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Hapu Gaan: A Nomadic Folk Music

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Abstract:

Music is as old as human history. Music appeared in human history at the beginning of the development of civilization. Forest and cave people started searching for melodious sounds even before the creation of specific languages. Through the practice of thousands of ages, melodious sounds and simple language found their place in primitive music. But with the development of civilization, a ruling class emerged among people. In the urge for supremacy of that ruling class, the people were united, separated and spread to different towns. The nature worship of people grew up in different religious believes. As a result of that religious belief, various folk tales were born. Since ancient times, the influence of various folk tales can be seen in the entire alluvial land of Bengal. The history of this folk tradition of Bengal is thousands of years old. In ancient Bengal, the western part of Bengal is known as the land of Rarh. Various genres of music have been prevalent in this Rarh region since ancient times. e

Even in the midst of cultural division due to different religious influence, one style survives in its own glory without taking sides with any religious division. That style, completely free from influence, is called Hapu Gaan. Hapu Gaan is the writing of the colored hearts of the exploited and oppressed people of the society. However, despite being a part of folk culture, Hapu Gaan silently represents the neglected genre of modern songs. Not only that, this song contains the use of body instruments what makes this form of music unique in itself. This paper will discuss about different aspects of Hapu songs elaborately.

Keywords: Hapu Gaan, folk music, nomadic culture, music, restoration

Objectives of the study:

This paper will focus on some objectives like-

- Exploration of marginal folk music and culture
- Understanding the structural formation of Hapu gaan as a part of nomadic culture
- Study on the evolution and present situation of Hapu gaan
- To discuss about possible ways of restoration or rejuvenation of this obsoleting folk song.

Introduction:

Folk music evolves and develops on many regional differences. There are countless genres of folk music in each region of the world which reflect diversity as well as uniqueness of the particular place. So, each and every folk form of music is equally important to show the cultural identity. Similarly, the folk songs of the entire Bengal region have been divided into three main regions.

1. Eastern Region, 2. Northern Region, 3. Southern Region¹.

The folk music of the western region includes: - Bhadu, Tusu, Bhanjo, Patagaan, Sapure, Alkap, Fakiri, Kabi Gaan, Raibenshe, Satyapirer Panchali, Bhangal, Tohal, Ashtaprahar, Krishnajattra, Bostami, Hijar, Shabajatra, Baul, Jhumur, Bolan, Leto, and Hapu.

However, among these folk music, Hapu songs are currently going on the verge of extinction. Hapu is a folk music, rather an art form mainly seen in western part of West Bengal, or a song of marginal people of the ancient Rar region. Although it was widespread in the Rar region in the past, including Burdwan, Bankura, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Nadia in Bengal and some areas of Meherpur in Bangladesh, this style currently survives to a greater or lesser extent in various villages of Birbhum district. In Kushtia, Bangladesh it is also known as '*HapuMaar*'² hitting with a stick or knotted rope is a part of singing a hapu song by the singer.

Understanding the meaning of the word 'Hapu':

Depending on the different region, Hapu or Habu refers to a song that describes lamentation or sorrow of everyday struggles. Regarding the naming of the *Hapu* song, Dr. Muhammad Ayub Hossain mentioned in his article titled 'Radher Hapu gaan': "হা অর্থ হাহাকার, দুঃখ-অভাব। 'হা ভাতারী' যার ভাতার বা স্বামী নাই। 'হা ঘর' যার ঘর নাই। 'পু' বা 'বু' শব্দে পূরণ বুঝায়।" (Hossain:1982).

'Ha Ghare' means one who has no house. The word 'Pu' or 'Bu' means fulfillment." However, Sameer Kumar Adhikari, in his book '*Banglar Hafugan*', explains the name 'Hafu' as follows: "দ্রুতপথ হাঁটার বা দৌড়ানোর পর হাঁফিয়ে উঠার মত দ্রুত লয়ে গান গাওয়ার সময় হাঁফিয়ে ওঠার শব্দই 'হাফু' নামের উৎপত্তিস্থল বলে আমরা মনে করি। তবে 'হাফু' এই শব্দটিকে দ্রুত বারবার উচ্চারণ করলে 'পু' শব্দ উচ্চারিত হচ্ছে বলে যিনি উচ্চারণ করছেন তাঁর নজরে এবং শ্রোতার মনে হয়। তাই এই 'হাফু' পরবর্তী পর্যায়ে 'হাপু' নামে পরিচিতি হয়।" (Adhikari:1992)

There is a controversy over the name of the word 'Hapu' in Hapu songs. Dr. Ashutosh Bhattacharya has mentioned it as 'Hapu song' in the first volume of his book '*Bangla Lok-Sahitya*'. Dr. Varun Kumar Chakraborty has also mentioned the word 'Hapu' in his book '*Bangla Lok Sahitya Charchacher Itihas*'. Even Dr. Madhavi Roop has mentioned the word 'Hapu' in her book '*Birbhum Lokgeeti*'.

The philosophical & historical aspect of Hapu:

Hapu songs are mostly common among the Mal, Kakmara³, Bede, Patua, Baiti and Bajikar communities of the Rar region. These castes are basically nomadic. They have spread from one region to another through a mobile lifestyle and livelihood to various rural towns. Similarly, a Hapu artist Barkat Ali can be found in Kutubpur

¹ Singh, K. S., (2008), *People of India*, Anthropological Survey of India, page-xxxiv

² Choudhury, D. & Sengupta, P. (2004), *Loksanskritir Viswakosh*, Kolkata, page- 119.

³ Singh, K. S., (2008), *People of India*, Anthropological Survey of India, page-558.

Union of Meherpur. He used to earn a living by singing the song "Hapu Gabo, Paisa Pabo" to the tune of the jhumur.

Although the exact origin and chronological history of the Hapu song is not known, it is believed that the Hapu song was first introduced by the Bajikar community of the Shital village living in the Lavpur region of Birbhum. The present Shital village was originally known as 'Siddhal Gram'. The people who lived in this village used to travel around different regions by dancing and singing through magic. This community was quite adept at playing music even before the Muslim rule in the Rar region. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay's 'Jadukari' story written on the Bajikar community of Shital village mentions Hapu songs.

“হায় গো দিদি

কাঁচরে চুড়ি বামবামানি

উর . র দূর.....

জাগ জাগ জাগিনা ঘিনা

জার যনি নি ৷৷”

Tarashankar Banerjee has mentioned these songs in his *Jadukari*⁴ as the songs of the voice of the girl. However, Sameer Kumar Adhikari has mentioned this in his book '*Banglar Hafugan*' - "When Tarashankar Banerjee Mahashay's '*Jadukari*' story was published, no one had any idea about Hapu songs. Because Dr. Ashutosh Bhattacharya Mahashay's '*Banglar Lok-Sahitya*' first volume was first published in 1954. That is, 12 years after Tarashankar Mahashay's *Jadukari Golpo*."⁵

The Bajikars are one of the oldest community in the Rar region. They started living permanently in the Rar region around the 11th century. Later, through this community, the Hapu song spread to other communities throughout the western part of Rar Bengal. However, at present, the existence of this Bajikar community has almost disappeared. As it spread from one community to another, it has been named differently in different regions. Basically, the content and humor of Habu, Hafu and Hapu are the same.

Subjects of Hapu:

Despite being a song of lamentation of people from the marginalized class, Hapu contains entertainment and humorous elements. Hapu songs incorporate various themes. Mythological stories, spiritual consciousness of secularism, awareness against various social inconsistencies, injustice, and superstitions. There are various stories of family life and stories of extramarital affairs, and there is also primitive humor. Basically, the attempt to express the thoughts and feelings of the marginalized class through this song is evident. However, in terms of song composition, this song is far beyond folk music. Dr. Ashutosh Bhattacharya wrote,

“লোক সাহিত্যে প্রাচীন বা Classics বলাে কিছুই থাকতে পারে না। এমনকি প্রাচীন কোন উপকরণ তার মধ্যে থাকলেও রচনার দিক থেকে তা সর্বদা আধুনিক।”⁶

Hapu songs have a folkloric difference from other folk music of the Radh region. Unlike other folk genres, Hapu songs do not worship any specific gods and goddesses. There is no tradition of singing these songs on any specific puja or festival. Even as a means of propagating other religions, these songs are not sung anywhere. Although there is a tradition of singing different folk songs according to the seasons, there is no specificity in Hapu songs. Even in the past, these songs were not composed in praise of any king or landlord or the heroic

⁴ Bandopadhyay, T. (1942), *Jadukari*, *Anandabajar Patrika*, Sharadiya collection, Kolkata.

⁵ Adhikari, S., (1992), *Banglar Haapu Gaan*, Birbhum, page- 14.

⁶ Bhattacharya, A. (1962), *Banglar LokSahitya*, [part-1], Kolkata, page-28-29.

story of any great person. However, the mythological subject of Radha Krishna in Hapu songs is mainly based on love. One such song is mentioned:

কাছে এসে বলে শুন ওহে ধনুর্ধারী

আমায় বয়ি কর নইলে মন গুমড়ে মরবি"

রাম বলে তুমি আমায় আমি করব নাকো বিয়ে

কাছে মোর সীতা রয়েছে দেখছো নাকো চেয়ে!

আমার ভাই লক্ষ্মণ আছে অবিবাহিত

তার কাছে গিয়ে তুমি জানাও সমস্তা'

উর- র- র- জাগ- জাগ- জাগা"

Hapu is a song of modern thought and consciousness. Hapu songs were vocal against various social inconsistencies and superstitions. Similarly, a Hapu song written about the consequences of unrighteousness is:

একই বিলে চরে পাখি অন্য বিলে ধায়

চল্যা যাবার কালে পাখরি ফাঁদ বাধলি পায়।

ও হায় হায় হায়!

পাখি না পিঞ্জিমি চেনে আসমানে তার বাসা

কার খোঁজে না বলিরে জলে করে যাওয়া আসা।"⁷

There are many such love offerings from brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law in Hapu songs. Because love-related topics are quite attractive to the marginalized classes in all eras. Just as it has an impact on their society, it is also reflected in Hapu songs as an integral part of social life.

Characteristics of Hapu songs:

An exceptional aspect of Hapu music is, using various parts of the body as instruments. Dr. Ashutosh Bhattacharya has mentioned this in his book 'Bangiya Lok Sangeet Ratnakar':

"সাধারণত দুইজন লোক একসঙ্গে এই গান গাহিয়া থাকে। একজনরে হাতে মন্দরি বা গোপীয়ন্ত্র থাকে, আর একজনরে হাতে ছোট একখানি লাঠি থাকে। লাঠিধারী লোকটি গান গায় এবং তাহার সাথে সঙ্গী লোকটি ধুয়া ধরে। গাহবার পদ্ধতিটি একটু অদ্ভুত। এক পদ করিয়া গান গায়, আর মুখে এক প্রকার শব্দ করিয়া নিজেরে পঠিহে লাঠি দিয়া তাল ভাঁজে। অবশিরাম লাঠি চালনার ফলে অনকেরে পঠিহে কালশরি দাগ পড়িয়া যায়। কতকটা নমস্কার ভঙ্গিতে লাঠি দুই হাত দিয়া ধরিয়া থাকে।"⁸

However, some people sing with their hands on the drums, and sometimes men sing by playing with their armpits and slapping various parts of their exposed bodies and making meaningless sounds in between songs.

⁷ Adhikari, S., (1992), Banglar Haapu Gaan, Birbhum, page- 17.

⁸ Sarkar, A. (ed.), (2018), Banglar Lokogaan, Kolkata, page-464.

⁹ Bhattacharya, A. (1961), Bangiya Lok Sangeet Ratnakar, A. Mukherji and Co. Kolkata, page-1929.

Hapu artists, especially from Hooghly and Nadia districts, sing by making sounds like ha--fu--u...., ha--pu--u... and continuously hitting their backs with canes or bamboo sticks.

Like other songs from the Rar region, the word 'lo' is sometimes used at the end of the song lines in Hapu songs. This word 'lo' is also used in the Rar region's Bhadu, Tusu, Jhumur and Alkap styles. Basically, the songs of the Rar region can be easily identified by this word 'lo'.

In some parts of Murshidabad and East Burdwan districts, Hapu Song is called *Hapu Khela*. Before starting Hapu Song, some people perform various physical gestures, which are a bit like sports entertainment, but in fact it is a part of demonic entertainment. People of marginalized classes mainly accept it as entertainment. Because Hapu Song is a common means of entertainment for the helpless people who are constantly going through the pain of poverty and the struggle for a life of need.

However, in the current context, the use of this music is continuously decreasing due to this physical injury. In the Birbhum region, Hapu singers also perform songs along with other artists during various worship festivals such as Shiva Gajan, Chaitra Sankranti, Manasa and Dharmaraj Puja. Even in Chaitra Sankranti and Bolan, programs are organized in various villages of Murshidabad district, where Hapu singers perform songs with the help of musical instruments commonly used with other songs such as drums, gongs, tambourines, ghungur, dabki, harmonium and tabla. In most cases, since they do not have their own musical instruments, other musicians accompany Hapu songs.

Performing style of Hapu:

Hapu songs are sung alone or in groups. Those who sing on the road, in the fields, and in the courtyards of their homes usually sing alone. And while singing on stage, sometimes they sing alone, sometimes in groups of two, four, or six. At the beginning of Hapu songs, singers use different *dhuas*. The singers in particular do the work of holding the *dhuas*. These *dhuas* sometimes move the listener with emotion and sometimes fill the listener with great humor. In Hapu songs, there is more variety in melody than rhythm. The structure of the melody in these songs is almost the same from region to region. Basically, its melody is arranged in the rhythm of the jhumur. However, Hapu songs are sung in different rhythms and beats on the same rhythm. These songs are based on poetry. Poetic rhythm is its soul. However, there are regional differences in the *dhuas* of Hapu songs. In West Burdwan, Nadia region, and some parts of Hooghly, the *dhuas* are held as '*Khichak Dam*'. In the Birbhum region, the *dhua* is raised as '*Khyasak Dam*' and in the East Burdwan and Murshidabad regions as '*Chhyaak Dam*'. However, in almost all regions, the Hapu song is sung with the sounds Hor-r-r-r-r...., Har-r-r-r-r...., or Har-r-r-r-r....

Although there is a slight influence of raga-ragini in other folk music, there is no influence of specific melodies derived from raga-ragini in Hapu songs. The natural speech of people which is sung in the rhythmic pattern of Hapu songs. The influence of regionalism is strong in this. Basically, the influence of the original tunes of the Rar region and the Jhumur rhythm is found in these songs.

Several class distinctions are noticeable in Hapu songs. That is, there is evidence of three levels of artists performing songs in this song. One class performs Hapu songs irregularly only on stage. Those who are involved in a prosperous livelihood. They do not perform Hapu songs anywhere else except on stage. Another class performs Hapu songs only in their own villages. In exchange, they accept rice, pulses, food items and money. The third class mainly takes refuge in begging for life and livelihood and performs Hapu songs. This begging class is mainly nomadic. Who are scattered in different regions. Some of them dress up and take on various forms. They earn a living by singing Hapu songs on trains, buses, in city markets, markets and various fairs.

Findings & Inference:

Currently, Hapu is becoming an obsolete genre of music due to some obvious but unavoidable situations. So this evolution of art is no exception. Every art undergoes transformation with the changing time. The influence of people's daily lives controls almost every industry. With the increased imitation in our social system and the search for work in the standard of living, the job opportunities of the lower class people have increased several times. As a result, the region-based folk culture is being damaged by the urban-centric thinking in the hope of living a better life. The economic needs of people are increasing with time. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult to survive in this profession by singing Hapu only, so the new generation is no longer taking it as a profession. Although some have been learning Hapu music for generations, it is not getting sincere publicity in the media. Moreover, Hapu music is much hidden compared to other popular folk music of the Rarh region. Hapu music is a marginal class-profession and a song of oppression at the same time. But as the days go by, Hapu music seems to be falling victim to unspeakable sorrow, poverty and neglect. Even in their songs tells the sad story of their living by the mean of singing hapu song.¹⁰

And this particular form of folk music cannot be restored or survive without direct involvement of people. As this is more of a nomadic people culture, conventional preservation ways can not be employed. Only if some enthusiasts, govt. or non-govt. organisation's endorsement, initiatives to showcase this music and give them opportunity to perform and promulgate the history and interesting facts about the Hapu song. The younger generation and public take interest in this art form. Otherwise this form of music will also be obsolete with time.

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¹⁰ Choudhury, D. & Sengupta, P. (2004), *Loksanskritir Viswakosh*, Kolkata, page- 119.