

Braj Folk Songs with Special Reference to Marriages

Abstract

Folk songs are considered as the richest aspects of Braj folklore. Almost all social, religious and personal gathering are followed by folk songs. This paper is an attempt to study various types of Braj folk songs related to Hindu marriages at various wedding ceremonies particularly in the rural area of Mathura.

Keywords: Braj, Mathura, Marriage Ceremonies, Folk Songs, Bride, Groom.

Introduction

The region called Braj primarily refers to the area around Mathura-Vrindavan in the state of Uttar Pradesh, but also covers some parts of Rajasthan and Haryana. This area is popularly known as land of Lord Krishna. The language which is spoken in this area is Braj bhasa which is one of the popular dialects of Hindi. Folk songs are considered as the richest aspects of Braj folklore. Almost all social, religious and personal gathering are followed by folk songs. Folk songs in Braj region on the occasion of marriages are sung by a large group of women of all age groups with the help of dholak¹ during night time. They are simple, melodious with a particular rhythm, tune and simple lyrics. These songs are orally passed on from one generation to another and from one village to another thereby by preserving cultural heritage, traditions and customs of the rural society.

Review of Literature

Lot of work has been done on Braj literature but still very few folklorists has work on folk songs of Braj region. Pavitra Suharda compiled folk songs of auspicious occasions in "Bamsari: Braja loka gīta"(1997); "Braja loka vaibhava" (1997) contributed articles on Braj folk songs. Cañcarika, Kanhaiyā Lāla's "Braja saṃskṛti aura Braja kā loka sāhitya" (2009) has significant role on the culture and folk literature of Mathura District, Uttar Pradesh, India. etc Another folklorist Vandana Tailang's book "*Braj ke Lokgeet Evam Lokparvo Ka Sangitik Adhyayan*" (2015) is well documented work. "Tere-mere Geet: Braj ke Lokgeet" (2015) compiled by Asha Rani Singal, which is an internet version of the book is a huge collection of Braj folk songs. Books, web pages, articles related to folk songs are also studied while writing this paper.

Aim of the Study

This paper is an attempt to study various types of Braj folk songs related to Hindu marriages at various wedding ceremonies particularly in the rural area of Mathura. The songs are lagan/ chauki, 'bhat', 'chipti pujan' (kinak pukaar), 'baan' or 'tail', 'aarta', 'chak pujan' or 'ghura pujan', 'madha sirai'(dholas), 'budha baboo pujan', 'rat jaga' (mehandi, tilva, gharvat), 'ghudchadi', 'swagat baraat', 'phere' or 'bhamar', 'galiya', 'bidai', 'kangana khulai', etc.

Braj Folk Songs Related to Marriages

Braj folk songs of Hindu marriages are broadly divided into three following categories:

1. Songs sung at the time of boy's marriage: Chowki, Barna, Kangana, Khulai, Ghadghadi etc.
2. Songs related to girl's marriage: Barni, Pattal Bandhna And Pattal Kholna, Galiyan, Phere or Bhamar, Badhaaya, Bidaai, etc.
3. There are songs which are common on both the sides like Bhaat, Geet, Kinak Pukar, Baan or Tail, Aarta, Dholaa, Tail Chadhana, Tail Badhana, Budha Baboo Pujaan, Rat Jaga, (Mehanda, Tilva, Gharvat) etc.

Folk Songs Sung at the Marriage of Boy

Hindu marriage ceremony is a systematic and customary procedure and consists of several steps and number of rituals and



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customs. Each and every ritual has a distinct meaning and purpose. Rituals are celebrated with lots of enthusiasm, excitement, zeal and fun. Basically ceremonies related to marriage continue for a week, from the day of lagan to marriage this may take five to seven days, as decided by the *pandit*².

Chowki Song

A Chowki Song is sung only once on the day of sagai or lagan, when groom actually sits on the wooden stool (chowki) and the pundit recites the mantras of lagan. Sagai/ or lagan is a kind of formal agreement of relationship between two families. The chowki is sung as:

**Kahiyo RI us khati (badhai- carpenter) ke ladke su
Chowki to lyave mere Rai Rattan Singh ki
Chowki to lyave mere Nand lal ki**

The groom's mother is very blissful and energized with the marriage prospect of her son in the above song. *Chowki* represents the high or special position of the person. Here, she metaphorically considers her son as the King *Rai Rattan Singh*, who is royal and majestic and requests her family members to go and instruct the carpenter to make a wooden stool on which her son is to be seated for the *chowki* ceremony. This is an auspicious and important moment of her life and she compares her son with Lord Krishna's extraordinary demeanor. *Yashoda* looked upon *Krishna* (Nand lal) as common child, the darling of her heart. The love of *Yashoda* and *Krishna* is of great importance in Indian Culture exhibiting the bond of mother and son. The power of the mother's emotion surfaces when the mother of the groom refers to her son as *Nand Lal*.

Barna Song

Barnasong conveys wishes and blessings to the newly wedgroom by his family members and relatives expressing the happiness, excitement and love for him. In most of these songs grooms are addressed by different names like *hariyala*, *barna*, *banna*, *shahjaada*, *raghunandan*, *nauseetc*. This happiness and extreme state of excitement is seen in a song where a sister sing "*ser moti maru ri bane pe, maru ri bane pe ke kheru ri bane pe*". The materialistic things in this song are of in significant value as far as her brother's bliss is concerned. Pearl, a symbol of devoutness, love and purity, is a precious gem. It is thought to give wisdom, bring wealth, protection and to strengthen relationship. The sister, on such an auspicious occasion, finds the materialistic value of pearl irrelevant and ensures a happy marriage for his brother; she wants to spread the pearls around confirming her massive love for him. The love here depicts spiritual significance. Another song is about lagan:

**Raghunandan phule na samaye,
Lagan ayi hare hare-2, Mere angana
Dada bhi saj gaye, tau bhi saj gaye,
Saj gayi sari baraat
Raghunandan to aise saj gaye,
Jaise shri bhagvan**

The groom's mother is singing the song when she receives the lagan at her home and calls her son *Raghunandan* (Ram in Ramayana). Lord Ram was an ideal son, disciple, brother and an ideal

king teaching the duties of a person to one's family and society. Rama, divinity incarnate, is perceived as perfect, self-controlled, honest, persuasive, stately, and capable of obliterating all his opponents. His dutiful and sincere conduct has been recognized as ideal for the mankind, for all times and ages. The bridegroom is eager for his marriage and his stature is compared to lord Rama when he is getting ready for this occasion overshadowing all the others in the family. The involvement of family members and whole society is the evidence for the approval of a marriage as a social institution. But one can also witness the patriarchal influence on the society through these regional braj songs. Here, in the mentioned song, it is depicted that only male members are getting ready to attend the marriage. This shows that earlier females were not allowed to go in *baraat*³. Generally, attire of groom which comprises of *sehra*, *mala*, *kangana*, *katar* are adorned, appreciated and admired in *Barnasongs*. He looks different and majestic because of the specific attire and jewellery. He is recognized effortlessly by everyone gathered in the function.

When the boy enters home with his newly married wife, certain rituals are performed preferably where newlywed couples sit together at the place of pooja, to pay tribute to their own God. All the women actively take part in this ceremony and sing the song Ghaidghadi:

**Ghaidghadi ji Ghaidghadi, Sasu chhoti bahu badi
Itne sasu paani jaye, Itne bahu gilonde khay
Sasu ke kaam Ghano, bahu pe hove bhi nay
ke sasu tu atke matke, ke matkave dhoonge
Dola me te jab utrungi, nyaro dharoongi chulho**

The completion of this custom makes the bride a part of the family and henceforth her role in this house becomes essential. She is now geared up to take all the responsibilities of her mother-in-law. The humorous folk expression *Sasu chhoti bahu badi* illustrates that the authority and roles are changing. Earlier the mother-in-law was the sole authority in the domestic sphere but hereafter the daughter-in-law is going to administer the household things especially kitchen. People singing these lines are passing sarcastic remarks to the mother in law and expresses their opinion that when she leaves her dominion to fetch water her *daughter in law* is enjoying her freedom. Another aspect which is described in the song is difficulties and strained responsibilities which the young bride faces in the new house. But then she strongly dissents the domination of her *saas/ mother in law* and demands a separate independent space for herself.

Kangana Khulayi

Kangana khulayi is another song that is sung at the time of untying the knot of *Kangana*⁴. The knot contains haldi; metal beet etc. and is generally tied to save them from evil or black magic. It is a kind of game played in presence of all female members of the family, where *bhabhi*⁵ of the groom acts as the mediator or jury of the game. Both the girl and boy have to open the seven knots of the Kangana (seven is considered as fortunate number in Hindu mythology, as pheres are also seven). The game is to find the ring from the cauldron which is full of water,

milk, green grass, and those Kanganas. The couple starts their sexual life after completion of this custom. The *bhabhi* supports the newlywed bride because she shares a sisterly association with her. In our society certain mischief, jokes and amusement are permissible in relations like *devar-bhabhi*, *jeeja-sali*:

**Tu to khole bigdi ka kangana
Aa meri bhabhi kangana khila**

The younger brother of husband demands his *bhabhi* start the game. Family members of groom refer to bride as brat when groom opens the knot of her band. These words clearly express the apprehensions of the groom's family members, as they think that bride might dominate and control their son.

Folk Songs Sung at Girl's Marriage

The *Barni songs* are sung at bride's place from the day of lagan till her marriage. Besides the feelings of happiness and delightful, thoughts of anxiety, separation and pain are also prevalent. *Laado*, *banno*, *rajdulaari*, *ramdulaari*, *Shahjaadi*, *laadli*, *barni*, *jaanki*, *paarvati*, *janakdulaari* are the different names used for bride exhibiting the excessive fondness of a daughter in her family. In Indian patriarchal society, bride leaves her family and merges her identity with that of groom's family:

**Laado meri raj dulaari,
janak var kaise milenge,
Banno meri ram dulaari
janak var kaise milenge
Laado ke dada var dhudan ko nikle
Laado pe chhaa gayi udaasi,
janak var kaise milenge**

This song states that the mother is much worried about the future husband and house of her princess. She is sharing her concern and uncertainties of the future of her daughter with her husband. The father of the bride is referred to *Janaka*⁶. A bride is frequently compared to *Sita*, a symbol of ideal woman, a dutiful daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law and mother in the Hindu mythology. Drawing analogous to *Sita* it is assumed that the bride should execute all duties. The girl is gloomy when father or any family member goes out to find *var* (*future husband*) as she fears that she is going to leave her father's house where she has spent her childhood.

Galiyan

*Galiyan*⁷, another very popular genre, is sung at the time of welcome to mock the groom and his friends during the arrival of *baraat* by bride's female friends and her female relatives. The *galiyan* are sung to alleviate the environment by adding humor, as the moment at the time of marriage is very emotional and anxious. The humorous annotations on the groom and his friends, makes the situation joyful:

**Sare baraati aise khade,
Jaise ghure pe gadhe pade
Laado ke bhैया aise khade,
Jaise office me Saab khade**

They compare *baraatis* (people from groom's side) to the donkeys by saying that they are standing as if donkeys are standing on the garbage, referring them as foolish and manner less. On the other side

bride's brothers are compared with well-behaved officers.

These songs are different at the time of *phere* ceremony. If the girl is preceding and boy is subsequent then the song is: *Agle ki maa ne boya dhaniya*, *Picchle ki maa ko le gaya baniya*. On the other hand if boy is preceding and girl is succeeding him then words would be like this: *Picchhle ki maa ne boya dhaniya*, *agle ki maa ko le gaya baniya*. The song exemplifies that the girl's mother is planting coriander, a useful spice in daily food and on the contrary groom's mother has eloped with a man of other caste. Since the mother of groom brought humiliation to the family, and the groom should feel ashamed before the bride. This song indicates the caste structures as well. Marriages are performed within the caste in specific *gotras* (sub castes) and arranged by family members only. If a couple goes for love marriage outside the caste that brings lot of disgrace to the families.

Bidai Songs

Bidai songs are sung at the exit of girl from her house at the time of marriage. The parents and other family members bid her farewell with tears in their eyes but also bless her for happy future. The songs express sadness, pain and grief of the family members and the girl:

**Baabul ka ghar chhod ke laado
ho gayi aaj paraayi ri
Daada bhi rove, vaaki daadi bhi rove
Hilki de de vaaka bhैया rove
chhod chali maa jayi ri**

This song transmits that because the girl is alienated from her parent's house, she loses her place and identity. She is termed as '*parayi*' (other) for her relatives. And at this moment, all family members like *grandfather*, *grandmother*, *uncle aunt*, *mother*, and *father* are weeping and wailing at the time of bride's *bidai*. Her brother who shared a friendly relation with her is crying (*hilki dena*) and says that she is no longer the member of their family.

Songs which are Common at Girl/ Bride and Boy/Groom Side Bhat Songs

Bhat songs show the intense relation of women to her parents' house even after marriage. Before the marriage of her child she specially goes to invite her brother. The maternal uncle of either groom or bride has a very important role to play in the marriage rituals. Maternal uncle of groom brings *sehra*⁸ and dress for the boy in the marriage, whereas maternal uncle of bride brings earrings and dress for the girl in her marriage. He also brings special *odhani*⁹ for his sister i.e. bride's/ groom's mother. A warm welcome is extended to maternal uncles when they come to perform *bhaat*¹⁰ *pehnaana/ udhana/dena* ceremony. Intense love between brother and sister can be seen through this ceremony and these songs:

**Do hanso ka joda darwaje khado re
Aaj mero bhैया bhat layo re.
Teeka bhi layo bhैया, bindi bhi layo
Nathni na layo sharmayo khado re, aaj mero
bhैया bhaat layo re**

Sister sings this song while receiving her brother for *bhaat* ceremony. She compares her brother and sister-in-law to a pair of swan expressing her happiness, joy and also feels proud of her brother's presence in her child's marriage. Her brother is providing emotional as well as financial support to her sister.

Geet

Geet songs in this category has variety of themes, for example they are related to day to day life, religion, mythology, legends, popular stories of present time, sufferings of a woman at her in law's place, relation of a woman with her husband, dowry problem, distance relationship - husband is in army, domestic atrocities are discussed in these songs. They also include some interesting and conversant bhajans that are based on Indian mythology especially influenced by two grand epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. For example, *Govardhan uthave diye kanha teri ungal ne*. Krishna had lifted the whole of *Govardhan* hill on his fingers to save villagers from heavy rainfall. In this song Lord Krishna is portrayed as savior of human beings or supreme god.

Dance Geet

It is another very important genre of Braj folk songs. From the day of lagan till the post marriage ceremony, songs are sung everyday followed by dance. Dance related folk songs are based on romance, love affairs, youth, extra marital affairs and incidents that revolve around daily activities of the local people:

Gunthi kho gayi re, sejan pe aadhi raat

Anokhe chhote devariya

Sasu puchhe ri, kaise kah dau ri

Saram ke si baat anokhe chhote devariya

Dholas

To perform any ritual or ceremony like *madha sirahi*, *ghura pujan* or *chak pujan*, *chhipti pujan*, dholas are sung. Singers gather and disperse for songs during night by singing *dholas*. *Dholas* are sung without any musical instrument and include 3-5 stanzas. While singing these dholas there is a pause after two lines. *Raja Nala* is a very popular hero of dholas in Braj region of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan:

Nal ke sobe ke jage beimaan,

ho mehalan me chori ho gayi

Gori kaa re gayo tero maal,

kai ki chori hai gayi

Mere ghar ko gayo re sab maal or

gale ko gayo re naulakha haar

Apart from these general songs there are also some ritualistic songs like *Gharvat*, *Mehenda*, and *Tilva* sung only on the day of *ratjaga* which depict rural peasant life. *Mehenda*, a traditional song shows that brother in law forcefully enters into an extra marital affair with his sister in law, and when she complains to her husband about the incident by singing-*Ras ras liya hai nichod, khokhat mari tere mund te mere lal*. But her husband is indifferent to the wife's complaint, because this act was done by his brother, not by someone outside the family. And he sings: *Ek hi kothi ka hai naaj, hum na hue hamare biran hue mere lal*. This shows silent acceptance of incidents like rape or extra marital affair within the

family by the family members. In a way woman is shown oppressed in the family and the song acts as a catalyst to convey the rebellious sentiments of the women folks. It is retelling of the story of women's sentiments.

Gharvat

Gharvat illustrates the relation of husband and wife in rural onset, where wife complains that her husband does not maintain relationship with her. He spends time outside the home.

He mere ghar ki gharvat ye chaukhat sun bole

He mahlasian, balam monsu bole na

Other ritualistic songs like *Baan-/ Tail chhada- Aa meri bhaabhi tail chadhaa, aa meri behnaatail chadaa,*) *Kinak pukaar - (Pawan ki bahu kinak pukaare, Manoj ki bahu hai kinak pukaare), Aarta-(Jaaye jhamke me barsego meh, Vaaki behnaa karegi arta)*, songs are of short stanza i.e of one line or two. They are not very much popular among young generation singers, but have cultural significance and cannot be avoided in any marriage ceremony. It is thus remarked that all items of day to day life are worshipped in marriage ceremonies. Involvement of all family members and community in the marriage ceremony is also very clear from these songs.

Conclusion

Folk songs are oral history giving graphic details of all the rituals and customs, narrating stories about the culture and region. They are the defined culture reflecting the speech patterns of the particular region and hence defines nation. They have concealed messages and has the power to change society. To conclude one can say that the Braj folk songs are storehouse of culture, beliefs, and social structure. They strengthen community bonding and in order to preserve the cultural legacy, values and traditions, it becomes mandatory to study folk songs of a region as it needs an exploration, attention and documentation as they are storehouse of knowledge and wisdom.

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Footnotes

1. A traditional Indian musical instrument

All songs used in this paper are sung by mother and aunt of the author who resides in Braj Region.

2. Priest (Brahmin)
3. Gathering of people from groom's side go to girl's place for marriage
4. Kangana is a band or thread worn by bride and a groom at the time of haldi ceremony.
5. Elder brother's wife
6. Sita's father and king of Mithila in epic Ramayana
7. Abuses in the form of songs
8. Headdress worn by groom on the occasion of his marriage
9. Shawl
10. Gifts from maternal uncle to all family members of bride/groom on special occasion in the marriage

Note

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