

Folk Songs of Bengal Performed by Women: A Glimpse

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Abstract—Folk music is a regular traditional music genre. This music evolves over time. The subjects of folk music are enriched with natural resources, so when natural resources change, the traditional form and performance of folk music changes. Folk music can be said to be a base for various behaviors of society, ceremonies, problem solving, activities, worship, festivals, various customs and traditions of people from birth to death. Bengali refers to certain regions of Bengal and beyond. Although many folk songs have disappeared over time, these topics or folk genres are still more or less present in Bengali folk music. These particular folk genres are traditionally studied, sometimes by men, sometimes by women, sometimes individually and sometimes in groups. Folk songs studied by women give a different message for the welfare of society. They keep the society in order and inform it about some of the rules and regulations of the society. The entry of women into Bengali folk music has been there since ancient times and is still present today. Folk music, which has been practiced for a long time by women, has been used for the welfare of society from time to time, but it seems that the pace has slowed down a bit at present. Folk music, which has been practiced by women, needs to be discovered through research and introduced to the next generation. It is important to write down the folk music obtained from the research in written form, which can be a documentary document for the next generation of researchers.

Index Terms—Folk song, Bengal

I. INTRODUCTION

Folk music is a song composed orally by the people of the city and the village. The people of the village sing and work amidst the busyness of their busy lives, ploughing the fields, harvesting crops at home, watering the trees, driving cars, and building boats. They sing at festivals and religious ceremonies. Their songs erase the fatigue of long journeys and the boredom of hard labour. In this way, folk music was

first born orally. Unlike the names of the composers of folk songs, there is no history of the birth date of this song. Only some guesses can be made about its era. (Pati, 2021)

Bengali folk music is the music that originated from the simple rural common people, which is usually transmitted orally, relying on hearing and memory. Starting from the ancient Nath songs to the present day Bhawaiya, Baul, Marmiya, Jhumur and Dehattava songs, this is evidenced by the names and compositions of the composers. We know that music is the combined form of songs, instruments and dance. From this musical interpretation, folk songs, folk instruments and folk dance can be called folk songs. The people of rural Bengal have composed these folk songs based on the reformist thoughts of the rural working class, the festivals and ceremonies of thirteen festivals in twelve months, explanations about the world and life, the beauty of Bengal, the creative thought and consciousness at the junction of rivers and boats, poverty, injustice in society, the increase in the price of everyday goods, etc., and the supernatural beliefs. However, folk cultural rituals have often dominated the folk songs of Bengal. Although the melodies of Bengali folk songs have universal appeal, they are mainly regional, such as Bhawaiyya in North Bengal, Bhatiali in the eastern region, Baul-Marfati in the southwestern region, etc. Again, although Bangladesh is a riverine country, there are differences in the nature of the rivers of different regions; the forms of Padma, Meghna, Surma and Dhaleshwari are different from the forms of Madhumoti, Ichamati, Bhairav etc. If we observe the folk songs of Bengal, we find several genres such as - First genre songs: songs in solo voice, songs in ensemble voice, Baul, Bhatiali, Dehattava, Murshidi and Marfati, the composers of these are also individuals. Songs of ensemble voice such as Kavigan, Letogan, Alkap gan, Gambhira gan etc.; these songs are performed by two

or more people together. Second genre songs: regional or omni-regional. Many folk songs are popular in Bangladesh and West Bengal. Third-class songs: Those that are communal, especially divided into Hindu-Muslim communities. Fourth-class songs: Some songs that are common only among women, such as bratgan, meyeli geet, etc.; these are composed and performed by women. Some of the common features of Bengali folk songs are: a. Their origin is from ordinary rural simple people and is spread orally in the folk society. b. Folk songs can be performed singly, duetly or in groups. c. Even if regular practice is not required for its practice, it is practiced or practised when necessary. d. Usually, people who are not sufficiently educated in school are its authors or composers, and in that case, a genuine heart is naturally revealed. e. Simple language, regional pronunciation and spontaneity of melody. f. Heart-warming appeal in the combination of words and melody. g. Although the appeal of melody is universal, the use of regional language identifies its own region. h. Dependence on nature, extensive use of rural environments such as the wilderness, wilderness, rivers, boats, etc. j. Unmasked expression of the joys and sorrows, pains and sufferings of daily life. j. Use of simple and natural rhythms and k. Predominance of the emotions of separation and reunion of human love. Melodic characteristics of folk music: Folk music can be roughly divided into four classes. The melody of the first class is 'Sa Ra Ma Pa', the melody of the second class is 'Sa Ga Ma Pa', the melody of the third class is 'Sa Ra Ga Pa' which ascends in this way and the melody of the fourth class is 'Sa Ra Ga Ma Pa' which ascends in this way up to the fifth. The influence of some ragas is also seen in Bengali folk music. The touch of ragas like Jhinjhit, Desh, Bhairavi, Bhupali, Behag, Khambaj, Bhairavi, Bilabal, Bhimpalsri and Patdeep Bibhas has enriched the folk music of Bengal. In terms of rhythm, folk music can be divided into two: fast-tempo, such as Sari and Jhumur, and slow-tempo Bhatiali, Bhavaiya, etc. The folk music of North Bengal, especially Bhavaiya or Chatka, does not indicate any subject matter, but only the rhythm of the melody. Chatka is fast-tempo, which can be compared to Jhumur; and Bhavaiya is slow-tempo, which is comparable to Bhatiali. (M, 2015)

Bengali folk music is not only a carrier of cultural heritage, it is a wonderful medium of spiritual exploration, a reflection of social reality, an aesthetic

expression and a philosophical practice. The sound, melody and form of the song contain all the questions that are at the centre of philosophical, sociological and aesthetic thought Who am I? Why do I live? In which society do I live? It is not just a vehicle of melody and emotion it is a deep philosophical and sociological practice on the relationship between self, society and God. (S, 2025) Although solo, duet and group forms are found among Bengali folk music, folk music performed only by female artists, folk music with dance or folk music with drama are particularly important in society. Songs of this genre are very necessary to maintain the balance of society. Folk songs composed by women in different aspects of human social customs from birth to death, such as songs for rain to grow crops in the fields during dry spells, songs to put children to sleep, songs to warn of flood during heavy rains, songs to cure children of diseases, songs to wish for good luck, songs to bid farewell to husbands while going to work, arrangements and songs for puja festivals, songs about the onset or problems of menstruation in girls according to natural laws, wedding songs, wedding songs, etc. These songs can be called the mirror of society. This article presents a brief description of some individual and group folk songs performed or conducted by women -

1. Maa Meleni Song:

This song is heard in Murshidabad district on the day of Chaitra Sankranti in the Bengali year. The virgin girls observe this vow and sing in groups. The idol of the folk goddess "Meleni" is placed on the altar, smeared with oil and turmeric and then immersed in water. The girls believe that by worshipping this goddess, they will become reborn and lucky. No musical instrument used in the worship songs has been mentioned in this book. (Chowdhury D, 2013)

2. Henchra Puja Song:

During the month of Phalgun, the virgin girls sing this song sporadically in the twenty-four parganas, Nadia, Burdwan and Bankura. They sing this song before sunrise and after sunset. The symbol of this worship is the flower branch. Henchra Devi is worshipped and sung to prevent scabies. (Chowdhury D, 2013)

3. Sayar Gaan:

This is a sad song dedicated to God. The pain of losing a child or an attempt to cure a patient is seen in this song. No musical instrument is needed. Mainly, women sing at night. However, a man may also be present. This song can be heard in North 24 Parganas and Nadia. (Chowdhury D, 2013)

4. Paush Aglano Gaan:

This song is popular in Bankura, Burdwan. On the night before Paush Sankranti, the village women stay up at night and sing to the tune of Karun to keep the Paush month afloat. (Chowdhury D, 2013)

5. Bivah Geeti:

The mantra of the wedding ritual is the wedding song. This song is enriched with regional tunes. For example, in North Bengal, it is Bhavaiya, in East Bengal, it is Bhatiali, etc. The wedding song is completed in these three stages. (A, 1954)

6. Itu Puja rhyme songs:

Throughout Bengal, during the Agrahayan month, the virgin girls of Bengal observe the Sun fast of Itu Puja for the happiness and prosperity of their future married life. On this occasion, they recite several rhymes to the tune of songs. (A, 1954)

7. Uttam Thakur's songs:

In the Bengali Phalgun Chaitra month, at the beginning of spring, in the western part of Burdwan, Bankura, and Murshidabad, mainly the virgin girls sing songs of Uttam Thakur centred on the folk deity. He is the god of spring nature's vow. The water-earth dhela is the offering. This is a song about describing nature. (A, 1954)

8. Dhan Bhana/Chira Kota song:

Some songs are sung by women during the time of rice bhana or chira kota. This is a collective work song. This is the main rhythm song. (A, 1954)

9. Zarina's Song:

In the rural areas of Murshidabad district, a narrative song is heard, which is known as Zarina's Song. It is a love story. The heroine's name is Zarina. Hence, Zarina's Song. It has the influence of Persian literature. (Lok Sangeet Ratnakar, Volume 2, Page 516) (A, 1954)

10. Birth Music: When a child is born in a family, the female music that is heard sporadically in some parts of Bengal is known as birth music. In respectable Hindu families, on this occasion, the birth story of Sri Ramachandra is revealed through music. Sometimes, the birth story of Laxminder is heard. (A, 1954)

11. Jal Bhara Geet:

The various rituals performed on the specific day of a wedding in Hindu society are accompanied by music. The song that is sung while fetching water from a river or pond ghat before the wedding ceremony is known as Jal Bhara Geet. This song is popular in the Nadia region. (N, 1995)

12. Bhaiphonta Gaan:

In the Bengali month of Kartik, after Kali Puja, the songs that girls sing with the auspicious ceremony for the well-being of their brothers are known as Bhaiphonta Gaan. (N, 1995)

13. Bhat Kapaar Gaan:

The day after the wedding is a good night. On that day, at noon, there is a provision for the groom to formally give rice and cloth to the bride. Arranging a cloth, food, and condiments on a plate and handing it over to the bride is called giving rice cloth. The song that the girls sing is called the Song of Rice Cloth. (N, 1995)

14. Tush Tushali Vrat:

Women observe this vow in the month of Paush. They believe that it brings happiness and prosperity. Along with singing, the rule of this vow is to worship mustard and radish flowers by chanting mantras with a nadu in their hands. For example, "May I be born in a good Brahmin clan. Take cow dung flowers, worship my three clans." (N, 1995)

15. Navanna Gita:

In the month of Bengali Agrahayan, women cook rice from new Aman rice and offer it to their ancestors. The new rice is sweet, and the gods accept the new rice as prasad and sing for that purpose —

"I thought it was new rice, the day is being ploughed
I have gathered it in a bunch, Tushala is the mother of the rice..... "

(N, 1995)

16. Suryavrata song:

Suryavrata and song are observed in the months of Baishakh and Magh. This vow is observed on Sundays in these two months. In this vow, one has to stand up from fasting all day. In the Malda region, this vow is called Khad Vrata. The virgin girls observe the Surya vow in the month of Magh. Their vow is called Magh Mandala. In observing the Suryavrata, the girls sing all day "Get up, start with a twinkle I will worship you with blood." (N, 1995)

17. Huduma or Hudum Deobrata:

Some say that the word 'Hudum' comes from 'Udom'. Udom means naked or naked. However, many musicians do not support this theory. They believe that 'Hu' means fire and 'Dum' means suppression. That is, at some point in the summer or monsoon season, when the cultivated land becomes hot in the scorching sun without rain, Hudum Puja and songs are performed to cool the hot land. In the Rajbangshi society of Cooch Behar, it is customary to call the deity 'Deo'. All the women participating in this ceremony get naked there and on a dark night, they make an idol of the deity Hudum with earth and cow dung in a field far from the locality and worship and sing. Men are prohibited from entering this place of worship. This story is mentioned in the Ramayana. During the dry season, from the end of the month of Baishakh to the end of the month of Jaishta, rain is called for for water agricultural work. They bury a banana tree and sing like a confluence. They sing by pulling a plow with a different opinion. This song is for the welfare of the society. (R, 2015)

18. Songs of the arrogant people of North Bengal's rural songs:

The wealth of folk songs has enriched North Bengal. The arrogant women of North Bengal have broken down in pride in the wake of some incidents. Various forms of this pride are reflected in the songs. In the form of nature, the departure of a lover, the feelings of love in the woman's mind, various complaints about the family, the sorrows and miseries of the unfortunate rural women, making their daughters live in the next house, etc., all are expressed in the folk songs of North Bengal. The explanation of separation, separation is more reflected here " On the other side, the black rain falls and shines on the other side, the clove tree is bursting with colour.

How does my mind, my good brother?
My bones are fried, my flesh is a rope,
Come, I jump into the river and read. (D D. S., 2010)

19. Women's Karma Sangeet:

Karma Sangeet is produced through the various ups and downs of folk life. Songs are the daily companions of the labour-dependent people of the Bengali region. They create Karma Sangeet by working with their hands and singing with their mouths. Of course, the role of both men and women in Karma Sangeet is equal. Women sing such songs during paddy harvesting, threshing, threshing in a dhekki, and during the Chira quota. The language of this Karma Sangeet is very simple, straightforward, fluent and regional. (D D. D., 2007)

20. Fishing Songs:

The Ravha tribe is one of the primitive tribes of North Bengal and Lower Assam. Their lifestyle, language, culture, and agriculture play a very close role in the daily life of the tribe. In the Ravha language, dance is called Basini and song is called Chai. Dance and song are practised in every part of the life cycle of this tribe, from birth to death. Usually, women tie a khalui around their waist while fishing in rivers or water bodies, take a jaki in their hands, and sing to the rhythm of the dance. However, men also do it. (D D. D., 2007)

21. Teesta Buri Mecheni Khel Song:

Rajbangshi women in the areas adjacent to the Teesta River in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts worship Teesta Buri. This worship is held on any day of the month of Baishakh. This worship is mainly done to protect themselves from natural disasters. The special part of this worship is the Mecheni Khel song. This is a vital event for women in all farming families. The practice of Mecheni Khel song is seen in Mathabhanga and Mekhliganj subdivisions of the Cooch Behar district. (N R. D.)

22. Kati Puja Song: Rajbangshi women perform this worship on the occasion of the Bengali month of Kartik. After the worship is over, they dance and sing around the worship, hoping to get a handsome and virtuous son like Kartik. This worship includes original songs and strange gestures. Men are prohibited from entering during the ceremony.

Married women plant four banana trees, place two pots in the middle, plant a paddy tree with shees in front of the altar, and dance with a chaluam lamp on the branch and sing along. (N R. D.)

23. Subachani Vrat Song:

In the folk society of North Bengal, especially in the Cooch Behar district, women observe this vow. On any day of the year, on the occasion of any auspicious event (wedding, marriage of a marriageable daughter, etc.), Monday or Wednesday is considered the day to observe Subachani Vrat. This vow is decorated with various poems and songs. The hopes, aspirations, and desires of the female mind can be heard in the songs. (N R. D.)

24. Wedding Song:

Folk customs like the worship of various goddesses enrich the treasure trove of folk literature. The first thing that comes to mind in this regard is the folk custom of weddings. Earlier, wedding songs were sung to welcome new sons-in-law. However, now, apart from welcoming sons-in-law, this song is sung to welcome any honourable guest. (N R. D., Uttarbanga Lokadevdevi O Lokachar, 2012)

25. Jigir Tolar Rhyme Kata Song:

This folklore bears the identity of folklore like Bengali poet songs. Conversational songs are quite entertaining in any puja or any auspicious festival. (N R. D., Uttarbanga Lokadevdevi O Lokachar, 2012)

26. Rajbangshi Wedding Songs:

In northeastern India, Rajbangshis live mainly throughout North Bengal. Rajbangshi wedding songs are an unwritten, oral, oral, memory, tradition-based, literary value-rich, active and lively culture of Rajbangshi society. These songs are invaluable creations born from the imagination of Rajbangshi women. (P, 2012)

II. CONCLUSION

Analyzing the songs sung by women in Bengali folk music, it is known that several genres of songs are almost obsolete today. Because the need for that genre is not very much today in some places or there is some in some places. For example, in the case of puja songs, the folk songs sung here in Hudum Puja, it is known

that women used to dance and sing for rain in Bengal during drought. That need has been met to a great extent today. Starting from the installation of government tube wells and other water arrangements, those songs are no longer practiced in that way. Kati Puja songs were sung in exactly the same way. Like Kartik, only women used to offer folk songs to God, praying for a healthy, handsome groom and for the creation of a beautiful society. That has also changed a lot. In the case of Teestaburi songs, it is seen that the water of the Teesta River used to flood cities and villages in times of drought. Today, the rivers flowing down from the mountains in different parts of Bengal are dammed, so that the water and its current no longer flood the region in the same way. For this reason, the practice of singing Tistaburi songs has gradually decreased a lot. The songs of breaking rice and cutting the rice used by women were sung while working with a dhenki or a chham-gain in the past. Nowadays, these tasks are completed with sophisticated mechanical methods and we get our necessary food or food ingredients very easily and quickly. Therefore, these songs used to prepare food ingredients have gradually become extinct. Some of the Bengali folk songs practiced by women are still more or less prevalent today, one of which is - wedding songs, wedding songs, auspicious songs, fishing songs, women's work songs, Suryabrata songs, Navanna songs, Bhaiphontar songs, Jal Bharar songs, etc. In conclusion, it can be said that Bengali folk music itself carries the trend of a region and itself carries forward an ancient great culture. As a result of continuous changes in natural resources, the form of the song will change, the method of performance will change, the essential contents of the song will change, and the singer will also change with the hand of time. However, if the new generation of artists are a little careful about the antiquity of the ancient Bengali folk music genres and the practical style, tone projection, use of words, pronunciation, then these resources will survive for the next generation.

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