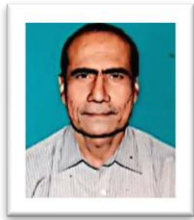


The past of Purulia speaks: Verbal Discourses, Folk Song & History

Abstract

In ancient societies, the technologies of writing and print were unfamiliar to the people, which was a general phenomenon of the past. So the discourses they have produced, mostly were unwritten and based on oral tradition; which along with the written sources of the history; could be used as one of the greatest tools to discover the various unsolved questions of the society and culture. Even though at times, imagination is superposed upon these, still realities are perceptible very easily. Present research scheme is an attempt to study the society and culture of a Bengal district Purulia (Westernmost district of state of West Bengal), in historical perspective through the lenses of folk songs of the region.

Keywords: Verbal Discourses; Purulia; Folk Culture; Oral Poetry; Folk Song; Banglar Lokosahitya; Jharkhander Lokosahitya, Ahira; Bandhna, Karam-Jawa Festival; Dash avatar; Parsha Ekadashi; Shabda Brhama, Bura Bhagwan, Manbhum, Tusu Satyagraha.



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Introduction

The task of traditional history writing usually have commenced with the confirmation of authenticity of the written documents by the historian. Consequently the establishment of that authenticity leads to the internal analysis of the content of the said documents. The situation differs altogether when a historian primarily deals with the oral tradition. Though a tiny part of oral tradition may also be finds in recorded version but that certainly not enough, rather most of the part comes to the historian as the form of verbal discourses, and the historian should have to record this living tradition with view to the logical establishment of history. This tradition embodied to the historian through performances of various kinds; such as Storytelling, Singing, and Dancing etc. The umbrella under whose shade these performances have nurtured, called folk culture. The culture of the folk or the commoners. As an arena of study folk culture are vast and complicated, even a part of it, the folk song, is immeasurable. In order to comprehend its enormity to understand social history and culture of a particular region, I have examined here some of the folk songs, (collected through field study); which aptly would portray a panorama of history of the commoners.

Study Duration:

September, 2017 to November, 2017.

The Research objectives chiefly include:

1. The Folk traditions are mostly unwritten and based on oral tradition, so to valued the oral tradition through the academics of history; this research scheme is framed.
2. To understand the role of the folk songs, in evaluating the overall local history with special reference to Purulia; is one of the chief inspiration behind it. Moreover it would possibly be articulate an investigation on the literary, artistic and linguistic values of folk song.
3. By analyzing folk song and peripheral literatures; the present project would further accomplish the socio-anthropological study of this region. In fact this project altogether has designed to study a part of folk literature with a progressive vision of enhancing the scope of inter-disciplinary studies.

Review of Literature

The oral discourses have been centre of many studies of literature, social sciences etc. till 1960, starting with works like Albert. B. Lord's "The Singer of Tales"¹ etc. Other important contribution relating to such studies in international academic arena are, J.C.Miller, (ed.) The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History² and John. Vansina, Oral Tradition³ (London, 1985) etc. I have found a recent article

centered on the particular topic, based on the African country Nigeria, namely "Edo Folk Songs as Source of Historical Reconstruction"⁴ by Charles O. Aluede and Abu A. Braimah. Though the studies cited above mostly centered on the oral literature and history of the Africa; but articulate the progress of the present research. The book of Vansina particularly, is an epoch making contribution in this field. It successfully creates a bridge between the study of the oral history, anthropology and folk lore. Moreover the author has spontaneous to suggest a number of good and practical academic advices relating to this genre of history, which enhanced my scope of research.

Concerning the national level, no attempt has been made so far to find the socio-cultural history of the any particular region, through the lenses of folk song. But a number of pioneering works so far produced by a number of scholars of international repute mainly centered on the overall analysis of the folk song. For example, Verrier Elwin, a noted anthropologist, ethnologist and tribal activist, jotted down his work in a compilation entitled "Folk Songs of Chattisgarh"⁵. Asutosh Bhattacharya was another ardent scholar of Folklore and authored famous books on various aspects of Folk culture like "Bangalar Lokosahitya"⁶ etc. In the works of Asutosh Bhattacharya a holistic account of rich and assorted tradition of folk art, oral literature, myths and mythology, religion and magic, fairs and festivals, customs and social milieu of the province is reflected as a whole but region specific deeper probe was beyond the scope of discussion. On the contrary, Bankimchandra Mahato has tried to find out the regional identity of Jharkhand in his book namely "Jharkhand Lokosahitya"⁷. The works of Mr. Mahato is more helpful to study the folk culture of Purulia; though not the history of Purulia through the lenses of folk song. However the above mentioned few out of the many published literature are unique of its genre and mostly have no connection to the historical study through the lenses of folk culture or folk music in and around Purulia. Hence a deeper probe of the proposed research scheme would bring these neglected academics of local history onto the light by using the oral literary source.

The main stream discussion of present treatise primarily should demand the spelling out of four components; namely: i) The oral tradition, ii) The folk song iii) The identity of Purulia, and iv) How these could be mechanized the understanding of the local history of Purulia.

The oral tradition comprises of information alive in reminiscence. Most of the time it drown into memory; but sometimes with the requirements of moment some parts are evoked. By incorporating all the information it formed a depository which engulfed the whole of hereditary culture; at the same time this depository is indispensable to the continuity of culture and the reproduction of society from generation after generation. Simultaneously its greatness mostly depends on the fact that, here "the item is remembered not dreamt or fantasized"⁸. The passion can on time be flawed but similarly it grips the true spirit of tradition. It is an activity based on process of

recollect; which in turn based on recreation of the past. It cannot be used only with the motivation for collection of information; rather it could be implemented by demand of the circumstances for rebuilding the part of past. Noted scholar J.Vansina defined oral tradition in this fashion, "...oral traditions as verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation."⁹ These messages formed with shape of spoken account, harmonic or called out on tuneful instruments only. Although "...all oral sources are not oral tradition"; as professor Vansina observed again. Rather a true oral tradition "must be transmission by word of mouth over at least a generation". Simultaneously he suggests that it must not be "just narratives";¹⁰ rather Oral folk traditions is a mindful historical proclamation. One who socializes it actually wants to converse the past to the audience. As J.C Miller observes, "Oral tradition is a narrative describing or imply to describe eras before the time of the person who relates it."¹¹ He again opine that, such statements in essence is very stereotype or clichés, which kept own stability through times and remain unchanged which historian must have to decipher. But Vansina deviate with and opines that, the "Traditions need not be clichés or narratives, nor is the conscious intent to testify about the past necessary. Much can be learned about the past from oral sources that are not concerned with the past and testify despite themselves."¹²

Oral poetry is the major and one of the finest sub categories of oral folk literature. Most often the folk song can alone be designated as the oral poetry. In short the song belongs to the folk' or lok' can call 'folk song' in English and 'lok geet' in many of the Indian languages, including Bengali. Alike other branches of oral poetry, folk song are also a creation of society as verbal discourses, which experienced simplicity and first hand interaction of society-nature combination. In broad sense of history it has also an inclination towards the history of peoples. Hence we must have plunge deep into the folk song to understand the socio-cultural history of the locality. However folk song in composition bears the information of its creator, as well as, it has own story, all are an essential viable particle for reconstruction of history centered on socio-cultural, eco-political, ethnic and local genre. Moreover its lyrics, use of phrases and language may inculcate the history of language or music etc. But the researchers would have to be cautious from the constriction of verbal discourses. As, occasionally it twisted through times. Overstatement is very commonly used in the folk song and other oral art; which plays a threat to the truth. This inadequacy has posed hindrance while reconstructing history. To treat them as a source, a historian must have a propensity towards a comparative study of the songs, other literature or contemporary statements and even with the related artifacts; and the historian is even with the help of philologist may have to sterilized the languages. One more task lies upon the historian is while writing main stream history by using the folk songs or ballad, have to be alert to mistakenly enter into the arena of music history. In fact music history is a different genre.

However folk music is music mostly of the people by the people and for the people, which includes the tells, hopes, despair, deeds of common men. Lomax and Lomax said "the gamut of human experience has been portrayed through this...literature of the people."¹³

Purulia is the westernmost district of state of West Bengal. When in 1947 the India have earned its independence from the British colonialist; present day district of Purulia was only a part of district of Manbhum in the province of Bihar, had positioned over the eastern part of Chotanagpur division.¹⁴ The district of Manbhum actually had been curved out from the district of Jangalmahal; which earlier have established by the EIC by enacting 18th regulation of 1805. Again the Britishers divided the district Jangalmahal in 1833, to keep hold over the territory after the menace of 'Ganganarayan Hangama' of 1832. Thus with the promulgation of 13th regulation of 1833 South-west Frontier Agency came into existence with its headquarter at Manbazar from 1833-38; and thereafter from 1838 the headquarter was shifted to Purulia. Consequently after a series of administrative evolution and measures in 1871, 1873 and 1879; a part of South-West Frontier Agency was re-named as district of Manbhum.¹⁵ From the birth of Manbhum a lingual tyranny was there, which severally protested by the Bengali leaders before independent. India got independence in 1947. National leaders were not in favor of the linguistic state for independent India. Linguistic Provinces Commission was vehemently opposed those ideas.¹⁶ Though under the pressure from southern states, central govt. have lastly admitted such demands. In 1953; a State Re-organization Commission was formed to judge over the issues and such possibilities. Thus famous 'Tusu Satyagraha'¹⁷ along the Gandhian path of Ahimsa and Satyagraha have been started. Number of songs composed with tunes of Tusu songs were sung replete with the ideas of protest of Hindi aggression and the justification of annexation of the Manbhum with Bengal. Under pressure from various corner of the country; the govt. had compelled to formulate some linguistic states. Hence the State Re-Organization Commission has enacted the 'Bihar-West Bengal Transfer of Territories Act' and the district of Purulia was born on 1st November, 1956; consequently it was integrated with the West Bengal. Purulia Sub-Division of erstwhile Manbhum district except the territories under the Chas and Chandil Thana [presently in Jharkhand] and the areas under the Patamda outpost [presently in state of Jharkhand] came to be known as the district of Purulia.¹⁸

A major part of the society of the Purulia is as old as its natural geographical features and obviously it also bears immense experience which is aptly reflected in the folk song, which in turn can be used for historical interpretation of the evolution of civilization in this region. To elaborate the proposed ideas, I like to cite here two folk songs from two different categories, first one associated with the religious festival of 'Bandhna'¹⁹; and impregnated with the ideas of evolution of the universe. On the other

hand, second one a song of entertainment but having a close socio-political contemporariness.

The first song cited hereunder, a popular 'Ahira'²⁰ song connected with the 'Bandhna' festival of Purulia; which used to sing to praise the 'Supreme Being' or the creator of the universe. The 'Supreme Being' popularly known as the 'Bura Bhagwan' (The great old god) is worshipped by the common folk of indigenous origin during various occasion in expectation that he would ensure a rich production. This 'Bura Bhagwan', alike 'Brahma' of the mainstream Hindu mythology, is the architect of universe, hence is the 'Supreme Being'. In one of the nice 'Ahira' song the poet have depicted the creation of the universe with following brilliant lines:

1) e;çq çRm BçN , e;çq çRm the
e;çq çRm lpdJam , nhçqy çaWu
hæt; iNh;e N , ünÑjaÑÉ Lçlm çpiSe z

(Nahi Chilo Agi / Nahi Chilo Paban / Nahi Chilo Rasadharatal / Shobdehi Titohey / Buda Bhagawan Go / Swargamortyo Karilo Srijan)²¹

Certainly the storyline has a clear resemblance with that of the Biblical statements of creation of the universe;²² as well as the Hindu mythological statements coupled with the 'Dashavatar' theory of god Vishnu. According to Hindu mythological beliefs; once during the creation of the world, a profuse flood was there; there was no traces of land; the only life alive was the god Vishnu in the disguise of fish.²³ Eventually the day of initiation of Karam puja²⁴ of this region usually observed on the 'Parsha Ekadashi' which according to Hindu myth is the day when Lord Vishnu after a prolonged sleep have changed his posture of sleeping. The 'Bura Bhagwan' in Karam Puja has termed as the 'Karam Raja'; the connotation is same as the 'Bura Bhagwan'. However the existence of 'Bura Bhagwan' in sound, as cited in the songs mentioned earlier, too had resemblance with Hindu mythology; as there is a theory of 'Shabda Brhama'²⁵ in Hindu scripture which speaks the origin of universe from sound bears sameness with the theory of 'Big Bang'²⁶. Hence the references of this song are a clear indication of the creation of universe and on the other hand the reciprocal relation of the main stream Hindu mythology and the tribal mythology.

The second song a popular entertainment song and comparatively modern in reference to the earlier one. Moreover the contemporariness of the content, the concern of the folk poet on the national issue have drawn our attention; in reality the geographical estrangement have seldom provoked them to think about the greater issues; a general psychological confinement due to such geographical estrangement have prevent them to react on such a great issue of high repute. However the song is as follows:

2) ph;C M;im Ly¥-s kçç çL Lçl-hÉL Cç¼cl; N;ã£,
-RmÉ; SeË;u çXP;UÙ çcm i;l-a,
çL L-lÉ L¥m;h-ÉL i;-a ?

(Sabai khal kunre jodi, ki korbek Indira Gandhi/ Cheylya Janmaye Dingeye dilo Bharat-a / Ki kore kulabek bhate?/)²⁷

The poet criticizes the manner of the peoples; who, disobeyed the restriction, imposed by the state for child birth or maintain family planning by restricting the birth of child in two. Hence the explosions of population have threatened India. The poet vehemently criticize the act of the people and narrates the helplessness of the govt. if the peoples have tender their non cooperation with any of the govt. project, it could have to be face an utter failure. Exactly it was happened in case of the family planning drives of the govt. of India. In 1975 25th June, the state of emergency was imposed on India. It was existed till 21st March 1977 for a period of twenty one months. Several violations of civil liberties were held during this period, among them imprisonment of opponents, censorship on press were mostly notorious. One of the much debatable measures have adopted along the line; forced mass sterilization campaign spearheaded by Sanjoy Gandhi, younger son of the Mrs. Indira Gandhi. This campaign finds mention in this song. The venture have started on the April, 1975 with a declared objectives to reduce the India's population ; but the hoax lies here that the emergency regime had forcefully compelled people to be sterilized; the propaganda and offerings of monetary benefits by the govt. have mechanized the process and altogether corrupted the issue.²⁸ However ultimately the program turned out to be a failed one; and the responsibility chiefly goes to the Sanjoy Gandhi.²⁹ Apart the brutality and force for sterilization, the campaign made on, have left huge effect over the psyche of the peoples; and even some time that effect and attitude of the peoples goes positive. Particularly a section of peoples having tired with the so called myth of population explosion have robustly supported the initiative. Some other with strong political bias over the Congress party and specifically the Nehruvian ancestry of the Indira and Sanjoy Gandhi; have vehemently supported the move. Some other goes with by realizing the fact from the point of view of calculative govt. propaganda. Probably our composer of this song was one of them; his tones unhesitatingly have spoken that he supporting the move of the govt. for the betterment of the peoples. Especially the India being a poverty stricken nation has always scared off the hunger, the shortage of food. The peoples from Purulia from time immemorial, have witnessed that plight due to its natural inheritance of drought, scarcity of food, famine etc. So the peoples from Purulia had turned up positively with that move; in anticipation that it would curtail the population, thus the foodstuffs the Purulia have produced, would become adequate for the population. Noteworthy the folk have such trend to come with the popular and easier point of understanding, most often they have failed to look after the hard truth lies inside the fact. Hence the local poet supports the move and blamed the peoples for not having the family planning by means of sterilization or other else; and thereby debarred govt. to sponsored welfare to the mass or the country.

Concept and Hypothesis

1. This research should enable us to understand the Oral tradition and cause of its existence; salient features it bears and the role played to study

socio-cultural and eco-political history of a particular locality. So by virtue of this research the discipline of social studies may get some new theories and information, which in turn will strengthen the academics of oral history.

2. This research would have enhanced the possibility to understand the capability of folk song as the interpreter of history in general.
3. Analysis of folk song brings out unique, new and unexampled features of socio cultural history of Purulia, WB; hence enriched the research on local history.
4. By virtue of analysis of various kinds of folk songs, the literary and linguistic value of oral literature and languages might speculate.

Research Design

Present research scheme as centered on the oral literature; so the investigation was started chiefly by collecting the popular folk songs and inquiring people for bringing out resemblances and differences of particular song or the tale and legend around the song. Particular emphasis was given to understand the folk festival on which the songs were mostly connected. After this a thorough analysis carried out for understanding the uniqueness, new and unexampled features of socio-cultural history of Purulia .These new and unexampled features are sometime the way of life they live, their struggle for existence, religion , love marriage and sexual life, finding the existence of god and other related religious diversities, social customs and practices. The opinions of other researchers, poets-writers-artists and other learned persons were interviewed and had been taken into considerations to understand the mutual relation of the present study and their thoughts. Hence the sources to be used for proposed research would chiefly revolve around primary sources. In addition to that, the survey of secondary sources have proved competent to enhance the scope of understanding, which chiefly included books, journals on folk culture and songs of West Bengal.

Findings, Conclusion and Suggestions

So the above discussion has clearly suggested that; the folk has the potential to graph their experiences in their oral literature. The experiences they have gather mostly sterilized with their beliefs and own world view; which have a clear disparity with traditional world views of the urban peoples. A psychosomatic mind-set enrooted in archaical domain has moved their ideas of understanding. That's the reason, while thinking about the projection of forced sterilization on mass in India; narrated in song number two, they have just omitted the concept of 'force' and 'monetary inducement' by the govt.; rather they were intended to illuminate it from their understanding from the point of view of curtailment of the population, which in turn helps the country to evade shortage of foodstuffs and other civic facilities. Similarly in song number one, the folk in accordance with their standard of understanding have acknowledged the creation of the universe through a 'Big Bang'. Consequently their perceptive of the existence of the 'Bura Bhagwan' in the sound; having a clear resemblance of the cultural text of the religious

elites of the world; though with an indigenous manner and idioms.

In this fashion this paper, has accomplish its declared aims to open out the subverted meaning and historical significances of folk songs of Purulia and to judge it's potential as close associate of the oral discourses. The oral tradition is a depository of a sizable part of hereditary culture; eventually this depository is indispensable to the continuity and reproduction of the culture from generation after generation. The beliefs, the emotions, the social ties, the politics of state and the peoples and particularly the real life realization of the peoples, embodied in the folk song, could altogether formed the pavement for research on socio-cultural history of the locals. The songs and customs jointly reflect various hidden social beliefs, trauma, dilemma, irrationality and rationality of the folk. The collective memory of past have found deep-seated in those songs and customs. Hence such songs as illustrious of the hidden clue for history; and creator of a strong consciousness among the folk regarding the do's and don'ts, the customs, tradition and other social institution, in turn could help us to find out legislation and other mechanism for the organization of social morals and justices; and thereby maintain the social equilibrium. In fact the oral tradition and it's various branches like folk song etc. have not only provides the first hand historical information; but it can be act as spiritual and moral pathfinder for the future society. Moreover the study on this direction of "oral tradition—folk song—history"; may be rejuvenate the writings of local history in India. Till date no such scheme on particular bias has been prompted at least in Bengal; and obviously in Purulia. Hence present researcher has intended to draw the attention of the scholar to entice towards such scheme.

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16. Bhattacharyya, Tarunde, (1986), *Purulia, Kolikata*, p. 26.
17. 'Tusu Satyagraha' (1948-1956) : At the time of independence, the Purulia as a territory of the Manbhum district was the part of Bihar. The govt. of Bihar had imposed various restrictions on the Bengali languages and forcible imposed the Hindi over the majority Bengali speaking peoples of Purulia. The opposition came from the Bengalis; which culminated the birth of Purulia district and its annexation with the West Bengal. During the movements a number of protestant songs were composed in accordance with the tune and lyrical mood of 'Tusu song'. The 'Tusu' is a popular deity of regional agro-religion origin, the observation of 'Tusu Puja' has used to perform with special types of folk song, called 'Tusu song'. On the other hand the movement was designed along the ideology of 'Ahimsa' (non-violence) and 'Satyagraha' (Passion for truth) of Mahatma Gandhi. Hence the movement was named after the 'Tusu Satyagraha'.
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19. Bandhna: A festival of felicitation of the cow and buffalos. Used to celebrate on the night of the 'Kartiki Amabasya' (Bengali month of Kartik / month of October-November) in Bengal Jharkhand and Bihar. The famous 'Kali Puja' festival of Bengal also was carrying out on that

- day. The word 'Bandhna' derived from the word 'Bandana' denotes 'Felicitation'.
20. 'Ahira': The tune of the songs of 'Bandhna', and sometimes the songs of 'Bandhna' is called 'Ahira'. The name probably derived from the title of 'Ahir' of the north Indian Gowala (milker) community.
 21. There were no fire, nor any wind, neither any piece of lands were there. The Supreme Being or Bura Bhagwan was in disguise of sound, have created the earth and the heaven.
 22. The Noah's Ark/en.m.wikipedia.org.
 23. Dash avatar / en.m.wikipedia.org. & Vishnu / bbc.co.uk.
 24. Karam Puja: Karam is an agro-religious festival of W. Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and MP etc. The Karam-Devta and his insignia, a twig of Karam Tree, used to worship for a month and the main festival observed on the day of 'Parshwa Ekadashi', 11th day of full moon in the Bengali month of Bhadra (August-September).
 25. Shabda Brhama: "The Supreme Being consisting of sound only" {Biswas, Sailendra and others [compiled by] (9Sept.2015), Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary, Sahitya Samsad, Kolkata, p.938} in Hindu scripture which speaks the origin of universe by the God in sound; bears a sameness with the 'Big Bang'. Wikipedia refer 'Shabda Brhama' as the "transcendental sound or sound vibration". Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, IV.i.2 has stated that the manifold universe is a creation of Shabda Brahama. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Shabda _ Brahman)
 26. 'Big Bang': This theory is the leading explanation about how the universe began.It has describes "the expansion of our Universe from a point of origin roughly 13.8 billion years ago. This hypothetical starting point of everything was an infinite concentration of energy referred to as a singularity".
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