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## **A FOLKLORISTIC STUDY ON THE FOLK SONGS THAT REFLECT NATURE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article traces nature in the folk songs being concerned with why folk song creators associate their songs with nature. The study drew its firsthand data by doing field research in Arghakhanchi and the researcher has used folkloristic concepts to analyze the given folk songs. The folkloristic study on them shows that the folk singers of the given locality use nature for two purposes. One purpose of using nature is to produce rhyme in the songs with the objects of nature. This may be called a surface level association. The second one is to associate the subtle layers of their ideas and feelings that they pass through in their life with the virtues and qualities of the things of nature. As a result of this, their creation becomes dense with different virtues and tastes of images and symbols. Of course, human beings feel lively and energetic when they are close to nature. Since there is constant original link age of human beings with natural properties like earth, water, fire, air, and ether, they find and feel nature as the essential inspiring factor for both their life as well as their creation that is very often filled with various wonderful facets of nature.

**Keywords:** folk literature – folklore - folk song – nature.

### **INTRODUCTION**

There is a deep relationship between human beings and nature. Human beings are parts of nature. Nature not only surrounds human beings but also exists within them. It is for this reason that the outside nature naturally affects the inside being of humans. In other words, there is an organic and harmonious relationship between human beings and nature.

It is on the basis of this relationship that humans take much inspiration from nature for their creation. The moment they are aware of and charged with the inspiring power of nature, they forget even rigid and deep-rooted painful matters of the world and give way to the spontaneous flow of their powerful feelings. The feelings that spring with the contact of nature are, of course, pure and noble feelings.

In the production of folk literature, the role of nature is very important. Folk literature represents the way of folk life, which is constantly in contact with the organism of nature. We find different scholars having their own views on folk literature. According to Krishnadev Upadhyaya, "The illiterate people who are far from the influence of civilization and live in their own natural condition produce folk literature in which they express their hope and despair, happiness and sorrow, life and death, gain and loss, and pain and pleasure" (p. 22). What he emphasizes here is that folk literature is a simple expression of the experiences of common people living in their own natural condition. In this regard, Richard Bauman (1992) argues that folklorists would orient their work toward those peoples who are not so far from their agrarian past and natural environment. Yogi Naraharinath adds another important aspect to it, that is, its purpose, "The literature in which the folk presents its ideas spontaneously in folk language for the welfare of folk in the folk behavior is called folk literature" (as cited in Bandhu, 2067 B.S. p. 11). In other words, folk literature springs out of people for the welfare of themselves. In this regard, Satyamohan Joshi's view also deserves a focus: "Folk literature is, in fact, that literature in which we find Nepalese folk culture in its purity and its own way of expression that includes all Nepali meters, Nepali tunes, Nepali tempos, Nepali rhythms, Nepali notes, Nepali feelings and Nepali dances, Nepali music and Nepali poetry that altogether produce the true, the good and the beautiful" (p. 190). Joshi's definition of folk literature takes us to the space of Nepalese culture to realize it particularly in the context of Nepal. His comprehensive view on it inspires us to see in it the true, the good and the beautiful, which are, of course, the essential aspects of nature as well as a cultural society of human beings.

## FOLK SONG

Folk literature has got many forms. Among them, the most effective one is folk song. Folk song is a musical and spontaneous expression of the lived experiences of folk life. Its essential virtues like music and spontaneity of expression are what we find in nature too. While talking about the way with which a creator is expected to produce his or her creation, Laxmi Prasad Devkota suggests that a creator should flow his or her feelings just as the birds chirp and the rivers flow (as cited in Bandhu, 2067 B.S. p. 88). Devkota here connects the way of poetic expression with the spontaneous aspect of nature. Of course, nature flows and inspires us to flow spontaneously. For Devkota beauty of things gets alive and realized when they are flowing (as cited in Bandhu, 2067, p.89 ). Chudamani Bandhu adds to it that a poet's basic nature is his or her fluidity (p. 89). In other words, we can say that nature's fluidity is realized within the poet's creation and the space that surrounds him or her. This is what we find in a folk song as well as its producer and singer.

A folk song reproduces the matter, music and fluidity of nature that the folk singer or creator absorbs while observing it many times in his or her life. Krishna Prasad Parajuli's view on folk song reflects the same, "Nature swells and resounds with folk songs and human heart reverberates being infused with them" (p. 64). In other words, the relationship between nature and the folk singers is lively and deep.

Folk song is associated with nature in many ways. The creator of a folk song tends to produce rhyme with the help of the objects that he or she has seen or felt in nature. We can regard this as the formal or surface level association. Secondly, there are several situations of creation in which the folk song creator enters the space of nature to associate his or her experiences and meanings with the virtues and qualities of the objects or things available in nature. It is in this context that the creator becomes more complex and dynamic in his or her creation, either associating and harmonizing the subtle layers of idea and feelings that he or she passes through in his or her life with the virtues and qualities of the things of nature or contrasting the ideas and feelings with the essential elements available within the things of nature. As a result of this, his or her creation becomes dense with various images and grows with different virtues and tastes of

symbols. In other words, nature remains as the ever-inspiring source for a creator with its large and wide- ranging variations of the sound and magnificent scenery. Human beings feel themselves lively and energetic when they are in nature in its purity and luxuriance.

Of course, the existence of whole organism rests on five basic natural elements: the earth, water, fire, air and ether. Because of this constant original linkage of human beings with natural properties, they find and feel nature as the essential inspiring factor for both their life and their creation. This kind of association and linkage gets dense and glowed in folk song as it takes birth and grows in a folk life, which is close to the various wonderful facets of nature.

### **STRUCTURING RHYME IN FOLK SONGS WITH THE OBJECTS OF NATURE**

Most of the folk songs flow making rhyming pattern. A folk singer usually produces a song in which the last word in the line has the same sound as the last word in another line next to it. Rhyming in a folk song makes it attractive and interesting. It creates an interest and pleasure not only on the side of the listener but also for the producer. The folk singer produces rhyme because he or she loves harmony in sound. Rhyme produces a unit of two lines sounding same at their end. This unit of harmonious gives pleasure to the listeners too. Rhyme in a folk song may outwardly feel just a mechanical or technical matter. However, it is also found as the part of an organic structure of a folk life. In other words, there is a genuine reason on the side of the folk singer behind choosing particular words representing certain natural objects while maintaining a harmony in sound in a folk song. One of the rhyming couplets that suggests deep and organic relation with folk life goes this way:

*Peulipalaunda*

*Kina boldinoumailebolaunda?*

Oh, *peuli*flowers sprouting here and there

Why do you not respond to my call, my dear? (My translation)

Source: Bhumikala Ghimire, age-64, Patauti-1, Arghakhanchi

Date: 2071/08/23

Here the lover has chosen the flower peuli for serious reason, and not just for maintaining a mechanical structure of his song. The term “peuli flower “ is contextually structured here. It has a semantic significance. Peuli flower sprouts in spring season. It is a beautiful flower. It is lovely to look at. It is soft and lovely to touch and smell. People even like to put it into their mouths to feel its taste, the mild sugary taste, playing with it in their mouths to feel in it the essential virtue of the season. In other words, peuli flower is the part of spring season and is capable of representing the essential features of this season: beauty, pleasure, tenderness, fragrance and creation. The lover is not only stimulated and inspired by the season to meet his beloved but also sees similarity between the peuli flower and his beloved: the sprouting peuli flowers remind him of his beloved, which eventually makes him call her. The aspects of beauty, delicacy and fragrance that he sees in the peuli flower are similar to what he feels in his beloved. This proves that the presence of peuli flower in his song is the outcome of his organic relationship with nature which enables him to experience both nature and his beloved. In addition to this, there is another folk song that carries with it the integrated relationship with folk life. The song runs as follows:

*Salalabageko Gandaki*

*Hansambolam dui dinkojindagi*

See how swift the Gandaki is flowing

Let's smile and speak to each other (My translation)

Source: Rukmagat Ghimire, age-65, Patauti-2,

Date: 2072/05 /13

This is one of the perennial songs that people sing any time of the year. Though this song is originally supposed to be sung as the part of duet, we also find people singing it frequently while they are cutting grass, collecting firewood, watching cattle in the jungle alone a bit far from the village or residential area. People also sing such songs while having a long journey particularly around the hill-side area. Barbro Klein (1997) observes, “Folklore is primarily communicated orally or in the practices of everyday life” (p. 333). Everyday practice of the given locality includes its folk singers’ performance as part of their way of life.

A young or matured man or woman likes to sing this song to encourage a partner or a group to be frank and liberal to each other. The singer wants to share his/her feelings

and experiences with his/her friend or a group. This singer seems to be well aware of the limitation of human beings' life. This life is growing short every day and, at any moment, it may end with death. By drawing attention to the momentariness of our life, the singer tries through his singing to enable his friend or a group of friends to participate frankly in exchanging their ideas and expressing their natural feelings and emotions to each other. In a word, the singer wants to overshadow the sense of death by constructing the moments of pleasure as much as possible since life may dash with death any time.

The song with its appropriate arrangement of the words represents the sense of transience that the singer has while singing it. The words like "dui dinko jindaki" (Life is just for two days) suggest the momentariness of life. Similarly, the words "hansambolam" (Let's speak and smile) produce encouraging tone of the singer to get his friend(s) involved in recreation to make their short life meaningful. The sense of transience is also suggested in the song through its first line that refers to the Gandaki river which is flowing continuously giving way to new water every moment. Anyway, the words of the song are capable of reflecting the momentariness of our life and thus shows the concerned people's integrated relationship with nature.

Going to jungle has been a part of everyday life in Arghakhanchi. People go there for grazing their cattle, cutting grass, collecting dry leaves and firewood, medicinal herbs, and so on. While doing their work, especially in summer season, they like to sit under the shade of a tree, usually the shade of a Himalayan ash (lankuri) to get their bodies cool and relieved. This moment usually leads them to release some folk songs. One of such folk songs goes this way:

*Lankurichhayan*

*Woriporibasera lam maya*

*Kire mire jalerumala*

How pleasant is the shade of a Himalayan ash!

Let's sit under it and exchange our love and criss-cross handkerchiefs.

Source: Tuls Ram Ghimire, age-68, Patauti-2

Date: 2071/06/18

This song is the part of an expression of common people who live in the countryside, working hard and sharing the moment of love. Experiencing love is an

essential part of human life and it is expressed freely and spontaneously in the songs of folk life. The above song expresses the sense of love as the part of lived experiences of folk life which it represents. It has sprung up to respond to the immediate context of folk life and we feel in it the warmth of genuine feelings that have captured the vibration of the hearts of people that have produced it as an integral part of the structure of daily life in the given locality.

By the above-mentioned examples of folk songs what I have realized is that folk life associates itself with nature. This association gets reflected not only in people's working tempo but in the mood of their entertainment that includes their act of singing folk songs which are found rich in rhyme. Here the use of rhyme is not additional but essential. It is used not as the part of outer decoration but as the part of totality of representation of the lived experiences of the given folk life.

### **IMAGES OF NATURE IN FOLK SONGS**

The folk singers usually express their ideas, feelings and experiences through the use of imagery. They usually draw the images from nature and extend the significance of what they are saying. The folk songs of Arghakhanchi are rich in images through which they express their lived experiences. One of the folk songs goes like this:

*Ungo ra herdakheri kalilekakailasa*

*Undhomaherada tala barilai*

*Makai pishnaparchha ama maddheni ratama*

*Daura khojnajanchhu ama Kali tirama*

Up I see a high slope of black forest

Down I see a deep pool

I have to grind the corn at night

And collect the fire stick on the bank of Kali.( My translation )

Source: Sita Neupane, age-64, Patauti-2

Date: 2070/05/16

This song is sung by a married woman who is suffering from patriarchy and struggling at her husband's house. She has to work there amid fears and dangers. The images like "a high slope of black forest," "a deep pool," and "on the bank of Kali" produce a sense of fearful situation in which the singer has to work and survive. Similarly, the image of "night" produces a situation she has to work without rest.

There is another folk song that is common in Arghakhanchi which expresses the experiences of the poverty-stricken people:

*Jastohunchhadhamilopaani*

*Ustaihunchhadukhi ko kahani*

The stories of the people in grief are

Like the polluted and muddy water

Source: Prachanda Bahadur Budhathoki , Age-78, Khidim-9, Arghakhanchi

Date: 2070/07/23

The singer of this folk song represents those people who have been suffering from poverty. Poverty-stricken people are very often in a sad mood. The term dhamilopani (the polluted and muddy water) signifies the sadness in their life whereas the opposite term crystal water would imply a bright and happy mood.

In addition to this, we find another very popular folk song that takes us to a significant part of nature:

*Karkalākopānijastomanushyakosharira*

*Ajammari lie jastotejabarilai*

*Dhana pachhi lāundaina sātha kohi jāndaina*

*Mai hum bhannibeerapanieklaijāneho*

Man is like the water on the leaf of cocoyam

Yet there are some that feel themselves as the everlasting ones

Neither the wealth nor anybody follows them beyond death

Even the bravest one has to pass away alone. (My translation)

Source: Jeet Kumari Ghimire, age-70, Patauti-2, Arghakhanchi

Date: 2058/07/14

This is a Teej song, simple in words and deep in idea. The song is popular in every locality of this district and almost all women know how to sing it. However, the elder matured women having some religious background seem to be more interested in singing this song.

The words that they have arranged in the song are so appropriate that the totality of their meaning permeates the whole life of human beings. The words "Karkalakopani" (the water on the leaf of cocoyam) in connection to human body are sufficient to dissolve the destructive ego of the heartless people. Moreover, the words "dhanapachhilaudaina" (wealth will not go beyond death) and "sāthakohijāndaina" (nobody will follow after death) seem to be able to cool the proud people's ego and drive their minds to the right tract. Besides this, the last line of the song suggests that even the bravest of the world has to surrender before the strength of time that carries everybody on and on till he/she dashes with death at last. In this way, the women singers seem to be able to select the appropriate words that truly represent their way of life. Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens (2005) believe, "It [folklore] is also the interactive, dynamic process of creating, communicating, and performing as we share that knowledge with other people"(p. 8). Of course, folk singers see themselves in connection to others in their agrarian life.

## CONCLUSION

In this way, a folkloristic study on the folk songs of the given area has enabled us to see that our life originates in nature and the act of returning to origin leads us to a kind of refreshment. Since folk song is associated in many ways with nature, the act of singing or listening to it produces a chance for us to get renewed with nature's vital forces and qualities. In a word, folk song is nature and folk singer/ creator and the recipient are, of course, the parts of nature. In a lively folk singing there is no gap between the song and its producer and even listener.

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