CHAPTER-2

2 FRAGRANCE OF NATIONALISM IN THE FOLKSONGS OF ASSAM

In this chapter, a few folksongs in Assamese, Sadri (Lingua franca among the tea and ex-tea communities), Santhali and Karbi language have been forwarded which are flavoured with patriotic and nationalistic zeal. Sadri and Santhali songs are a total reflection of subjugation by the British rule and witnesses of bitter experience faced by the particular community whereas the karbis and the Moran songs are from the pre colonial monarchical background venerating the communal legendary figures. But the events of the Assamese folksongs were experienced both in colonial and pre colonial Ahom rule.

Folksongs are pragmatic with social heritage, the environment and the folklife of a particular region. Performer and audience hardly receive so close contact in other genres. It is nourished from age to age by the aesthetic sense of the individual mind and serves the society by educating the younger generation, socialization and by excercising social control in the society. It is the most powerful propaganda of a particular programme, a particular political movement. In this case, we may cite the following quotation made by Deep Punia:

"...Through songs, jokes and proverbs, they show their anger and difficulties caused by injustice, oppression and exploitation. Folksongs can also prove the most powerful propaganda media to direct the attention of the people towards a particular programme. Political parties take helps of songs to popularize their party candidate and the manifesto adopted. Vendors also take recourse to this method for selling their articles. The development officials too adopt the oral media to popularize the programmes of planned change"
And for this reason the Brothers Grimm in Germany and the collectors of folksongs and ballads in England were inspired and pioneered to intricate the latest dreams of a country with culture and folklife. The role of folklore can be more illuminated if a South African country Malawi is cited where folksongs enabled a person to come back to power by mass mobilization.

Malawi is a small country in Africa South of the Sahara, sandwiched between Zambia and Mozambique. In 1964, led by D. Hastings Kamuzu Banda under the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), the country attained independence from British colonial rule. Banda has returned to Malawi in 1958.

When he arrived, he was handed over the leadership of the National African Congress, a group that had been established in 1940s. But almost immediately after the country gained independence 6 years later, Banda scattered into exile the very people who had organized the independence movement and had invited him to lead it. In 1966 Banda banned opposition parties; he became life president in 1971. But Banda carefully appropriated and manipulated oral traditions and history to consolidate and legitimize his power.

Malawi had a rich heritage of songs, poetry and dance. Traditional songs were adapted to advance the idea that Banda was the only person that could lead Malawi. They proposed that God chose Banda before he was born to be the leader of Malawi. For instance, one song sung by the women’s league from Rumphi district said:

*Ba Ngwazi Wanda bike*

*Chiuta wakawasola*

*Kuwa Mulongogzi withu muno m Malawi*

(Before Ngwazi was born

. God chose him

*.........To be the leader in Malawi*)

In these songs, Banda became the father and founder of the Malawi nation, a God sent messiah much like Moses or Jesus in the Bible.
Folksongs played no fewer roles in Colonial Assam than the Malawi Chapter. When no media was available among the dominated and mostly tortured subject to express agony and to make agenda for a collective upheaval during the colonial regime, the revolutionary mass took resort to folksongs. They expressed their grievances and united themselves with the help of folksongs in the nook and corners of Assam. Where illiteracy and lack of modern communication stood as a barricade among various communities, folksongs delivered the most recommendable service to the laymen to interact and to unite against the British lion.

Now let us absorb in the folksongs of a few dominant communities who had exercised these during their ethnic emergency in monarchial and colonial era to outburst their suffocated experiences and ideas.

During British administration, all communities of Assam irrespective of their racial and cultural distinct features came under one common aspiration. Common agony or hatred to the British Sahibs was the resultant of the equal measures adopted to subordinate all the communities. The Assamese-speaking people did not sit with empty hands. The Bihu songs reflected the folk minds as....

"The alien, the alien, the shabby alien,
Don't you give him room
He gets up at midnight and breaks into the house,
In the darkness does he escape"  

The term Bangal has always meant a foreigner or alien. A European is called Baga bangal (white Bangal).

Aliens have come into the land of Assam
I have observed their vanity,
Donot go, O dear, to an alien,
There’s no knowing what his love is  

The song is against the praise of strangers
Through stream came the tea garden sahib,
Having drunk he threw away the bottles,
What is the use of so much wealth?
All is useless without a woman.

The tea garden sahibs remain branded for all time.

The British couldn’t settle in Assam without facing disputes. Assamese along with the tribes like Abors, Mishimi of the North-East Frontier prevented the British at Sadiya from entering Assam. British officer Halkan was murdered which was echoed in the folksong...

Hora koi gasare murha samaniya
Hora koi gasare murha
Halkan chahabak abore katile
Bichari nepale mura
(The stump of Horakoi tree, Oh my friend
the stump of Horakoi tree
Abors killed Halkan Sahib
His head was not found)

The terrific battle at Sadiya is again reflected.

Ekara patore jahaj banai diya
Sadiya ranaloi jaon
(Make a ship of the leaves of Ekara tree
As I am ready to fight the Sadiya battle)

Again, Kone ani diba lone amlakhi
Kone ani diba jira
Kone ani diba dhanare batori
Sadiya ranare pora
(Who will fetch salt and amalakhi
Who will bring jira
Who will give the message of my Dhan)
from the battle at Sadiya)

The only traditional historical ballad that is sung sometimes even now-a-days is Maniram Dewanar geet (the ballads of Maniram Dewan) associated with the trial and hanging of a patriot in 1858 A.D.. The song, which has a melancholic tune, goes like this:

_Sonar dhowa khowat khali oi Maniram_

_Rupar dhowa khowat khali_

_Kino rojar ghare doroh achorili_

_Dingit chi pejari lolii_

(you smoked upon a gold hookah, O Maniram
you smoked upon a silver hookah,
what treason did you commit to Royalty
that you got a rope round your neck)

SANTHAL FOLKSONGS

The Santals belong to Munda group, a branch of that aboriginal group which probably entered India from the North-East. They were basically hunters and jungle-dwellers and agriculturists to some extent. There religion is animistic, spirits (bongas) are everywhere around them. The Santhal Parganas is a district of 4800 sq. miles in area, lying about 150 miles north of Calcutta, was formed into a separate administration after the Santhals had risen in rebellion in 1856. Santali is a language of great regularity and complexity but when the Santhals come in contact with races speaking an Aryan language it is apt to become corrupted with foreign idioms.

The Santhals of Assam were brought to this region from Jharkhand, Chotanagpur, Chattisgarh and other parts of India by the British people. Siddu and Kanhu, two martyrs of mid nineteenth century, embraced death penalty in the movement against the British policy of land and revenue system and have become a paramount source of inspiration for the followers of later times.
Folksongs were composed after these two freedom fighters and these songs are alive in Assam till now.

(1) Chadam dada taleme
    Chadam dada lagayem.
    Chadam dada madane malin.
    (O brothers, untie your horses
    Rush to the battle field
    We are with pale faces)

(2) Chand bangar nehrat marang buru joharem
    Chand bhayor sanggete
    Chidu Kanhu chadam chetan re
    (You pray to the god, Marang Buru,
    march accompanying the brothers of the Moon dynasty.
    Siddu and Kanhu are on the horseback)

(3) De-ja boyha delaja bakayha
    Hud hud gud gud damanike
    Bitish raja lagayeya bon
    (Come all our brothers
    come in groups and gather in the same venue
    as we are to drive away the British)

(4) Hulaban hulah kaban
    Lagah abon lapadh hai
    Abowakah disam daban tahadh dahaya
    (We will revolt
    we will revolt in large gatherings
    and will fight to save our motherland)

(5) Relgarhi paiya chetan khirh khirh
    Dah chetan lauka jahaj khad khad
    Cherma- re udah jahaj han hanah kan
    (Trains are running over us with the sound khir khir
Ships are running with the sound Khad khad on the water
Aeroplanes are moving in our sky)

(6) Ah dada chap-pe
Char boyha arag pe
Raharh dahou gudau-pe
Hara buru dharti daban dul dulau-wa 2
(Come with bows and arrows
Shoot with arrows
Blow the war trumpets
so that we can quiver our dharti ma)

(7) Hu/ boyha lagoyen
Banduk hou chadeyen
Adi adi mayam dahou bohelen
Sidu Kanhu karham red char-da parayen -hou boyha 2
(Movements have passed over
Guns have roared
Rivers of blood have flowed over us
Arrows penetrated the chests of Sidu and Kanhu)

FOLKSONGS IN THE TEA GARDENS OF ASSAM
Discovery of tea plants in 1923 A.D. and the Yandabu treaty in 1826 A.D. were two famous successive events in the history of Assam. In the very outset, the indigenous Assamese labourers shared a significant part in the infant stage of the industry. In the tea-estates of Maniram Dewan and Jagannath Barua and also in those of Assam Company, Assamese labourers raised up to 30-40% of the total workers. As soon as the hegemony transferred to the East India Company, a scarcity of indigenous labourers had been noticed unprecedentedly. A few reasons may be cited in favour of the local laborers' unwillingness.
(i) Regimentation of tea gardens, hard and fast rules accompanying atrocities did not match with the local laborer’s (especially Bodos and allied groups) passion. Moreover, serving in the tea gardens was their part time business as they had possessed their farms and fields besides natural resources.

(ii) Hanging of several local patriots and upsurge of the sepoy mutiny led the local workers to feel the British as antagonist.

(iii) The strange and to some extent disgraceful codes of behaviour of the British Sahib were considered as a threat to their and religion.

(iv) Partial may be, the dethronement of Assamese language from the schools and offices from 1836 to 1873 A.D. gave a new fillip to this event.

When all efforts of the British people to remove the indigenous detachment turned in vain, they increased the land revenue beyond imagination. It is reflected in the Dali Puran as -

*Bhabi Chinti Chahabe upay napay
Bagichaloi kuli bicharibo jay
Gaon dhani hol, kuli paboloi nai
Bhabi bhabi chahabe ulale upay
Sonkale dukhiya hok khajana besi karo
Kuli paboloi aru kihar bhoy karo"*

(The Sahib’s operation for kulis did not bore fruits as the villagers are in the verge of enrichment. As revenge, he enhanced the land revenue so that they would not have any alternative except the tea gardens)

Lots of riot sabhas, raijmels and mutinies appeared in the scene as a protestation against the enhanced amount of revenues resulting massacre, lathicharge and gun fire. The Doli Puran depicts the Patharughat tragedy where hundreds of poor peasants embraced bullets of the British gun in 1894.

Later the tea planters began to import uneducated scrupulous labourers with the help of local agents from Orrisa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Tamil Nadu etc. motivating by various means.
Assam desher chahpata, pani boli bar mitha
Chal sakhi, chal jaba bogane, tulaba pata ananda mane
(The tea leaves and water of Assam are heard to be sweet.
Let us go to the garden, Oh friend, we would pluck cheerfully)

The laymen acknowledged that the backbone of the nation invariably depends on the socio-economic foundation of the common people. The insolvent mass experienced severe atrocities by the estate owners despite of their optimum sacrifice for the welfare of the industry. The division of India and Pakistan grieved them much. The following song reflects their political awareness, valour and patriotism.

Ki agunjali/re ei sunar bharate
Diba nishi bhabire upay na dekhiya
Bhaire hindustane pakistane
Desh bibhakta oiy
Desher ma boin sab chute-el.
Bhat rutir lagiare
Bhaire bhai mantrigane ghure beray
Aeroplane chariare bhai aeroplane chariya
Desher netara sab sukhe ache gadir achan paiya re
Diba nishi bhabi upay na dekhiya
(We are unable to extinguish the fire lit up in India, which divides India and Pakistan. Our mothers and sisters have passed away for the sack of bread. It is amazing how the ministers are roaming by aeroplane after enthronement)

The workers were pressurized heavily in the all round development of the industry. But the entire credit and benefit went to the owners. They hardly found time to take care of their house conditions, diets and sanitation.

Dhan kati go narakati, narakati ghar bandhi
Sei ghar jal pare go, boise sararat kandi,
Ki bolobo go machi pichi, ki bolobo dukher katha
Kacha bache ghun dharse, temoni amar durdasha 14
(We go on harvesting paddy, making house out of the paddy thatch.
But rain penetrates causing misery to us.
How I can depict our grievances
Resembling a green bamboo infected by insect!)

The British people did not merely pave the drainage of wealth to their homeland and exploited the laborers economically, but abused the opposite genders with lust. It is reflected in the Bihu song as---

_Ujai ahile bagichar chahabti_  
_Cherap khai pelale chichi_  
_Atek dhan bastu kelei logiche_  
_Chowali nahole misa_ 15

(the sahib of the tea gardens came against the current of the Brahmaputra,
Threw away the glasses of wine
Why they require so much wealth when girls are thought to be the pleasure).

The workers had to confine themselves to the hard and fast rules of the company and faced uncountable atrocities which is reflected in the song------

_Desh gela jamin gela_  
_Taito amara kandina_  
_Manush le golam holi_  
_Manastape mori go_ 16

(Our homeland is no more, lands are no more
We do not weep even then.
. But it extremely pains us that our people have been converted to slaves)

_chardar bale kam kam_  
_babu bale dhare aan_  
_chaheb bale liba pither cham_  
_re nithur shyam_
phaki diye anali assam
(The British supervisor doesn't know anything
except commanding us
for hard work and whiplashes
Oh! Heartless almighty,
we have been played false).

The agitating workers were well aware of the exploitation of the British Sahibs. The economic drainage caused by the British to their homeland at the cost of the workers' hard work did not pain them so much. But inhumane behaviour bestowing the poorest living standard was a matter of great regret to them. Even tea was also not served them according their requirement.

"Now it is said that where the tea grows, that is yours but when we made sacrifice we require tea for our funerals, we therefore perceive that you have taken all the country and if we, the old and respectable can't get tea to drink, we are not well satisfied."

The press of those days entitled the conflicts in the tea garden as the conflicts between labourers and aristocrats.

Chand kande suraj kande
Kande go swarger tara
Patale basuki kande
Bahego sosaner dhara
Nadi kande, nala kande
Kande go gulsi phul
Intye biniye kande
Praner dhadki phul.

(The sun weeps, the moon weeps
the stars of the heaven weep
the basuki(the king snake) weeps
under the ground
the heart weeps with deepest grief)
as the current of repression is quite inhumane)

"The primary object of the British rule in India is to benefit the European capitalist and merchant, even if necessary, at the sacrifice of justice and humanity."19

They had dedicated themselves for the welfare of the tea gardens with a desperate mood for their disability to go to their homelands and the appeal of the hearts to meet their dearest ultimately turned to a cry in the wilderness.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Chuit geloi rajpat} \\
\text{Chutloi dewaniya} \\
\text{Chuit geloi mor jila garbaria} \\
\text{Chuit geloi} \\
\text{Chuit geloi maihap} \\
\text{Chuitloi swajaniya} \\
\text{Chuit geloi more golake jhumoria} \\
\text{Chuit geloi}\text{20} \\
\text{(Our crown has been lost} \\
\text{Suzerainty has been lost,} \\
\text{Nostalgic villages have fled away} \\
\text{Parents have been detached} \\
\text{Kinsmen are no more} \\
\text{Intimate jhumoir companions are no more)}
\end{align*}
\]

When the British sahibs harassed the tea workers physically, culturally and economically, they wanted to search a way to escape from these compulsions. It echoed in the song of their Tusu Puja also.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Cal sarda cal barda} \\
\text{Asame barha dukh re} \\
\text{Rele cade desh jaba} \\
\text{Ar ekhane thakba na} \\
\text{Chandpure ticket kate} \\
\text{Ag chale jaba guwalande} \\
\text{Chahab shyalader chah bagane} \\
\text{Aru kadam rakhaba na}\text{21}
\end{align*}
\]
(lets go charda and barda
too much grievances in Assam
we wil go to our land by train
and willnot stay here anymore
we will book ticket at chandpur
and move to Guvalande
In the tea gardens of the Sahib
We wil not step any more)

KARBI FOLKSONGS
The Karbis are one of the peace-loving tribes of the Assam province. A voice of protest was raised against the British people and their policy of divide and rule in the Karbi society.

Tawaii achan karbimar
Tawaii achan rangrangmar
Phereyek tharanjek
Ibi ipun chinam nang
(Karbi brothers, if we want to maintain our unity, integrity, then we have to forsake our fears)

The Karbi community was rescued by Tumung Mahar and Klengmekar pe. A gratitude to them is found in...

Kon Pa-tumung mekar plang wang biima
Kon Pa-Alangri achan nangching thur ma?
(Who are Tumung Mahar and Kleng Mekar, our saviour?
Where had our community been fragmented?)
MORAN FOLKSONGS

The Morans are one of the Indo-Mongoloid groups of the great Bodo fold. Once there occurred a great battle between the Morans and the rulers of Ahom Kingdom. Cruelty and suppression on the Vaishnava Gurus were the main causes of the great Moamaria rebellion in 1769 A.D. Ultimate result was the death of Ramakanta and Ragha Moran, two leaders. Radha and Rukmini, two courageous ladies committed unincidental sacrifice which is reflected in the song

Bartupar guliboor kus pati dharili
Ahom roja bangili Moran roja patili
Kaloloike khiyati thoi oi
Radha rukmini
Yuddha kari kari
Bartupar guliboor kus pati dharili

(You embraced the bullets of bartop,
broke the Ahome tyranny and established the king of our Morans.
You created glamour forever.
Oh Radha and Rukmini, you embraced the bullets after prolonged fighting).

This kind of legends arise race consciousness and become unavoidable element in ethnic assertion, integrity or group cohesiveness derived from such folksongs leads to the formation of nationalism where antagonists may be a government, or imperialists or a neighbouring country. For instance, the Morans who increased group cohesiveness by making the Ahom ruler their chief antagonist, again composed panegyric on behalf of Ahom hero Gadapani and consort Joymoti during British administration.

Godapani oi paharat goi lukali oi
Lora rojai pabo hi buli
Lai lesai oi kande enai binai oi
Jerenga potharote bohi
Joymoti oi jatona je bhugili oi
It has been observed that folksongs played a matchless role in the aforesaid communities during the colonial period. When all the means of liberation and self expression seemed to be in jeopardy, basic human rights and needs had been snatched away, folksongs stood as the healing agent to mould their long cherished dreams. In a few songs above, the plot in their pre colonial suzerainties or kingdoms offered a very appreciable contribution to boost their communal harmony against the British suppression. Similar is the case in other communities also. Unfortunately, most of the songs or other oral treasure faced immature death for illiteracy and carelessness. Yet, we may have some pictures or facts unnoticed in conventional history from the surviving ones and may come to the conclusion-

Folksongs played as a healing agent by outbursting the latent emotions and grievances besides the pleasant moments of the suffocated mass.

Folksongs served as propaganda of political agenda and innovated novel ideas of the scattered mass.

Folksongs stood as the unifying bond among various communities or among various members of a single community.

Folksongs are strong catalysts of ethnicity and nationalism.

Folksongs are unwritten charters composed spontaneously.
Nationalism provides the most fertile breeding ground for reviving and recirculating folksongs.

Hence both folksongs and nationalism can be compared to the two sides of a coin and launches each other during emergency. "Folklore in revitalization movements is often used to reinforce the new ideas, and in this way it can be seen as performing a similar function to folklore in stable situation."26
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3. Prasenjit Choudhuri, *Asomar Chah banua aru unaish shatikar bidwat samaj*, (Guwahati-1: Students Stores), 4


5. Lila Gogoi quoted in Prasenjit Choudhuri, op.cit, 38-39

6. ibid, 28

7. ibid, 29

8. ibid, 42


12. M. Har of Dibrudalang T.E. of Sonitpur, Assam interviewed by Baijayanta keot of Tezpur University on 05-06-2005

13. Shashi Sharma, op.cit, 344-345

14. ibid, 360

15. Lila Gogoi, op.cit, 199

17. Prasenjit Choudhuri, op.cit, 45.


19. Prasenjit Choudhuri, op.cit, 36.


23. ibid, 26

24. Pranami Phukan of Kakopathar, Assam interviewed by Baijayanta Keot on 11-12-02.

25. ibid, 11-12-02.