



**CREATIVE BEAUTY OF LANGUAGE IN FOLKSONGS:
EXAMPLES FROM THE MAITHILI FOLKSONGS**

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ABSTRACT

Folksongs function as a mirror of a culture. They vividly describe common people's happiness and sorrow, their desires and dreams, every up and downs of their lives. They mesmerize us by their beauties and charms. Sadly, despite the desperate effort of some true folksong-lovers, folksongs are dying a slow death. There is a false belief that folksongs are inferior to poetry and modern songs which are more creative and beautiful. The present paper tries to show how this belief is false. It starts with a brief introduction of folksong, followed by the discussion of what 'creativity' means in relation to poetry and folksong, and presenting plenty of examples of folksongs which show how creative they are in the use of poetic devices and figures of speech. Finally, it ends with a short discussion of the causes of their gradual disappearance. The examples are taken by the Maithili folksongs.

Keywords: folksongs, figures of speech, culture, gari, samdaon

Introduction

Folksong needs no definition. Everybody knows what it is although they may not be able to explain it. Folksongs are found in every community, and are sung on different occasions. In case of the Maithili culture, folksongs and rites of passage are inseparable. Predominantly sung by women, the folksongs of Mithila are woven around calendar of events, rites of the passage, and everyday life situations. They are sung at birth known as 'Sohar', in wedding ceremony called 'Gari' and separation such as marriage and/or death called 'Samdaun', etc. They are sung on the occasions of different festivals, e.g., 'Chhath' (Sun-worship), 'Sama-chakewa' (brother-sister love), 'Jitia' (for son's safety), etc. They are also sung to celebrate different seasons, e.g., 'Phag' in Spring, 'Biraha' in Summer, 'Kajari' in the rainy season, etc. It might sound surprising to some non-Maithil people but folksongs are also sung with household daily chores, e.g., 'Lagani' while grinding grain on a stone grinder, 'Ropani' while planting paddy crops in the field, and so on. In fact, folksongs are so universal in the Maithil community that you may hear them in a quarrel between spouses, or meeting someone so dear to them after a long interval (Rai 2016). Thus, every phase of life is touched by folksongs. It is very sad that such an important phenomenon of Maithil life is gradually disappearing. Folksongs are basically unwritten, and in most cases their writers are unknown. though today folksongs are written and sung. Maithil culture is very rich in folksongs. Examples of all kinds cannot be cited here: only a few examples are given below.

(1) गारी /gari/ 'rebuke'

इ बुढा बाबा के पाकल पाकल दाढी

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अरे देखै मे पातर आ खाइ तीन थारी

तोहरा से पुछे हम ओ धनुरधारी

एक भाई गोर किए एक भाई कारी

(This old man has white beard

He's thin but eats three plates full

Tell us o great archer [Rama]

Why is that you are black & white is your brother)

Context: 'gari' is sung on the occasion of a wedding ceremony at the bride's place. The groom and his company with his relatives and friends sit to have dinner. They start eating and the women folk start singing 'gari' which literally means **abuse**. The song could be very insulting but nobody minds. Actually, the women are requested to sing 'gari', and the groom and his company enjoy them.

(2) समदाओन /sɑmdɑon/ 'a song of separation'

भूली जा हे भौजी तकरार सब ननदी के

चित्त से उतारि द कसूर

गुरुजन परिजन सबके नमन मोरा

चलली अजान देश दूर (चौधरी २०१५)

(O bhaujee!* Forget all the fights with your nanadi**

Don't take my mistakes into your heart

O elders! My last namaste to you

I'm going away to an unknown land)

*elder brother's wife

**husband's younger sister

Context: Samdaun is a song of separation. It is sung at the time when the bride takes leave from her parents. She is now leaving her parent's home for good: she doesn't know if she would be able to visit the house again. The song expresses her anguish for the them whom she is leaving behind.

(3) सामा-चकेवा /sama-ɕakewal/ 'a song and dance on brother-sister's love'

हाँ रे पनकउवा s s s सावन भादो केर उमडल नदिया

भासी गेल भैया के बेडवा रे पनकउवा s s s

हाँ रे पनकउवा s s s मचिया बैसलि मैया मनमने गुनै छै

भैया गेलै बहिनी बुलावे पनकउवा s s s (रेणु १९९५)

(This flooded river of the monsoon time, o pankauwā!

My brother's boat was carried away by the current

On a string-bed, Mother might be thinking, o pankauwā!

That brother must have gone to meet me ...)

Context: This is a song sung on the occasion of Sama-chakewa, the birds that symbolizes brother-sister. The sister who is waiting for her brother at her husband's home laments when she hears that her brother's little boat was drowned by the flooded river. The song is addressed to a water-bird: the implication is that the bird would go and tell her mother about the unfortunate accident.

(4) बिरहा /biraha/ 'a song of melancholy'

हाँ रे पनकउवा s s s सावन भादो केर उमडल नदिया

भासी गेल भैया के बेडवा रे पनकउवा s s s

हाँ रे पनकउवा s s s मचिया बैसलि मैया मनमने गुनै छै

भैया गेलै बहिनी बुलावे पनकउवा s s s (रेणु १९९५)

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(Cuckoo bird cries at midnights to torment me

And the sleep has become my enemy: there is no sleep)

Context: The song expresses the anguish of a wife whose husband is not home. Spring has come, and the cries of the cuckoo bird at the silence of the midnights do not let her sleep. Everybody, everything has turned out to be her enemy.

(5) रोपनी /ropāni/ 'planting'

बहे पुरबैया हे ननदी पवनवाँ करे झकझोर

अरे राजा जी करेजवा में दरदिया होवे बडी जोर (चौधरी २०१५)

(O nanadi this gust of the east wind shakes violently

Brings the memory of my beloved that gives me heartache)

Context: The song is sung at the time of rice planting. The singer laments on the absence of her lover (husband) as the gust of the east wind brings his memory back to her.

Folksong vs Poetry

Folksong is the oldest form of oral poetry. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that it has got everything that poetry has. In addition, its musicality makes it even more charming and beautiful. Folksong and poetry both are twin-sisters. They both are equally beautiful and charming. What makes them different is their upbringing. Poetry was brought up in an urban setting with more comforts and style. Her upbringing made her more sophisticated, more 'cultured' and 'stylish' (Rai 2015). Folksong was brought up in a rural setting. She is therefore wild. She brings with her the fresh air of the countryside. She is innocent and frank. It would be biasness to say that poetry is more beautiful and charming than folksongs. Folksong exploits all those poetic devices and figures of speech that poetry does.

Creativity and folksong

The beauty of a poem lies mainly in its creativity. Creativity does not mean something entirely new but saying things differently. The same thought and ideas, feeling and emotions are dealt with in such a way by poets that they seem new: nobody had expressed them that way before. Creativity is not in theme but in language: 'poetry is not a special language but it uses language in a special way' (Rai 2020) Creativity can be summarized as follows:

- Looking at things, people, concept from a new angle and expressing them in a novel way
- Use of poetic devices and figures of speech
- Being unusual
- Stretching the language rules

Folksongs like poetry possess all these features as the following examples show.

(6) मोरङ जङ्गल के हिरनीया जटिनियाँ

पाकल बाँस के छौकिनियाँ जटिनियाँ

(A gazelle from the forest of Morang – my *jatiniyā*

A golden stick of a bamboo branch –my *jatiniyā*)

This song is sung on the occasion of 'Jat-jatin' *Jat*, the hero and *jatin*, the heroine. *Jatin* has a fight with *Jat*, and she leaves for her *naihar*, parents' home in a huff. *Jat*, who can't live without her, goes after her and on his way asks everyone about his *Jatin*, and in doing so he describes his beautiful *Jatin*. Here, *Jatin* is compared with a jungle-gazelle – the implication is that she is as supple and wild as a gazelle, which roams the jungle at its will. The second line compares her with a bamboo branch which is golden in colour. The implication is that she is as slim as a bamboo branch used as a stick, and her skin glows like gold. The comparison is a beautiful example of metaphor. In fact, it is very difficult to translate the exact meaning of छौकिनिया – 'stick' is just better than

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nothing. Further, its rhyme हिरनीया जटिनियाँ and छौंकिनियाँ जटिनियाँ makes it more musical. Further it should also be noted that instead of calling her *Jatin*, *hiran* (gazelle) and *chhaunkin* (stick), which is common, by adding *-yan* to these terms she is called *Jatiniyan*, *hiraniyan* and *chhaunkiniyan* which show more intimacy. What could be more creative than these two lines!

(7) अन्नपानी पैचा लेल

सिन्दुर सपन भेल

पिया भेल डुमरी के फूल। (सिंह १९९१)

(I borrowed grain (to keep my body and soul together)

*Sindur** became like a dream

And my hubby became *dumari*** flower)

*vermillion which a married Maithil woman put on her forehead

**flower of cluster fig

The setting of this song is that the husband has gone to some unknown land for some time. The wife laments his absence. She can bear with hunger (by borrowing grains sometimes from her neighbours), but his absence is unbearable. Even putting vermillion on her forehead gives her no pleasure because her husband is like cluster fig flower. The pleasant surprise of the beauty of it is in the third line where the husband has been compared with cluster fig flower. Actually, cluster fig has no flower: the flower is within the fruit – if you break the fruit, you could see tiny flowers in there. This is also an example of metaphor with rhyming lines. The implication of the comparison is that her husband (or her husband's sweet memories) is in her heart although she could not see him in the same way as the cluster fig flowers couldn't be seen as they are inside the fruit. In other words, place of love is heart not eyes.

(8) रेशमी पटोर मैया फाडीके फेकाउली s s s

सोनाके गहनवाँ मैया गाममे बँटाउली, आ रे s s s

रु s s s पा के आधा मनके चुर

रगडि कैलक धुर s s s जी s s s (रेणु १९९५)

(Mother tore the silk-sari and threw it away ...

The gold jewellery she gave away

And the 20 kilograms silver anklets

She crushed with her feet to dust ...)

This is a beautiful example of personification and imagery. Koshi river has been personified and addressed as mother. River Koshi has great importance in the Mithila region: it is both a source of happiness and sorrow for the Maithil people. Each year thousands of families suffer because of its flood, but on the other hand it is the major source of irrigation. Koshi thus gives and destroys life, and therefore she is worshipped and referred to as mother. Koshi has been depicted here as angry because she has herself torn her silk-sari and threw it away which creates image of many of its tributary as pieces of clothes. Similarly in her anger she has crushed her 20 kilogram silver anklets into dust which creates the image of the silvery sand along its bank – the sand that it brings with its flood, as soon as the flood subsides there remains just shining sand as far as eyes could see.

(9) बाँधल बछेड रे बथान पर डहके खूँटा खडी डिकरे गाय

बिना रे बयार लहर उठे नदिया में आपहीं हिले रे पटोर

(The cow and its calf are tethered and both are crying

There are waves without wind in the river and so in the sari)

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सुनु सुनु सखी सब गावँ के समाज सब सिया धिया चलली जाय
जा जा हे सिया बेटी पिया के बगरिया हे बाबा के नगरिया भेलै है उदास (चौधरी २०१५)
(O my friends and villagers look Sita is departing for good
O Sita go to your husband's home, father's home is desolate)

Both the songs are *Samdaun* sung when a married daughter leaves her parents' home for the first time. They have very skillfully used alliteration that adds to beauty of the lines and depth to their meanings. As she leaves her parents' home, she not only laments the separation of her family members but also the pets, cows and calf who seem to be crying for her. They also reveal the cruel truth of the society in which a woman has to leave her parents' home for good to settle with unknown, strange people in an unknown place (we must not forget that in many cases, the bride doesn't even see her groom before marriage let alone know him – she goes to such an unknown place and home where she doesn't know anybody).

All these examples show how creative are folksongs in terms of using poetic device and looking and describing people, things and concepts in a novel way. Finally, we will see two more examples of creativity – the songs which were created on the spur of the moment as soon as the incident happened: the first refers to domestic violence, and the second to an untimely death and its consequences.

(10) रे s s s मारेला ते मारेला, चुडी किये फोडेला
छौंड़ा रमचरना रे। गे मइयो s s s
चुडिया वियोगिया कलेजी मे दरदिया
छौंड़ा रमचरना रे। गे मइयो s s s
(O! You beat me but why did you break my bangles
O boy *Ramcharnā*! O my mother...
The broken bangles make my heart ache
O boy *Ramcharnā* ! O my mother...)

The context is that Ramcharn, the husband beat his wife and in doing so he broke his wife's bangles which were very precious to her. She was so unhappy and angry that she addressed her husband as 'boy' and called him by his name not Ramcharan but Ramcharna which are derogatory. What could be more creative than the fact that the song was created by her after she was beaten. It should also be noticed that by creating the song she has stretched the use of the language, because addressing one's husband as 'boy', and calling him by his name in a derogatory way are socio-linguistically not allowed.

(11) डकुवा रे डकुवा s s s
लुटि लेलक हमरा के रे डकुवा
जकरा खातिर भैस बेचलिए
उहो नहि बैचलै रे डकुवा s s s
O robber (doctor)...!
You robbed me O !
For whom I sold my buffalo
He is no more alive, O ...)

The context is that a woman's husband dies while being treated by a doctor. She has sold her buffalo to cover the treatment but the operation is not successful and she loses both, her husband and her buffalo. The beauty of the song is in the first line where she uses the word डकुवा /*dakuwa*/ 'robber' twice with different meaning. The same word has been very skilfully used to refer to the doctor and also to a robber – the implication is that a robber and a doctor both rob of poor people.

Why are folksongs disappearing?

Folksongs are no less beautiful and charming than poetry and yet people, particularly the educated ones, look down upon folksongs. They think that they are for illiterates, and that they are crude. They ignore folksongs and prefer listening to movie-songs. The children follow their parents. It is very sad but the fact is as the literacy and education is going up, the use of folksongs is going down. It is so because the vernacular of education and the language at home are different from the very beginning of education to children. That is why, we, the so called 'elites' of the society are the major cause of the gradual disappearance of folk traditions.

Related to this cause is the Inferiority complex which we have in relation to other cultures, particularly the Western culture. Rich people and language with more speakers dominate the poor and the languages with less speakers. This is also true with culture of which folksong is a part. Maithili language and folksongs are dominated by Hindi language and Hindi song particularly the Bollywood songs, which in turn is dominated by the Hollywood songs, i.e., English songs. This is the reason why Maithili folksongs such as 'अन्गुरी में डँसले बिया नगिनिया हे ननदी' (*anguri me dansle biya naganiya he nanadi*), and 'अन्नपानी पैचा लेल सिन्दुर सपन भेल' (*ann pani paincha lel sindur sapan bhel*), and so on are gradually being replaced by such Bollywood Hindi songs as ... मुन्नी बदनाम हुई' { (*Munni badnam hui*), and 'शीला की जवानी' (*Sheela ki javaani*).

False modernity is another cause of the disappearance of folksongs. The common popular belief being modern is to wear Western dress and listen to recent Hindi or English songs. We run after this false modernity and foster foreign culture at the cost of our own. We believe that in order to be modern one must be able to speak, and listen to English songs even if we do not understand them. In fact, music and songs are no longer something to be listened to, on the contrary it has become something to be seen on a mobile or a computer screen. We don't listen to music but we watch the actors and actresses dancing or performing the songs. This modernity is killing the importance of music and songs.

Davies (2019) opines that 'Less scope for its use' and 'lack of public awareness about its importance' is an important cause for the disappearance of folksongs which is only partially true because scope for the use of Maithili folksongs is vast as they are used in all seasons, in rites of passage and virtually in every walk of life. Lack of public awareness about its importance is true.

Whether we like or not, we are under the influence of globalization. Modern technology has made the world a small village. Communities, languages and cultures come in contact with each other: Maithili culture is also not untouched by other cultures. People are dazzled by novel things and tend to forget the older ones. We forget that new things are not always good: they lack the gravity of the old things. There are two Maithili proverbs that I would like to quote: (a) 'घर के मुर्गी दाइल बराबर', *easily available things lose their importance*, and 'दूरक ढोल सुहाउन' (राई २०६८ वि.सं.) *drum beating far away sounds melodious*. These are truly applicable to Maithili folksongs, and to Maithil people.

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