

# PAURĀNIC INFLUENCE ON THE ASSAMESE FOLK SONGS

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## Abstract

The purāṇas have great influence on the society and culture of Assam along with the other Indian cultures. An immense numbers of folk literature and traditions of different tribes and races of Assam enrich the Assamese culture. Many folk songs are sung by the people of Assam in various occasions. These songs are greatly influenced by the events of different ages. Hence, the influences of purāṇas are also observed in these songs. In this paper, an attempt will be made to highlight the *Paurānic* influence on the Assamese folk songs through some references.

The purāṇas are considered as the sources of knowledge. They have great influence on Indian society and culture through the ages. This influence of purāṇas also extends to the society and culture of Assam along with the other Indian cultures. It is well known that Assam is a land of many races and tribes. Therefore there are a large number of cultural elements present in the heart of Assam. The Assamese culture contains immense number of folk literature and traditions. The traditional beliefs, superstitions, myths, customs, tales, and practices etc. of the people of this land vary from tribe to tribe, community to community. This may be different but all of them contribute for the enrichment of the Assamese society and culture. Like any other region of the country some folksongs are traditionally sung by the people of Assam and they occupy a peculiar position in the Assamese culture. Here are various types of folk songs in the storehouse of Assamese culture like *Bihunām*, *Huncari*, *Biyānām*, *Dhāinām*, *Āinām*, *Bāramāhī Gīt*, *Bongīt*, *Nāonkhelor Gīt*, *Garakhiyā Gīt*, *Dehbičārar Gīt*, *Ṭokārī Gīt*, *Kāmrūpī Lokagīt*, *Goalparia Lokagīt*, *Maho-ho Gīt* ...etc. These songs are the expression of common beliefs, traditions, myth and legends, joys and sorrows, hopes and despondencies, feeling of love and separation of the Assamese folk. Therefore, these are the

invaluable resources of Assamese culture and penetrated into the heart of the Assamese people. It is difficult to state as to when the Assamese folksongs were circulated first. But these songs are greatly influenced by the events of different ages. In the context of *Paurāṇic* Influence on the Assamese folksongs, here, we have made an attempt to glimpse into certain types of songs only, as it is not possible to cover all the folksongs of great Assam.

- ***Bihunām*** : In the month of *Bohāg* (*Vaiśākha*, April-May), the people of Assam celebrate *Rangālibihu* with great pomp. During the festival, the boys and girls perform *bihu* dance and *huncari* accompanied with songs which are called *bihunām*. In some of these songs we get reference of *Paurāṇic* god and goddess. For instance-

*prathame praṇāmo āi sarasvatī dvitīya praṇāmo hari/  
tṛtīya praṇāmo gānvar buḍhā methā dhari jāon nāmare guri/* <sup>1</sup>

Here, it is stated that before starting the *bihunām*, the *bihu* performer salutes the goddess Sarasvatī, Viṣṇu and the elders of the village. Again, Brahmā and Viṣṇu are mentioned as-

*brahmāi sarajā nāmare kathiyā viṣṇu ye sarajā nām/ beyā nām olāle  
sarvadoṣ khemibo bihure gītaka gām/* <sup>2</sup>...etc.

One example of *huncari nām* is-

*kṛṣṇāir murate bakul phul epāhi niyar pāi mukali hal ai govindāi  
rām/* <sup>3</sup>...etc.

- ***Biyānām***- *Biyānām* is a kind of folk song of Assam. *Biyānāms* are sung in the marriage ceremony by the folk women. These are sung with a melodious tune indicating different functional context of the ceremony from the beginning to the end. In these *biyānāms*, the influences of mythical and legendary accounts of the purāṇs are observed. In the marriage ceremony, the bridegroom and bride are considered as Śiva and Pārvatī or Ūṣā and Aniruddha or Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī or Rāma and Sitā. Similarly, the father of the bridegroom is considered as Daśaratha while mother considered as Kauśalyā or Daivakī. Sometimes, the father of the bride is considered as Dakṣarāja. In the marriage songs, it is found that the mythical marriage accounts of these *paurāṇic* characters are drawn to the

comparison with the common bridegroom and bride. There are many examples in this regard. Some of them as-

*mārār alaṅkār thovā kati kari deutārār alaṅkār thovā he/ rāme di pathāise suvarṇa alaṅkār hāte jore kari lovā he/ /<sup>4</sup>...etc.*

*śiva gonsāi āhise dambaru bājise dakṣarajār sotālat kanyā bhikṣā māgise/ /<sup>5</sup>...etc.*

*pāṭit vahi rukmīṇīye māṭit maṅgal cāy/ ketiā āhibo kṛṣṇa hoṅar bānsī bāy/ /<sup>6</sup>...etc.*

- **Dhāinām** – These songs are called *nicukaṇi gīt* also. The Assamese mother used to sing these songs to make her child sleepy. The reference of Kṛṣṇa is found in the midst of these type of song to –

*jaṣodā māu mathani thovā/ kṛṣṇai kāndise kolāt lovā/ /<sup>7</sup>...etc.*

- **Bṛndāvanī nām** – The theme of these songs is the various sportive activities of Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa performed in the Vṛndāvana. Generally, these songs are sung in the religious functions like *Gopinī savāha* by the followers of Vaiṣṇavism of Assam.

*vṛndāvanar māje prabhu āsilā lukāy/ bhāleto gopinī kānde visāri nāpāy/ /<sup>8</sup>... etc.*

Here, Kṛṣṇa's sport with the gopīs or the female cowherds is revealed.

- **Dehvicārar gīt** - These songs are simple expressions of philosophical and spiritual aspects. The main theme of these songs is the non-eternal human body and the eternity of soul. It is reflected in these songs that people can not realize the Supreme Being due to their ignorance as their minds are covered with *kāma, krodha, lobha, moha* etc. Therefore, they run after the worldly pleasure and get trouble in this life. These songs also explicit the influence of *paurāṇic* literature –

*brahmā harihara kṛṣṇa balobhadra ātmār bhitare ase/ gaṅgā gayā kāsī gandakī jamunā āse śārīror kāje/ / ...*

*dehar karun prāṇ bāndhava dehār bisār karun/ caidhyaya baikuntha caidhyaya brahmāṇḍa dehāte bisār dharun/ /<sup>9</sup>... etc.*

- **Ṭokāriḡit** – These songs bear similarity to the *Dehvicārar gīt*. These are mainly related to spiritual devotion and philosophical

aspects. These songs are usually sung by a group with *tokārī* (a folk musical instrument of Assam, having a single string and played with a finger. It is found that the names of Śiva and Pārvatī are associated with this songs.

*jetīā birikhe dui pāt melile talaloi melile śiyā/ hei gachejupi khoje mahādevē tokārī hājongoi diyā/ mahādev gosānye tokārī hājise bāte pārvatī guṇā/ /<sup>10</sup> ... etc.*

Here, it is stated that Śiva made *tokārī* and Pārvatī made its string.

- ***Bāramāhī gīt*** – There are descriptions of the twelve lunar months in these songs. The main theme of this type of songs is the separation of the lovers and their mental conditions in such stage as well as the natural changes of the months. These songs are classified as *Rām Bāramāhī*, *Sītā Bāramāhī*, *Śāntī Bāramāhī*, *Rādhā Bāramāhī... etc.* In these songs the love and separation and mental conditions of Rāma and Sītā, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are stated.

Example of *Rām Bāramāhī*-

*āghoṇa māhote rāme mane kare cintā/ kimate vañciba āmi saṅge loiyā sītā/ / ... etc.*

*āge goilā prabhu rām pāchata lakṣmaṇa/ kātir śuklā pakṣe sītā harilā rāvaṇa/ /<sup>11</sup> ...etc.*

Example of *Rādhā Bāramāhī*-

*ohe kṛṣṇa, bahāgar māhate rādhe deutār garjani/ deutār garjani śuni matsye dei ujani/ /<sup>12</sup>...etc.*

Example of *Sītā Bāramāhī*-

*āghonar māhate bāpu sārile bātar/ dūrar parā rāmacandrak karisu kātar/ / puhare māhate bāpu ati bor śit/ mai abhāginī sītār nāi thānthit/ /<sup>13</sup>...etc.*

- ***Āi nām***- These songs are the result of folk belief. The Assamese folk believe that mums, chicken pox etc. are the *āi* or goddess Mahāmāyā Bhagavatī (a form of goddess Dūrgā). Therefore, when someone suffers in these diseases some lyrical prayers are recited by the women folk to satisfy goddess Mahāmāyā. Many *āi-nāms* are found which exposes the magnanimity of goddess

Mahāmāyā. Some songs are connected with the name of Śiva and Pārvatī. According to folk belief *āi* lives in Kailāśa with Mahādeva. One of such songs is furnished in reference of it.

*āi āhibor hol bahudin mahādeu pathāise khedā/jovāne nojovā āi bhagavatī kailāś hoise śudā/*<sup>14</sup>... etc

- ***Nāonkhelor gīt*** – These folk songs are sung by the boat men. In the river ways, one of the important means of transport is boat. To drive a boat, it requires hard labour. So, to minimize their labour and tiredness the boatmen sing such type of songs. The theme of some songs is the love sport of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. It shows that these songs also bear the *paurāṇic* influence in them.

*kānāi pār karā re,belir dike cābā/naṣṭa gaila dudher bhāṇḍār bajā goilā bayā/*<sup>15</sup>...etc.

Here, Rādhā requests Kṛṣṇa to pass herself from one side of the river to the other by his boat.

From the above discussion, it is observed that the common people of Assam are greatly influence by the *paurāṇic* literature. Actually Assam has a rich record of study and practice of different branches of knowledge including purāṇas .Assam is a producing ground of various śāstras like *Kālikāpurāṇa*, *Yoginītantra*, *Haragaurīsamvāda*... etc. Moreover, many great scholars of Assam have been offering their contribution to the ocean of Sanskrit literature. Of course, the Assamese folk songs are not directly influenced by the original purāṇas which are in Sanskrit as this language is not communicative or popular among the common people of this land. On the other hand, the folk songs are come out from the mouth of the simple folk.

The purāṇas mainly advocate the worship of a particular deity from the Hindu trinity– Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara or Śiva. These three main gods are mentioned abundantly in the Assamese folk songs along with the legends and activities related with them. It is also noticed that among the trinity, Viṣṇu or Hari or Kṛṣṇa is mentioned most. We can consider the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism movement propagated by Śankardeva in Assam as a reason of it. This ism is mainly based on *Śrīmadbhāgavatapurāṇa* and *Gītā*. For extending Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, Śankardeva introduced the *Satra* institutions, *Nāmghar*, composed many religious books, songs, dramas, poems

and also translated some Sanskrit śāstras into local language keeping the simple folk of Assam in his mind. Thus, his great contributions and other followers of Vaiṣṇavism enriched the storehouse of Assamese culture and helped the society of Assam to get influenced by the knowledge of different śāstras. Therefore, we find the *Paurāṇic* Influence in the midst of the Assamese folk songs too.

***Endnotes :***

1. *Bihugīt āru Banghoṣā*, p.2
2. *Ibid.*, p.2
3. *Asamiyā Lokasāhityar Rūprekhā*, p.106
4. *Ibid.*, p.144
5. *Ibid.*, p.149
6. *Ibid.*, p.204
7. *Oral sources*
8. *Asamiyā Lokasāhityar Rūprekhā*, p.109
9. *Ibid.*, p.73
10. *Ibid.*, p.68
11. *Ibid.*, p.122
12. *Ibid.*, p.122
13. *Ibid.*, p.121
14. *Ibid.*, p.86
15. *Ibid.*, p.99

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