

SOURCE AND EVOLUTION OF BIHU SONG: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This research paper aims to an analytical study of the source and evolution of bihu song. Folk song is an important element of folk literature. Folk songs are created and expanded orally by the folk people from the previous generation to the next generation like other elements of folk literature, Bihu songs are the most distinctive type folk song of Assam, which is one of the northeastern state of India. These are related to bihu, the fertility faith centered folk festival of the Assamese agriculturist society. Bihu song express the joy of nature, love and union. The various contents of Assamese society like economic, political, social, religious etc. are reflected through the bihu song with oral expansion from the ancient times. The specialty and the own dimension of this song for its diversity of content, expression style, structure, performing style and literary beauty. Bihu songs are mainly related to the bihu dance of Bohag bihu, the spring time festival of Assam. It accept the various changes of Assamese society with the period of progressive time. Therefore bihu songs are going through the various stages of evolution with the sign of changes as like as Assamese society. The main aim of this paper is to analyze the source and stages of evolution of bihu song. The main research method used in this paper is analytical method. The data are collected from library and field survey.

Key words: Assam, bihu, huchari, bihu song, bihu dance, source, evolution.

Introduction

Folk culture and folk music are the base of every society. Folk music is the distinctive part of literature and culture for their literary content and musical mode. Its indicating the language, geographical location, social convention, culture, region of a specific society. Folk music are the ethnic pattern of folk people which are involved with their socio cultural perspective, psychological perspective, occupation etc. Folk music is “transmitted from one individual to another and diffused from one locality to another as performance succeeds performance, both unconscious and conscious modification of the melody occur.”(Dorson 365) It is not different with bihu songs which are streaming by oral expansion.As the spring time Bohag bihu is the most characteristically typical Assamese festival, so bihu song are the most distinctive type of folk song of Assam. “The bihu of Assam was originally a kind of festival complex connected with the agricultural cycle. The Bohag bihu coming at seed time as also Assamese New Year happened to be the most important of the complex.”(Dutta 17) Bihu songs are normally quatrain with alternate rhymes, sung antiphonally and also excellent poetry. It describe the beauty of both nature and human life, express adoration of loved one, speak the frustration and sorrow, but above all they glorify youth and love and express the yearning for union.

Source of Bihu Song

Bihu is the national festival of Assam. This bihu festival is the main stream of bihu song. Bihu songs are inseparably related to bihu dance. From the ancient time bihu songs are enriched the Assamese literature with their value of social, cultural, musical and literary content. Fertility faith is the main source of bihu song. The Assamese agricultural society is grown with this fertility faith. The Assamese community is a combined community which is formed with the culture of arya, anarya, austic, mongloid etc. various ethnic groups. The national festival bihu of Assamese society is formed with the base of combination and union. Joy is the main theme of this festival. It is the joy of nature, life, pleasure and satisfaction.

The different views are being observed about the origin of the word ‘Bihu’. Some scholar have commented that ‘bihu’ derives from the Sanskrit ‘bishuv’ or ‘bishuvan’. The meaning of ‘bishuv’ is the time of

equal day and night. (Boruah 979) In this time various festival are celebrated in different parts of India. In the other hand some scholar has rejected the opinion that bihu derives from 'bishuv' or 'bishuvan'. According to them bihu derives from 'baihu', 'paihu', 'bishu', 'baishagu' etc. which are the various festivals celebrated by the different ethnic groups of Assam. It is noticeable that every community living in Assam celebrate spring time festival with their own folk rituals and faith. In this time they perform various types of dance and song which are expressed the joy love and union. Among these songs 'oi nitom' of Misings, 'rangali' of Deoris, 'baishagu' of Bodos, 'chagra' of Tiwas, 'chathar' and 'bahurangi' of Rabhas, 'lewa-tana' of Hajongs etc. are reflected the likeness of bihu song. After viewing the different types of folk song of ethnic groups in Assam which are related to bihu song, we can say that the tradition of bihu song is formed with various elements of different ethnic groups and the bihu festival has been developed with the agricultural and nature related festival of anarya and various rituals of arya culture.

Evolution of Bihu Song

Bihu song and dance has been created by the imitation of nature. Dance and song is the means of expressing the happiness of satisfaction. The Assamese agriculturist celebrated bihu in the mid of Chait and Bohag (mid-April) at the bank of rivers, open fields and under the trees. The boys and girls danced and sang for their own satisfaction and expressing of happiness. After noticing the faith of fertility and productive orientation of bihu festival, it can be said that at the primitive level the erotic and nature related song was performed at the celebration of bihu. Example-

Tumar chakujuri harinir chaku jen

Bukute padumar chaka.

Tumar bahuduti padumar thari jen

Rihar achalere dhaka.

Your eyes are just like the eyes of dear

Lotus seed vessel in the bosom,

Your arms are just like the stem of lotus

Covered with the end of scarf.

With the passage of time bihu was started to perform at the path of villages by the male bihu performer. In that time the bihu performer was honoured with tamul-paan (betel nut), money, hasoti (homemade cloths) and eatables by the villagers. This bihu tradition which is performed at the gateway of the villagers is called 'huchari'. In this time the bihu song was begun to change some of its manner. By the time of Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam started with the initiative of Srimanta Sankaradeva, the elements of bhakti or spiritual word started finding in the content of huchari songs. Words such as 'Ram', 'Govinda', 'Govindai Ram' etc. were absorbed in huchari songs and became an integral parts of it. Especially 'Pada' and 'Ghosha' had been included in the opening of huchari performance. Under the influence of Vaishnava culture the content and performing style of bihu song accepted a new stage of changes. Example-

Krishnair murate bakul phul epahi

Niyar pai mukali hol oi Govindai Ram.

A bud flower on Krishna's head

Has released with the touch of dew Govindai Ram (address the god).

The tradition of bihu was more developed under the patronage of Ahom kingdom with some more changes of bihu songs. At that time the folk festival bihu was announced as the national festival of Assam. (Devi

116) The first official endorsement that bihu performed as a performing art form style was during Ahom king Rudra Singha rule. Rudra Singha invited bihu performer to performed bihu at the Rang-ghar (a house of joy) field on the occasion of Rongali or Bohag bihu. At that time Rang-ghar was used as a permanent platform of entertainment. Bihu was thoroughly enjoyed by the Ahom kings at the Rang-ghar courtyard. Especially from that time bihu dance and songs developed as a performing art form as the main character of performing art that it to be performed in front of live audience. (Sarma 5) In the subsequent time with the promptness of Ahom king and royal officers the bihu of Rang-ghar was entered in the courtyard of royal palace and royal officer's houses. The bihu song performed in front of the king and royal officers were changed to the restrained and serious mode. The content with appreciation of king and royal works has entered in bihu songs. Example-

Swargadeu ulale batcharar mukhaloi
Duliyai patile dola,
Kaanat jilikile naraar jangefai
Gaate gomechengar chola.

The king has come to the gateway shed
The palanquin bearers has readied the palanquin,
The jangfai (an ornament) has shined on his ear
A shirt of gomecheng (a kind of fine silk) on his body.

As the British colonialism brought the changes to the social, political, economic life of Assam parallelly the cultural life was also affected. The various schools, colleges, tea-gardens, oil-companies, ship and train communication etc. established in Assam in the period of British rule. In that time the various new concepts entered in the bihu songs as like as the social system of Assam had adopted various new concepts. Train, ship, oil-company, tea-garden, kani (opium), resam (silk), rumal (handkerchief), cheniguti (sugar), longguti (clove), juta (shoe), aarchi (mirror), jacket, gundhtel (scented oil), chati (umbrella), kerani (clerk), mohori (an employee maintaining accounts), chipahi (soldier), tupi (hat), chahab (European man), mem (European women), cheleuti (cigarette), cherap (wine) etc. subjects has entered in bihu songs. Example-

Bilatee chahabe bagicha patile
Murat charu hen tupi,
Kulire chuwali memanee korile
Mukhat cheleuti hupi.

The British made the garden
The hat on their head just like an earthen cooking pot,
They made the girl of coolie as mem
Cigarettes in their mouth.

Bihu culture has across a complex time of social conflict from second decade of 19th century to the third decade of 20th century. In this time some middle class newly educated Assamese people gave indecent and ugly comments against the bihu festival and forced the British government to ban this festival. Among this people Haliram Dhekial Phukan, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, Kamalakanta Bhattacharya, Ratneshwar Mahanta, Hiteswar Barbaruah, Budhindranath Delihial Bhattacharya are mentionable. The British government decided to ban the bihu festival for the bihu inimical comments specially Budhindranath Delihial Bhattacharya's advice against bihu festival. But some people with the initiative of Ananda Das from Nagaon and lead by Ojha Maimat Tatinga and his sister Chenimai from Haluagaon of Kalangpar, Nagaon

District, protested against the decision of British government and finally for their intense opposition the government was forced to change their decision. (Changmai 102)

In the other hand on the contrary of bihu inimical some people have called to save the own form of bihu with some reformation. In that time Balinarayan Borah, Rajanikanta Bordoloi, Lakshminath Bezbarua, Padmanath Gohain Baruah, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Hemanga Biswas, Bishnu Prasad Rabha etc. had commented in favor of bihu. In this way the anti-bihu action which was arised in second decade of 19th century was stopped in third decade of 20th century. Some conscious people initiated to collect and record the bihu songs for preservation which are streaming by oral expansion. Among this people Nakul Chandra Bhuyan and Dimbeswar Neog are mentionable. In 1920 Nakul Chandra Bhuyan compiled the book of bihu songs named *Bohagi*. But for some special reason the book was published in 1923. Before that in 1922 the book of bihu song *Aakul Pathik* was published by Dimbeswar Neog. In the subsequent time various book of bihu song collection has published. After the publication of bihu related two books *Bihu* 1914 by Benudhar Rajkhowa and *Bihu Aru Tar Prakritik Chitra* 1918 by Ganesh Chandra Hazarika, there has been published gradually many other bihu related books.

From the third fourth decade of 20th century the bihu which was performed in the field and household courtyard is entered in the proscenium stage as a folk performing art form. There are many stage oriented new bihu songs started to create by the bihu performer with new tune and new performance style. The various issues of the society of that time was described through the bihu song. For example- the Indian Independence Movement, the India-China War, the Language Movement, the Foreign Expulsion Movement etc. subjects are narrated in bihu songs. Example -

Unaisha bashashthi chan

chinai kore aakraman

chinai jodi guli kore

Bukupati lobane?

Year nineteenth sixty two

The Chinese attack

If the Chinese shoot

Will you take on chest?

Maghai Ojha, the ojha of dhol performed bihu song which narrated about the 1960's Language Movement. Example-

Raijkhan kandiche chua dangaria

Deshkhan kandiche sua,

Raijor balate tumi balabanta

Kianu Pahari jua?

See gentleman, the people are crying

See the nation is crying,

You are powerful with the power of people

Why are you forget?

It is noticeable that the above mentioned subjects and other contemporary subjects were included in the content of bihu songs, but it was not able to sustain these types of bihu songs for the longer period of time, that is to say these songs were not able to flowing always as the traditional bihu songs.

With the progressive motion of time the bihu song has started to record in audio cassettes. But before recorded in audio cassettes some bihu song was record in gramophones. In that time the rhythm of tabla was used instead of the rhythm of traditional drum (dhol). In 1938 at Kolkata, Bishnu Prasad Rabha composed a gramophone record of bihu song named *Bihuwati*. But in 1935 at Kolkata Bhola Saikia of Golaghat District recorded two bihu songs in gramophone record of Senola Company. (Hussain 115). In this time bihu song and dance inserted in the Assamese features film. In the real sense the bihu song and dance used for the first time in the Assamese features film 'Smritir Parash' directed by Nip Baruah. Brajen Baruah was the music director and Keshab Mahanta was the lyricist of this film which was released on 6th April, 1956. (Deka,Bujarbaruah 194) The bihu song of the film is

O mure dehiti oi, o mure chenaiti oi

Chakur jurania, rua kumalia

Kailoi melibi thuk.

O' my love, o' my sweetheart

Coolness of eyes, soft paddy seedlings,

Please open the bunch tomorrow

From this time bihu song-dance are applied in many Assamese films like 'Era Batar Sur', 'Maniram Dewan', 'Pratidhvani', 'Chikmik Bijuli' etc. to the nowadays film industry. In the time of 1960-70 there were some gramophone recorder in which recorded the bihu songs by Dipali Borthakur 'Aagoli bahare lahari gagana', Khagen Mahanta 'Dhansiri pare hoi dhapaliai ahilo', Dr. Bhupen Hazarika 'Moinajaan moinajaan' etc. From 1980 the bihu song are started to record in cassettes with a new form of changes. Instead of traditional lyrics and tune some modern appearance has included in bihu song. In the passage of time the audio-visual CD's were circulated in Assam. For the demand of stories the traditional bihu song has started to publish in the CD's. The lyricist compose the song with the tune of bihu song for the CD's. But these types of songs are can be named as bihu tune based modern song.

Nowadays it has been taken various steps for the dissemination of bihu song and dance through the various medium. The workshop of bihu song and dance is the most effective medium to expanse the bihu tradition. It has able to expand the upper Assam centered bihu song and dance to the whole Assam, India or World through the workshop which are held in various place not only in Assam but all over the World.

Conclusion

Adopting different forms of evolutions, the bihu song and dance had changed from seasonal agricultural festival to the national festival as well as symbol of national integration. Nowadays bihu song and dance recognize as a very popular art form of the world. But when it started to perform as a performing art form in the proscenium stage, the fertility oriented purpose and the spontaneity of it has disrupted to some extent. Because it has to perform the performances on stage in a specific time with a specific purpose. In addition the bihu performance has transformed to some extent with the attempts to modernize for the stage oriented performance. In present time the bihu dance and song has also been identified as a means of livelihood. Because the performer has become strong financially by the various competitions and events of bihu stage. But still in the different parts of Assam the bihu has performed with their own structure with the performance style which were performed in the fields and household courtyard in the past time. As the bihu songs are passing through the different stages of evolution it takes a new structure or form, but the popularity and pleasantness have not faded of the traditional tunes and style of bihu songs. As the time goes on it has been able to establish itself in front of whole of India and the World.

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