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FOLKLORE OF ASSAMESE MUSLIM

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ABSTRACT

The Assamese Muslims share large forms of oral literature, material culture, social folk customs and performing folk arts with other indigenous communities, especially with the Hindus of Assam. In this context it needs to be stated here that the vocabulary of the Assamese Muslims of Assam, like other Assamese Muslims of parts of Assam, contains a large number of Arabic, Persian and Urdu words. Even if the exact meanings of these words are not known to majority of the Assamese Muslims, they can follow their sense.

Keywords: Assamese, Ballad, Culture, Festival, Folksong, Folklore, Muslim, Riddle.

INTRODUCTION

This is due to the fact that many Arabic, Persian and Urdu words have been using by the Assamese Muslims through generations. Some forms of folklore of the Assamese Muslims of Assam also contain a few Arabic, Persian and Urdu words. While a few such words have remained intact, some others are derivations. Such folklore containing Arabic, Persian and Urdu words are only a few in number.

FOLKSONG

The various folksongs prevalent among the Assamese Muslims of Assam mention may be made of Fakir Ali geet, dhek and sera dhek, jikir, biyapad, Oja geet (songs to appease the Goddess of pox), Kitab porha, etc. In the south-western most part of Assam, the Assamese Muslim womenfolk sing Fakir Ali geet on every Thursday and Friday in the similar tune of Oja-pali. A few lines of Fakir Ali geet are mentioned below:

O' Maulaji ashman sua jamin sua sua agnir pani
Ashman khan soudikehi kala kala nohoi kon khini
Sol jai mosin Chandor ghare
O' Maulaji kaya dekhe say a utha sarboloke jane
Hazarat na Fatema say a nasil ki karone
Sol jai mosin Chandor ghare
O' Maulaji sukurbare jumma namaz khunu najir hoi
Ki karane pukmapure nasil sarboloke jane
Sol jai mosin Chandor ghare
Hazarat Fatemar biyat uphal hoilla konjona
Tel nai sailta nai khudar roushan jale
Bina tele jail ase khudar roushan jale
Sol jai mosin Chandor ghare ^
Ashman keitola jamin keitola
Ashman jamin kei rati din kei rati
Sol jai mosin Chandor ghare

(This song is sung in praise of Allah and in praise of Hazarat Fatema - the mother of Hassan and Hussain and the daughter of Prophet Muhammad).

Dhek and sera dhek are special kind of folk songs prevalent among the Assamese Muslim of Assam. A general meaning of the term dhek is to hum a time continuously and this humming resembles the raga and raginis of the Bihar Ojapali. On the other hand in the case of sera dhek besides humming, songs are also sung. The sera dhek center round the philosophy of Islam. For example:



Allah Allah bola bhai
Nabir name sar
Nabir Kalima parha
Hoia jaba par

(Chant the name of Allah and Prophet Muhammad and read the Kalima, that will help to reach the heaven)

Jikirs, the devotional songs of the Assamese Muslims, are also prevalent among the Assamese Muslims of Assam. But these Muslims while sing jikirs do not dance like the Assamese Muslims of Naharani, Jajori and Konwarpur in Upper Assam. Of late, jikirs have become popular among the Muslims of Assam due primarily to the expansion of network of communications especially with regard to radio and television. It needs to be pointed out here that many of the sera dheks prevalent among the Assamese Muslims are nothing but jikirs composed by Azan Fakir. Like the Assamese Hindus, a large number of marriage songs are also prevalent among the Assamese Muslims. Many of these songs are also sung by both the groups during marriage ceremony. In the following, we have presented a few marriage songs prevalent among the Assamese Muslims of Assam. These songs contain certain Arabic, Persian and Urdu words which is indicative of the fact that these marriage songs are sung by the Muslims only:

(i) Ai Banu bapekar aderi
Ai Banu ke mor kune
Loye jai oi Allah

(In this song it is said that the girl who is married away is dearer to her father).

(ii) O' bukur bapei
Durute nidiba ntkah
Ahote jaute bhariye bisabo
Maribo godhuli pua

(In this song the girl has asked her father not to marry her far away).

(iii) Ga dhui yaran sutale thiya
Bapekok sudha goi
Ki sari pindhabo tai
Gate tukua botahot sukuwa
Sei sari pindhabo pai

(The bride after the bath has come to the courtyard: asked her father what type of sari she will wear).

(iv) Anisu surpat
Lowah jonab
Bismillah buli
Khowah jonab

(This is a groom receiving song; the groom has been offered soft drink and he has been asked to take it in the name of Allah.) We have already pointed out that the ainams prevalent in Assam are the songs to appease the Goddess Sitala (the Goddess of pox). The Muslims of Assam also sing a kind of song to appease the Goddess of pox. Among the Muslims such songs are popularly referred to as Oja-geet.

To cure illness and disease and also during various family crises, generally individual households invite a Maulabi for recitation from the Koran. This is locally known as Koran parhua. The singing sessions, known as Kitab porha, prevalent among the Assamese Muslims of Assam are like jaris. The jaris are popular forms of religious songs prevalent among Muslims in different parts of India. These songs describe the history of Islam, teaching of Islam, life of Prophet Muhammad, Bibi Fatema and Hassan-Hussain. The Jaris composed centering the story of Karbala are popular among the Muslims all over the world. The various events of Islamic history have been written in Bengali in puthis which played a significant role in the spread of Islam in Bengal during the nineteenth century. The Muslims of Assam sing these Bengali puthis during marriage and other household functions. This act of singing of the puthis is



popularly known as kitab porha among the Assamese Muslims of Assam. Among these Muslims the Bengali puthis which describe the story of Hassan-Hussain, Amir-Hamza, Usuf-Julekha and Sonabhanu are very popular. Since the overwhelming majority of these Muslims could not read and write Arabic, Persian and Urdu, these puthis written in Bengali had been an effective medium to introduce these Muslims to the doctrines of Islam, Islamic history, life and works of Prophet Muhammad and so on.

BALLAD

While discussing the ballads prevalent in Assam, we have referred to one of the popular ballads known as Digiri Pukhuri Geet. This ballad is equally popular both among the indigenous Hindus and Muslims of the study area. However, it is to be noted here that there are certain minor variations in the wordings of the same ballad prevalent among the Muslims and the Hindus. In the following we have presented the ballad indicating the variations in the wordings. The wordings in the lines within the brackets are sung by the Assamese Muslims and the immediately preceding lines are sung by the Hindus:

Nanglar age rajai pukhuri khandila
 Ram bola he o' Ram
 (.Bhal bola he o' rajai)
 Pukhuri khandirajai panike napala
 Ram bola he o' Ram
 (Bhal bola he o' rajai)
 Pukhurir pare rajai anek phulu rula
 Teuto Digit rajai muih boli dila
 (Digirpare rajai sinni randhi.dila)
 Teuto Digit rajai panike napala
 Akhar randhan akhate thakila
 Kolar soli aphilai pelala
 Salor kapur ajuri singila
 Olal kunweri Digiri pujiba
 (Olal kunweri Digirit namiba)

The above ballad clearly indicates the two forms prevalent one among the Hindus and the other among the Muslims. In the case of the Muslims Ram bola he o' Ram has been replaced by Bhal bola he o' rajai; Digirpare ra ai muih boli dila is replaced by Digirpare rajai sinni (consecrated rice) randhi dila, and Olal kunweri Digiri pujiba is replaced by Olal kunweri Digirit namiba. Another ballad is prevalent among the Muslims of Assam. This ballad is popularly referred to as Farmud Pomilar Geet which is generally sung by the Muslim women. The setting of the story which is described in this ballad is a large village called Nagarbahi which is situated in the north-west of Mangaldai town, Nagarbahi consists of altogether seven small villages. There are two small villages Kanaichuba and Bazpara within Nagarbahi which are closely situated to one another. The inhabitants of Kanaichuba are Assamese Muslims and of Bezpara are Assamese Hindus. Farmud was a Muslim boy who belonged to Kanaichuba and Pomila was a Hindu girl lived in Bezpara. They fell in love with one another. Since their affair was frowned upon by both the Hindus and the Muslims, one day both Farmud and Pomila ran away from home to a nearby dense forest in which they stayed for sometime. During this period they were provided with meals without the knowledge of other villagers by their friends who knew that they were living together in the forest. Unfortunately, one day both Farmud and Pomila were attacked by a wild tiger and were killed. When the friends of Pomila came to know about her affair they started teasing them in the following manner:

Sakhi pranor sakhi
 Monor katha kabi
 Dighal photar Bamun matim ne
 Dighal darir Maulabi



Since the affair between Farmud and Pomila was frowned upon by both the Hindus and the Muslims, the episode took a critical turn and the hope of Farmud-Pomila's marriage became impossible. Hence, the friends of Pomila sang in dismay in the following manner:

Pomila ajatik sinili
Pomila ajatik mon dili
Pomila debar paka mewa
Pomila ajatik jashili
Pomila aponar gharkhan
Pomila ghurike nasali

When people came to know that Farmud and Pomila were killed by tiger, the friends of Pomila expressed their sorrow in the following manner:

Pomila Farmudur lagote
Pomila ghar eri geli
Pomila Farmudur lagote
Pomila gaon eri geli
Pomila gadhenir habite
Pomila Farmudur lagote
Pomila banrajar petoke geli

The friend s o f Pomila blamed Farmud for what had happened to both o f them and sang in the following manner:

Farmud adharani Farmud jahannami
Kia toi Pomilak nili
Gharu napeli tiri napeli.
Nije bagharpetok geli

In this ballad there are three words which were originally Arabic and Persian. These words are Maulabi (priest), mewa (fruit) and jahannami (he who goes to hell). The ballad known as Jana-Gabharur Geet, is also popular among the Muslims and more particularly so among the Marias. It has been stated by B aruah (1989: 81) that Jana-Gabharur Geet has resemblances to 'Gul-O-Sonauwar' - an ancient Persian ballad which was translated into Hindi by Nemchand and

in 1857 it was translated into Bengali by Muhammad Danesh.

PROVERB AND RIDDLE

The various proverbs and riddles prevalent in Assam are also popular among the Assamese Muslims. In the course of fieldwork, the following proverbs and riddles were collected from among the Assamese Muslims. These proverbs and riddles are also equally popular among the Assamese Hindus of the study area.

PROVERBS

Bhajeni buli anilu tok
Aharor panta saonat khuweli
Jubura logeli mok

(In this proverb the mother-in-law is accusing her daughter-in-law for serving rotten food which has caused illness to the mother-in-law)

Ketok dekfu randhei barhei
Ketok dekhi duwctr jopawe

(This proverb reflects the attitude of the host to the guest. It says that some guests are well received and some are not).

Ajala buli anilu sai
Satdina mora manuh tui
Dameritu khai

(This proverb is relating to the nature of daughter-inlaw. It says that the daughter-in-law initially appeared to be innocent, but she was actually not).

RIDDLES

Upi upi batote ase supi
(someone hiding by the road side)
Answer: Leach.
Maiekto jopora jupura
Putakto sonar tukura
(The mother is indecent but the son is glittering)
Answer: Chilly
Ag tita guri mou
Ki karisa bhobeli bou
(The tip is bitter and the base is sweet)
Answer: Sugarcane



MATERIAL CULTURE

The tools and implements for tilling, ploughing, harvesting, thrashing and fishing possessed by the Hindus and Muslims are identical. We have already mentioned their names. In the same manner the implements used for storing and utensils for cooking are also identical for both the communities. Like their Hindu neighbours, boiled rice is also staple food of Muslims. The food habit of the Muslims of Mangaldai area does not materially differ from that of the neighbouring Hindus. Like the Hindus, the Muslims also take their breakfast of sandah (flour of roasted rice) or chira (flattened rice) or pitha (pan cake). In so far as the dress pattern of the Assamese Muslims of Assam is concerned, the rural Muslims wear lungi as domestic apparel. Some of them also wear dhoti while at home or outside. The Assamese Muslim women wear mekhala-chaddar (traditional Assamese female dress) either at home or at outside. In so far as the Muslim girls are concerned, frock is common up to 10 to 12 years of age. Beyond that age they wear mekhela-chaddar, sari, blouse or stalwart kameez.

FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

The Assamese Muslims of Assam generally take part in the melas held in connection with various festivals of Mangaldai area about which we have referred to earlier. This is more particularly evident during the melas held in connection with Deul and Paseti festivals. During the Maghor Domehi, the Muslim young boys also like their Hindu counterparts construct meji and take feast. During Boihagor Domehi various pithas are also prepared by the Muslim womenfolk. Among the Muslims Id-Ul-Fitre and Id-Uz-Zoha are the two important festivals during which mass prayers are held. The first one is held after a month's fasting in the month of Ramjan (the ninth Islamic month). Id-Uz-Zohais observed on the occasion of

Hajpilgrimage (one day after the date of Haj). This festival is observed in the month of Jelhajj (the twelfth Islamic month). In addition to these two important festivals, the Muslims also observe some other festivals like Muharam (observed in honour of the martyrs of Karbala); Fateha- I-Doaz-Daham (observed to rejoice the birth of Prophet Muhammad in the third Islamic month Rabi-Ul-Awal); Shabe Barat (observed in the eighth Islamic month Shavan) and so on. In these festivals, generally community prayers are held in the mosques. Milad-Sharifs (recitation from the Holy Koran in congregation) are also held in the mosques during these festivals. The prayers are followed by distribution of pithas or sinnis among the Muslims who assemble for the prayers.

CONCLUSION

So far some aspects of folklore of the Muslims of Mangaldai area have been touched upon. The preceding discussion implies that the Assamese Muslims share many forms of folklore and folk life of Mangaldai along with their Hindu neighbors.

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