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A discourse on the significance of *Bogejari* Songs and *Maare* songs in the folk life of the Pati Rabhas of Assam

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Abstract

The Pati Rabhas is a sub group of the Rabha community. The Pati Rabhas are mainly centered around the plain land on the south bank of the river, Brahmaputra in south west part of Assam. The Pati Rabhas inhabit in the south west- Kamrup and the east- Golpara area in Assam. As a sub class of the Rabhas, the Pati Rabhas have genres of folksongs associated with different folk customs, rituals and folk beliefs. The Pati Rabhas entertain some genres of folk songs similar to those of the other sub groups of the Rabhas. Besides, they have a good bunch of folk songs which are not found among other Rabhas. Folk songs like 'Bogejari', 'Maare'; songs associated with 'Hanaghora' festival, 'Paarbaah' festivals etc. are only prevailed among the Pati Rabhas. These good numbers of folk songs enrich the folk life and cultural life of the Pati Rabhas as well as provide them a unique identity as a sub group of the Rabhas. 'Bogejari' and 'Maare' songs are very popular among the Pati Rabhas and both these genres of folksongs reveal many things about the Pati Rabhas in Assam.

Key Words: Pati Rabhas, Folk life, Folk songs, 'Bogejari' songs, 'Maare'songs

Introduction: The Rabha is one of the major tribes of Assam. Being an ethnic group, the Rabhas have an individual and unique identity. The Rabha as a community belongs to Indo Mongoloid race (Borah, 2008: 27). The Rabha people mostly live in the plain area of Assam. They are chiefly scattered in the plain land on the south bank of the river, Brahmaputra. So, they are considered as plain tribe. The Rabha people in Assam are distributed throughout the districts of Kamrup, Goalpara, and Southern area of Nagaon, Darrang and Baksa. The Pati Rabhas are a sub group of the Rabhas. Their main concentration is found particularly in the south- Kamrup and east- Goalpara area. The Pati Rabhas co-exist with nature. Their main occupation is cultivation. It makes a deciding impact on the folklife of the Pati Rabhas. The folklife of the Pati Rabhas is dependent on the natural elements collected from Mother Nature. Most of the Pati Rabha villages are located amidst green paddy field and woods. This colorful tribe has spectrum of folk elements. Among those, the range of folk songs is found in good numbers. Most of the folk songs of the Pati Rabhas are associated with folk performing art. Different folk songs of the Pati Rabhas are sung in different occasions, rituals, customs and festivals. The Pati Rabhas have

no written history. So, the genres of folk songs provide a platform to study the folklife and background of this community. Among the folksongs and performing art, *Bogejari* songs and *Maare* songs are enjoying a pivotal place among the Pati Rabhas. Both these genres of folk songs possess a number of features which are very significant in respect of understanding the Pati Rabhas from a close prospect.

Objectives of the study: The main aim of this present study is to find out the significant aspects of the two most popular genres of folk songs of the Pati Rabhas, viz, *Bogejari* and *Maare*. The objectives can be recorded in the following points,

- i) To study the various aspects of the *Bogejari* song and how it influences the folklife of the Pati Rabhas.
- ii) To study the significant aspects of the *Maare* song and how much it makes impact on the folklife of the Pati Rabhas.
- iii) To trace out the similarities and dissimilarities between the *Bogejari* song and *Maare* song as two genres of folk songs of the Pati Rabhas.

Methodology: To fulfill the purpose of this present study, methods like Observation and Open ended interview schedule with focus group discussion have been adopted. Ten Pati Rabha villages of Kamrup and Goalpara districts have been selected with the purpose of collecting data. Data is also collected from the secondary source to consummate the needs of this study. In this regard, books and local souvenirs have been taken into account. Data, collected from both the primary and secondary sources are analyzed to attain the needs of this present study.

The Pati Rabhas: who are they?

The Pati Rabhas are one of the major clans of the Rabha community. The Rabhas comprise of a number of socio- cultural and linguistic clans, viz, the *Pati*, the *Rangadani*, the *Maitari*, the *Totla*, the *Bitla*, the *Dahari*, the *Shonga* (Das, 2008, reprint: 06). Among those clans, the Pati Rabha is the largest and centrally spread in the South Kamrup and east Goalpara area in Assam. After studying the anthropometry, ABO blood groups, PTC tastes and finger and palm prints of the *Rangdani*, *Maitory* and the Pati Rabhas, Dr. Bhuban Mohan Das have reached to this conclusion that there is no significant difference among these groups (Borah, 2008: 26). Still, the Pati Rabhas have emerged as a unique sub- group of the Rabhas because of its separate cultural identity. It may happen because of their close association with other non- tribal communities in the plain land on the south bank of the river, Brahmaputra. Most of the Pati Rabha villages are found from Rani, Guwahati to Sukuniya in south Kamrup area and from Dhupdhara to Dudhnoi in east Goalpara area. This long terrain on the south bank of the Brahmaputra inhabit by a number of tribal and non-tribal communities. So, most of the Pati Rabha villages are attached with other non-tribal villages in south Kamrup and east Goalpara area. As a result of which the Pati Rabhas have developed a new trend of folk and cultural life which are more similar to the adjacent non-tribal communities than the other sub-groups of the Rabhas. So, the Pati Rabhas have emerged as a sub group of the Rabhas in terms of their separate setting of folk life, folk songs and other performing arts from the other Rabhas. At the same time, it is worthwhile to

mention that the Pati Rabhas also entertain and follow certain customs and rituals similar to other Rabhas. But, in terms of folk songs and performing art, the Pati Rabhas have new set of elements and in most of the cases it is not found among the rest sub groups of the Rabhas. Apart from south Kamrup and east Goalpara area, some Pati Rabhas are also found in Darrang district (Das, 2008, reprint: 07). Besides, Some Pati Rabhas inhabit in Nagaon and Karbi Anglong districts in Assam (Borah, 2019, reprint: 12).

Folklife of the Pati Rabhas: *“Folklife is the living traditions currently practiced and passed along by word of mouth, imitation, or observation over time and space within groups, such as family, ethnic, social class, regional, and others. We learn our folklife traditions in an ‘everyday way’.”* (Bowman, Bienvenu and Owens, 2005: 1) Family is the primary base of the Pati Rabhas. Members of the family live in the same family campus. Generally, father is the head of the family and he is the owner of all the immovable property. They are very peaceful in family life. Joint family system was seen among the Pati Rabhas in early time. Now a day, nuclear families are found among almost all the Pati Rabhas because of economic hardship and population influx. The Pati Rabhas prefer to settle collectively in social life. The Pati Rabha families from the same ‘mahari’ i.e., matrilineal inheritance constitute a ‘chuba’ or ‘para’ (Rabha, 2015: 11). A village is consisted of more than one “chuba”. The folklife of the Pati Rabhas is simple and rooted to nature. The Pati Rabhas are very much dependent on woods, bamboo and straw to fulfill different needs in their folklife. The main profession of the Pati Rabha people is cultivation. Domestication of animals, fishing and hunting are also parts of their livelihood. Living amidst nature, the Pati Rabhas spend a simple and rustic life. The system of ‘mahari’, i.e., matrilineal inheritance plays a pivotal role in the folklife of the Pati Rabhas. They give first preference to ‘mahari’ in each and every social occasion related to one’s life cycle (Sarma, 2014: 15). The Pati Rabhas have twelve recognized ‘mahari’, viz, *Chung, Chinal, Napha, Nongdok, Kachu, Tharu, Dia, Dagam, Phahto, Raja, Rangcha* and *Dobhakhhal* (Rabha, 2015: 15). Due to the presence of ‘mahari’ system, the Pati Rabha women enjoy customary privilege in the folklife and in social domain. Moreover, the womenfolk of the Pati Rabhas are skilled in different activities like fishing, hunting, weaving, reaping crops etc. related to their livelihood. Loom is an essential item in the folklife of the Pati Rabhas. Loom is available in almost all the Pati Rabha families. The Pati Rabha women are very skilled weaver. They produce clothes for the family members in that loom. Cowshed, pigsty, hencoop are parts of their folklife.

Folk songs of the Pati Rabhas: Folk song belongs to the genre of oral literature. Folk songs transmit from one generation to the other in verbal form (Sarma, 2013, reprint: 18-19). *‘Objectivity is one of the important characteristics of folk poetry since the name of writer or composer is not found in the body of folk song. George Herzog says that the art itself is much less dependent on new creations produced by every generation. Its bulk grows through a process of recreation of material already in existence.’* (Borah, 2008: 43) The Pati Rabhas are fun loving and they have passion for singing. It reflects in a good number of folk songs entertained by the Pati Rabhas. They have spectrum of folk songs. Being a sub

group of the Rabhas, they are enriched with many genres of folk songs available among rest of the Rabhas. Besides, the Pati Rabhas have developed some other genres of folk songs which are not found among the other sub groups. The folk songs of the Pati Rabhas are either associated with rituals or folk festivals. Folk songs like *Bharigaan*, song associated with *Baikho puja*, songs associated with *Ghorgosani puja* or *Rontuk*, songs associated with *Tukuria puja*, *Lakhor geet*, i.e., cowherd's song, songs associated with *Bhaluknaach*, i.e., bear dance are found among the Pati Rabhas as well as the other groups of the Rabhas. Apart from those some genres of folksongs are found among the Pati Rabhas only. Folksongs like *Bogejari*, *Maare*, *Bohurangi*, *Hanaghora*, *Jarighora*, songs associated with *Paura puja* are not found among the other sub-groups except the Pati Rabhas. Among all genres of folk songs, *Bogejari* songs and *Maare* songs are the most popular and widely accepted by the Pati Rabhas. Both these genres of folk songs offer the Pati Rabhas their cultural identity living in south Kamrup and east Goalpara area. *Bogejari* songs are associated with festivals, whereas *Maare* songs are devotional songs. The Pati Rabhas have no written or recorded history. But, these genres of folk songs bring into light many virgin things and phenomenal incidents from distant past of the Pati Rabha society.

***Bogejari* songs and its significance:** *Bogejari* songs and dance form are traditionally being practiced among generations of the Pati Rabhas since many centuries. This particular genre of song is found only among the Pati Rabhas. The other groups of Rabhas do not entertain *Bogejari* song. *Bogejari* songs are very simple in diction and in terms of meaning, but very expressive. *Bogejari* songs are sung in the colloquial language used by the Pati Rabhas in south Kamrup area. The Pati Rabha people of this area use a peculiar dialect mixed with the phones from both Assamese and Rabha phonetics, called *Rabhamese* (Sarma, 2014: 22). The allegories and symbols used in *Bogejari* songs are taken from the natural world as well as from the daily life of the Pati Rabha people. *Bogejari* songs are written in quatrain verse form (Sarma, 2014: 39).

Historical significance: The Pati Rabhas believe that *Bogejari* songs were composed by a lady named *Bogejari bai* (Rabha, 2010, reprint: 1). The Pati Rabhas consider *Bogejari* as a girl of Royal blood and she was a nature-artist (Barman, 2014: 11). Some *Bogejari* songs can be discussed as oral history of the Pati Rabhas. In folk life, the Pati Rabhas believe on the stories sung in *Bogejari* songs. The existence of *Boge* kingdom is historically proved. In south-Kamrup area, in between Boko and Chhaygaon, a small state was ruled by the tribal kings. The name of the state was *Boge*. It existed from 16th to 18th century (Shil, 2008: 2). It is very significant that the *bogejari* song itself narrates the stories associated with *Boge* dynasty and its legacy. The capital of *Boge* state was *Ouphula*. The mention of *Ouphula* is found in *Bogejari* song.

‘*ouphula phalaphang*
maje dhuniya gang
baat poth nisinong
boge baarit jaang’ (Informant¹)

i.e., *Ouphula* and *Phalaphang* are two villages. There is another village in between these two villages named *Dhuniyagaon*. The roads are not comfortable to travel on. Still, we have to march on to the capital of *Boge*. It is interesting to note that those villages mentioned in this *Bogejari* song still exist in south Kamrup area. All these three villages are *Pati Rabha* villages.

The Royal Legacy of the state of *Boge* is found in *Bogejari* songs.

*' Boge rajyar rani
Jira bai hol
Dhunduli taire beti
taio Raani hol' (Informant¹)*

i.e., *Jira Bai* becomes the queen of *Boge*. *Dhunduli* is the daughter of *Jira Bai*. She too becomes the queen of *Boge*.

*' Dhunduli name aasil
Boge rajar tiri
olai aahe Dhunduli
Sau ghuri ghuri' (Informant²)*

i.e., *Dhunduli* is the queen of *Boge* King. She is very beautiful and the folk want to have a glance of her again and again.

Another song goes as follow

*' Dhunduli aaru Bogejari
Dui Maai beti
Boge rajyat jilike
Jen jon biri' (Informant²)*

i.e., *Dhunduli* and *Bogejari* share the relationship of mother and daughter. Both of them shine in *Boge* state like the shining ornament of *Pati Rabhas*, i.e., *Jonbiri* (a garland).

Significance in folk life:

The *Bogejari* song deals with each and every aspect of folk life of the *Pati Rabhas*. From human love relation to worship of nature; from satirical remarks to burning problems of rural *Pati Rabha* community are seen as themes or subject matters in *Bogejari* songs. No formality is observed while performing *Bogejari* songs. Any *Pati Rabha* can sing and dance in *Bogejari* song at any happy moment or light occasion.

*"Bhat Randhong banga bora
xako randhong bhul
gamasate tuli thoisung
Domasaki phul"* (Rabha, 2010, reprint: 8)

The above *Bogejari* song sheds light on two aspects of the folk life of the *Pati Rabhas*; one is their food habit and the other is the skills of weaving. The song expresses the feelings of a female *Pati Rabha* for her beloved one. She prepares dishes on vegetables with boiled *bora* rice. She also weaves and knits flower on *gamas*, i.e., a cloth used as towel.

The following *Bogejari* song depicts another beautiful picture of the folk life of the *Pati Rabhas*,

“*jakha marong subuk sabak*”
uthil dangor xol
maas marongte xori poril
koya nakor phul” (Informant³)

i.e., I have caught a big *xol* fish (Snakehead murrel) with *Jakha* (a bamboo instrument to catch fish). But, in the meanwhile I have lost my *Nakor phul* (nose ring). This *Bogejari* song reveals that the Pati Rabha women are skilled in fishing. They also like to wear or keep ornaments.

The above two songs provide a glimpse of how the *Bogejari* songs depict the folk life of the Pati Rabhas. So, *Bogejari* songs can be studied as oral history of this community as well as a large canvas of the folk life of the Pati Rabhas.

Maare songs and its significance: *Maare* songs are deeply associated with the folk life and folk beliefs of the Pati Rabhas. This genre of songs is also sung in *Rabhamese*. *Maare* songs are more popular among the Pati Rabhas of south Kamrup area. Other sub groups of the Rabhas hardly perform *Maare* songs. This genre of folk songs deals with different aspects associated with the folk life of the Pati Rabhas.

Religious and social significance:

Maare songs are associated with the worship of the goddess of snake, *Manasha* (Rabha, 2015: 19). So, *Maare* songs have religious implications. The worship of goddess, *Manasha* which is commonly known as *Maare puja* among the Pati Rabhas, is generally observed during the Assamese month of *Jeth*, i.e., around April and May. Dance forms like *Ojhapali* and *Deodhoni* are associated with *Maare* songs. The text of *Maare* songs is narrative in nature dealing with the myths and legends related to goddess *Manasha* and her confrontation with merchant, *Chando* (Borah, 2008: 45). So, the subject matters of *Maare* songs are basically the stories of *Chando Sadagar* (merchant Chando), his son and daughter-in-law, viz, *Lakhindar* and *Beula*; and most importantly the growing tension between *Chando* and goddess *Manasha* and the climax of the story.

Maare songs are long narrative poems in epic form. In ancient time, it took seven days and seven nights to perform and accomplish the stories narrated in *Maare* songs. Now a day, it takes one day to three days to complete the performance due to constraints of time (Rabha, 2012: 54). *Deodhoni* dance is an integral part of *Maare* songs. The lady who performs *Deodhoni* must know to sing *Maare* songs. The *Ojha* and his *Palis* sing *Maare* songs and the *Deodhani* performs it in dance form playing different roles from goddess, *Manasha* to *Beula* and *Lakhindar*.

Maare songs of the Pati Rabhas narrate series of stories in a chronological way. Some examples of stories are like the beginning of the universe, the birth of goddess *Manasha*, her divorce, her conflict with merchant, *Chando*, the birth of *Beula* and *Lakhindar* and their marriage, the devotion of *Beula* for her husband *Lakhindar*, snake biting and death of *Lakhindar*, offering puja by merchant *Chando* etc. Each story has a link with the other directly or indirectly.

A glimpse of *Maare* song from the story of beginning of the universe is given below

‘jauwe jauwe ghor gosani
tor gorbhot barhibo paas khetor
paas khetore khabo puja kheti pothare
toi ghoroni khabi puja ghoror bhitore’ (Informant²)

i.e., deity, *Shiva* blesses *Ghorgosani* that she will give birth to five sons. All her five sons will be offered puja in open field by the devotees. She will be worshiped at home by her devotees.

Cultural significance: The *Maare* songs used by the Rabha *Ojhapali* are the images of Rabha culture. The language, tune and creative style are purely of the taste of the Pati Rabhas of south Kamrup area. From this aspect it can be said that *Maare* songs are composed by some ardent Pati Rabha devotees who worship goddess, *Manasha*. Because, the language as mentioned above used in *Maare* songs is Rabhamese; which is the language of communication for the Pati Rabhas. Besides the religious and mythical fervors, *Maare* songs shed light on the ancient society of South Kamrup area as well as the life styles of the people. Because, some parts of the stories related to merchant *Chando* in the *Maare* songs, narrate minute things related to that period. Even, the gods and goddesses in the *Maare* songs are designed in the attire of Pati Rabha people busy with household activities. One example is given below

‘*Ghorgosani kaate xuta
gohain ye jorai
hen kale jaai durga
bera bhonglai sai*’ (Borah, 2019, reprint: 21)

i.e., Goddess, *Ghorgosani* is producing cotton thread to make clothes and lord *Shiva* is helping her. Goddess, *Durga* peeps in through the hole of the clay wall and sees *Shiva*. The above extract of *Maare* song sheds light on two important aspects of the folk life of the Pati Rabhas; one is the weaving skills of the women and the other is the bamboo based housing pattern of the Pati Rabhas.

Affinities and Variances between *Bogejari* songs and *Maare* songs: As genres of folk songs of the Pati Rabhas, both *Bogejari* songs and *Maare* songs have importance in the folk life of the Pati Rabhas. Both these genres reflect many issues related to their folk life. *Bogejari* and *Maare*, both are sung in *Rabhamese*, which is the medium of communication of the Pati Rabhas. But, both these genres have variances in terms of structure and mode of performance. From the above study, the variances can be jotted down in the following points,

- i) In structure, *Bogejari* songs are found in quatrain verse form. On the other hand, *Maare* songs are kind of long narrative poems.
- ii) *Bogejari* songs shed light on historical aspects of the Pati Rabhas and are based on legend. But, *Maare* songs are basically based on myths available among the Pati Rabhas.
- iii) *Deodhani* and *Ojhapali* are integral parts of the *Maare* songs. But, *Bogejari* song does entertain neither *Deodhani* nor *Ojhapali*.

- iv) *Bogejari* songs can be performed at any time in a year. It has no religious implication. On the other hand, *Maare* songs are performed only in *Maare puja* once in a year, generally, in the month of *Jeth* (April- May).
- v) *Bogejari* songs can be sung by any Pati Rabha. But, *Maare* song can be performed by *Ojhapali* and *Deodhani* only.

Conclusion: Both *Bogejari* songs and *Maare* songs have significance and importance as folk performing art among the Pati Rabhas. *Bogejari* songs can be sung and performed by any Pati Rabha at any moment or at any happy or funny occasion. The Pati Rabhas have no recorded history. In this aspect, *Bogejari* songs can shed light on the royal legacy of the Pati Rabhas of distant past. Moreover, *Bogejari* songs bring forth various elements related to the folk life of the Pati Rabhas. These songs are still popular among Pati Rabha community. *Maare* songs can only be performed in *Maare puja* and that to be with certain religious norms. *Maare* songs shed light on religious myths available among the Pati Rabha folk. To some extent, *Maare* songs portray beautiful pictures of the folk life of the Pati Rabhas. It is a matter of great concern that the performers of *Maare* songs are rapidly decreasing. In our conversation with renowned *Maare Ojha*, Mr. Kanak Rabha (age: 77 years), he expresses his worry and agony that boys from new generations are reluctant to learn this performing art. A number of *Maare* songs have already been disappeared and lost. Some others are on the verge of extinction. In this aspect the Pati Rabha folk and other concerned have a pivotal role to save this rare genre of folk songs and performing art. There is abundance of data to be explored in the folksongs and folk life of the Pati Rabhas for a cultural researcher. This study may also be helpful for a folklore researcher who might be interested in the folk life of this sub-group of the Rabhas.

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List of Informants

Informant¹: Mr.JitenRabha, age- 55, vill- Ouphula, Bamunigaon, Kamrup, Assam, collected on 2/1/2021

Informant²: Mr.BhubinRabha, age- 72, vill- Bagan, Mirza, Kamrup, Assam, collected on 3/1/ 2018

Informant³: Mr. Utpal Rabha, age-40, vill- Lampara, Boko, Kamrup, Assam, collected on 19/01/ 2019

Mr. Kanak Rabha, age- 77, vill- Dhupdhara, Goalpara, collected on 05/05/ 2017