And have caught fish,
They have all come back safe and sound
But where is my deorā?

My husband has gone to reap the paddy,
Let the tiger catch and eat him,
I wish my husband was dead,
Let my deorā survive.

There are some chatkās in which the subject of extra-marital love is treated hilariously with a view to producing a comic
effect. The cat here is none other than the paramour, so called perhaps because of his sneaking and prowling nature. The wretched Pāniyā (Pāniyā mara) is, of course, the husband.

Hurry up, O cat, and come,  
O cat that cries mew.

It is raining in a pleasant drizzle,  
And a gentle breeze is blowing  
O cat that cries mew.

There are the arum plants in the backyard,  
Cut a leaf and put it over your head,  
O cat that says mew.

The door has a simple knot,  
Pull it loose,  
O cat that says mew.

The pot of curds is on the shikiya [shikiya=a hanging device],  
Gently take it down and eat,  
O cat that cries mew.

The tray of pān is on one side,  
Take some after looking for the lime  
O cat that says mew.

Wretched Pāniyā is sleeping in the room,  
Be careful and lie down,  
O cat that cries mew.

Many chatkās are pure comic songs and are not preoccupied with love or desire.

Here is one about a lazy and crafty woman who gets all the household chores done by her husband when the poor man comes home after the hard day’s work in the field:

O my, O my, I cannot do any work!  
You have come home after finishing ploughing?  
You have done a fine job.
Now please go and husk five measures of paddy.  
You have husked the paddy?
You have done a fine job.
Now please go and draw water in the pitchers ... etc.

There is a hilarious piece about the marriage of the chengti fish's son with the daughter of the puti fish, for which the different fishes volunteer to perform different functions:

I am caught in the spider's web,  
And the ants are laughing;  
The son of chengti fish is being married  
To the daughter of the puti fish.  
The chandā fish gets up and says,  
'I shall be the bairāti for the marriage.'

The tepā fish gets up and says,  
'I shall be the drummer for the marriage.'... etc.

[The chandā is a nice-looking fish. A bairāti is a woman who performs the auspicious functions in a marriage. The tepā fish gets puffed up when air is inserted through its mouth.]

However, there are some chatkā songs which are marked for their restraint and delicacy. Here is an exquisite little piece which almost echoes the lyric of a famous Hindustani composition - jhanana jhanana pāyeliyā bāje.

The ghugurā on my feet jingles.  
O mother, how can I go out?  
My father-in-law is in the house,  
My husband's elder brother is at the door,  
The husband's sister is awake at the head of my bed.  
Pray, how can I go out?  
I paid an advance to the goldsmith for the ghugurā  
In the hope of fulfilling my love-tryst,
But knowing nothing, the goldsmith has inserted pulses in it, [so that it jingles]

O my mother, how can I go out?
I clutch at it, I press at it,
Gently do I put my feet,
And with the water pitcher on my waist
I go to the river ghāṭ.

Though not explicitly stated, this piece has an obvious allusion to the love-trysts of Radha with Krishna, the charmer. There are many songs — not necessarily chatkās — in which the reference to Krishna is more or less direct. The male object of love is referred to in many a song as kālā, kānāi or kānāiyā, who he is a charmer with his flute and whose flute-playing draws the beloved to the rendezvous, the river bank, on the pretext of drawing water. For example:

Don't play on the flute any more, O kālā,
Because of its music
I cannot stay at home.

When you play on the flute
Then I, the woman, come to draw water ...

But it has to be remembered that kānāi here serves only as a popular symbol suggesting the extra-marital nature of the relationship¹ and has no spiritual or religious significance, either genuine or affected, as in case of some pseudoreligious songs. In some songs, the lover is even addressed as bhāginā, the nephew, obviously alluding to Krishna who was Radha's nephew.

1. Some songs with overt erotic expressions are called kānāi dhāmāli.
(c) Moishali and Maut Songs

Structurally falling within the bhāwāiyā and chatkā forms are two groups of popular songs linked with two professions — buffalo-grazing and elephant-catching. The first group is known as moishāli songs because of their association with the buffalo-herd (moishāl). The second group, though having no such popular name, is referred to by some as songs of the māut (elephant driver), and is connected with the elephant-catching operation and the people engaged in it.

(i) Moishāli songs

Among the moishāli songs, the majority are built upon the theme of love; only, the hero here is the buffalo-herd and the imagery is also appropriately drawn from the objects surrounding him:

Ghultung, ghultung goes the bell on the buffalo's neck.
My womanly heart weeps, it does not rest at home.
Along with the bell on the buffalo's neck
Goes the playing of my friend's dotārā,
My womanly heart bursts,
I lose all interest in my household chores.

Sometimes it is the parer-kāmini — another man's wife — who is attracted towards the moishāl:

Why do you play on your flute
Along the bank of the Champā river, O moishāl?
The river Champā has washed away my pitcher
O moishāl, what for do you use your sling
Along the bank of the Gadādhar?
Why do you get all afire
On seeing another man's wife?
Sometimes it is the moishāl's wife pining for the company of the moishāl who is away in a bāthān (temporary dairy farm) working for wages:

Leave the bāthān, leave the bāthān, O moishāl,  
Do come back home.  
I shall sell away my necklace  
And raise the sum equal to your wages.

The intensity of a woman's love for a moishāl is expressed in the following song:

What trouble has befallen me  
For having loved a moishāl.  
The moishāl does not even speak to me  
In his arrogance.  
The modhua twigs swing in the easterly wind,  
And the end of my sāri swings all the time.  
In the backyard there is the clump of āthiyā banana,  
O my moishāl, there have I kept {hidden for you}  
The banana-bark container of doi-chirā.

(ii) Maut songs

The second group of songs, centring round the elephant catching operation, are more interesting as there are greater variety and richness in them both in form and content. The elephant catching operation takes place in the deep ever green forests to the north of the district bordering on the Bhutan hills, and the mauts of Goalpara, who spend months deep inside the jungle cut off from their near and dear ones, sing these songs in their camps in the evening to relax themselves and to keep up their spirit. Some songs are also sung to the newly-captured elephants in a bid to tame them and as the popular
belief goes, the songs melt the hearts of the wild beasts and tears run down their cheeks. Thus connected as they are with the elephant-lore peculiar to the district, these songs are an important ingredient of the cultural wealth of the area.¹

The following song is sung by the maut, the phandi (the man who is in charge of lassoing the animal) and their companions after an elephant has been captured and brought to the camp:

Say Allah, Allah, O brother,
Hái Allah Rasul
To which division does the elephant belong, O brother?
(Hái Allah Rasul)
It belongs to the Bhutan division, O brother,
(Hái Allah Rasul)
Which phandi lassoed it, O brother?
(Hái Allah Rasul)
The phandi was so-and-so, O brother,
(Hái Allah Rasul)
Which maut does he assist, O brother,
(Hái Allah Rasul)
He assists the maut so-and-so, O brother,
(Hái Allah Rasul)

The next one is a widely popular song which begins with an allusion to a mythical story current in these parts according to which the elephant is a Brahman's wife transformed into the animal.²

O elephant-girl, O elephant-girl, O Brahman's wife.
With the copper pitcher on your head, (O dear,)
And the golden ḍhārī in your hand (O dear.)

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¹ A most informative and interesting discussion on these songs along with a number of their specimens is to be found in an article entitled 'Songs that Grew Out of a Legend, Nahut Songs of Goalpara' by Niharbala Barua published in Folk-Music and Folklore: An Anthology, Vol.I.
² For the myth, see Chapter IX, Section I(d).
Alas, my elephant-girl
You have no compassion for the māut
You left your home at an auspicious moment
But the ominous lizard over your head, O dear
Croaked five times (O dear.)

The theme then passes on to the predicament of the māut who has come to the jungle, separated from his hearth and home, even leaving a newly-married wife, partly because it gives him his livelihood and partly because he cannot resist the call of the forest:

The sandpiper cries lying in the sand,
The māut from Gauripur cries, O dear,
Cut off from his hearth and home (O dear)
I left my mother, I left my brother,
I left my golden home.
I married and left behind, O dear,
A tender-aged bride (O dear).

The element of self-pity can hardly be missed. The māut then remembers the lamentations of his wife when he was about to part from her:

O my māut of the tusker
The day you leave for elephant-hunting
My womanly heart keeps on languishing.
What use are the stars in the sky
When there is no moon?
For the woman whose husband is away,
There is darkness in the day.
How can boats move in a pool without water?
What use is the beauty of a woman
Whose husband is away?
O my māut of the tuskless elephant,
The day you go up-country,
My womanly heart keeps weeping.
There are other songs that highlight the love that develops between the maut in his sojourn and some young woman in the neighbourhood — and unmarried maiden, or even a young wife. The following one dramatically expresses the sentiments of the maut and his beloved, particularly of the latter.

If you go away, O my maut friend, will you come back again?
You move the elephant, you graze the elephant,
    Under the wild bamboo groves,
What snake bit my maut
That he became lame?
The ojā and the gunin use the dhekiya fern [ojā, gunin = medi-expert] To purge the poison.
The woman that I am, I shall use my tresses
    To charm away the poison.
O my stocky maut with the thick beard,
Will you tell me the truth and say where you have your home?

[The maut replies]

'I move the elephant, I graze the elephant,
    I chain the elephant's feet.
I tell you the truth, O maiden,
    I have my home at Gauripur.

[The maiden again]

'You move the elephant, you graze the elephant
    You chain the elephant's feet
But tell me the truth, O maut,
    How many women do you have back at home?'

[The maut again]

'I move the elephant, I graze the elephant,
    I put the cord around the elephant's neck,
I tell you the truth, O maiden,
    I have not married as yet.'
The tension and anguish at the prospect of the end of the love affair—for the māut's stay is but temporary and uncertain—are brought out in the next one.

My māut grazes the elephants
   Along the banks of the Gadadhar.
What a spell you have cast upon me, O māut,
   With the love-beads on your neck.
Do build your hut on a high place, O māut,
   So that I can see it while drawing water.
Do make your bed-stead high
   So that I can see it while passing by.
You fed me on curds, you fed me on milk, O māut,
   But you never gave me the dregs,
Alas, from now on, your journeys along this path
   Are going to end.
'Don't cry, don't cry, O maiden', [pleads the māut]
   'Don't spoil your sweet voice.
If I come back again,
   I shall adorn you neck with gold.'
ELEPHANT-CATCHING AND SONGS CONNECTED WITH IT.

A newly captured elephant

A camp scene at night.

Taming the wild beast and training it up.

Singing songs before the elephant

The singer with his dholak.