

Locality in the Folk Songs of Gulmi, Palpa and Arghakhanchi

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Abstract

This article draws on the folk songs of Gulmi, Palpa and Arghakhanchi with special focus on how they reflect and represent the sense of locality. Most of the folk songs that carry with them the sense of locality in the given districts are wali, Teej songs, savai and bhajan. People in these districts sing their own local folk songs to express their feelings deeply attached with their own local objects, places, people and gods and goddesses. I studied these folk songs in connection to the local beliefs and sensibilities that are regularly attached with what they do and anticipate in their actual local life. Anyway, the given folk songs duly reflect the local colors of the regional landscape, cultures, memories and music that have their own beauty and taste.

Keywords: Locality, Folk Songs, Folk Music, Space, Memory

Introduction

We need a definition of locality based on territorial theory since it is a major key word in the article. Locality refers to the site or scene of something in relation to its surroundings. It can be taken as suggesting two aspects: geographical as well as the cultural ones. Richard Johnson et al. assert that locality or “place is itself a producer of meaning and changes in spatial practices always have cultural implications” (106). In regard to space, Chris Barker observes, “Space is a construction and material manifestation of social relations which reveals cultural assumptions and practices” (379). In other words, different places or spaces are used in diverse ways to carry out various activities with different social meanings. As the folk singers are the parts of a particular folk life, what they express in their songs is naturally the part of the whole way of life existing there. In the folk songs of hilly districts of Lumbini zone, we find the reflection of the local colours of the landscape, cultures, memories and music that have their own beauty and taste. The study on the folk songs of these hilly districts of Lumbini zone is sure to capture the sense of locality in them. Each district has its own different folk songs to represent people's feelings associated with their own localities. The folk songs of different regions not only just refer to the objects, places, people and gods in their objective sense but express them in connection to the whole way of life in association with the beliefs and sensibilities that are regularly attached with what they do and anticipate in their actual life. No doubt, the sense of locality is expressed in different local musical associations. The folk songs representing local objects, places and people certainly arouse the love and respect for their own locality in the audiences.

Folk Song

There are different forms of folk literature among which folk song is the most powerful one to transmit the spirit of folk life. By virtue of its orality, spontaneity and musicality, folk song is capable of holding the warmth of life, the immediacy of human emotions. Our pain and delight, sorrow and happiness, expectations and frustrations, beliefs and values find full expression in folk song. While analyzing folk songs, the most important thing that is never to be missed is to find and feel in them what it means to be human. In Wilson's words, “[i]t is this attempt to discover the basis of our common humanity, the imperatives of human

existence" that places the study of folk literature at the very centre of humanistic study (qtd. in Sims and Stephens 10). Folk songs represent both: specific as well as common human feelings and ideas. In this sense, they reflect the whole way of life. However, when we are to focus on the folk songs of a particular community, we certainly try to be more and more specific to have its knowledge in depth and detail. Of course, folk song as the most effective form of folk literature, expresses the folk spirit of a given community or locality in its fulness. Before studying it in its real context of the given areas, it is relevant here to see how different scholars of this field define the term.

There are some important scholars whose opinions about and definitions of folk songs enable us to understand them in depth and detail. Let's see then how Krishnadev Upadhyaya defines folk song, "Folk songs are the songs of the earth, songs of life, songs of victory, songs of auspiciousness and the songs of expectations. They are the wealth of people that are produced by themselves and are concerned with their lives" (274). For him, folk songs are people's own creations which represent their impulses and feelings attached with the Earth and the moments and experiences of their victory, auspiciousness and deep-seated expectations. In a word, folk songs are true expressions of folk life. Similarly, Krishna Prasad Parajuli adds more to the understanding of folk songs in this way, "Folk song is a natural rhythmic singing that slithers uninterrupted with the sharp and sweet voices and ripples through the hearts of infinite number of people who play with the waves of joys and sorrows in the lap of earth" (70). Of course, folk songs spring out of people's hearts and represent the feelings and experiences of folk life as a whole. Ramnaresh Tripathi's definition of the folk song strengthens more or less the same aspects of folk song, that is, "Folk songs are the spontaneous springs of nature in which there is no adornment but only sentiment, no prosody but only tune, no artistry but grace" (qtd. in Bandhu 113). In other words, folk songs have no trace of artificiality in their expression. They flow as the river flows and make the sound waves in their own way. Next definition of the folk song given below focuses on how the individual creation gets dissolved in the tradition of folk song:

Folk song is that song in which there is no projection of an individual creator who, in fact, identifies himself or herself with the folk spirit and produces something as to be impersonal which the folk feels its own that represents the folk personality as a whole. This is how an individual folk song gets joined to the people's great tradition which changes it, later on, as it runs with the sense of time. (Barma *et al.* 750)

In other words, this definition enables us to see the undercurrents of the folk tradition in which an individual creator is emphasized as a contributor to the making and enriching the tradition and how the individual creation grows in the tradition to represent the folk life as a whole. Another important aspect of folk song is group-singing which Satyarthi emphasizes in this definition of the folk song, "The seeds of folk song lie in group-singing" (qtd. in Bandhu 113).

In Arghakhanchi district, there are different types of folk songs with typical musical associations that represent the different types of geographical as well as cultural aspects of life. Some of them are worth notable from the perspective of locality. Let's observe one after another to see how they reflect the nature and culture of the areas with their own participation:

Hātamā liyim kalam ra masi kāgatu patra lāi

Āhāi kāgata patra lāi

Doshara charan gāeko geeta Vikako chhatra lāi

Ahāi Ulkako Chhatralāi

We took pen with ink to write on a paper

We offer the second song of *ohali* to the deity Chhatra of Ulka.

Source: Harita Acharya, age-62, Mareng -4, Arghakhanchi

Date: 2071/01/24

This song is sung only in the rainy season and its typical name in Arghakhanchi is *wali*. *Wali* is a women's song of very slow tempo which they sing in group while transplanting the paddy-seedlings. The words used in the song refer clearly to particular local deity. The term "Chhatra" is the name of a local god and "Ulka" is the name of a particular place of Arghakhanchi, where "Chhatra" resides. The temple of Chhatra is very famous in this district. It is so familiar that ordinary people frequently use it in their folk songs. Here women express their respect and pray for this local god in their first part of *wali*. From ancient time this song has been the part of folk life in rainy season. When audio-visual signs and symptoms appear in nature of rainy season, the tune of *wali* naturally and silently starts flowing first in the minds of people including the old people and grown up children of these areas. The flowing of actual *wali* sound or tune takes place on the day of transplantation of paddy-seedlings in the field. On this day, many people gather in the field: some of them as the spade-men to level the mud in the plots, some as the carriers of the seedlings, some as the ploughmen, and some others as the trans-planters of the seedlings. On the one hand, the ploughmen and the spade men are preparing the field and on the other, the women start pulling out the seedlings from the seed-bed. Just before taking out the seedlings, women worship the local deities like *Sime* and *Bhume*. When they have finished this, they pray and remember all the local deities through *wali* song for their good omen and protection while transplanting the paddy-seedlings.

The above *wali* song is the part of the beginning in which women have to remember, as a rule, the local deities. In other words, the first part of *wali* is offered to the deities so that they feel safe for the whole period of transplantation or other activities in the field. After this, remembrance of the deities, their singing of *wali* song goes on for the whole day which entertains the people of the whole surrounding.

In addition to *wali* song, there are other types of folk songs in which we find the sense of locality. For example, the following Teej song can be observed to see how it represents particular locality in Arghakhanchi district:

Lāmpātiko Lānbi dunge Lāmpātiko lanbi dunge
Gairi dobhāna bhote gairi dobhāna
Salamā sala tāride bhote salamā sala tāride bhote
Bābā bhetama bhote Bābā bhetana

The boat at Lampati is long
Deep as it is at the confluence of two rivers
Row me to the other shore, Oh boatman!
So that I can meet my father

Source: Jeet Kumari Ghimire, age-73, Patauti-2 Arghakhanchi

Date: 2070/05/19

This is a very popular Teej song of Arghakhanchi district. Teej song is sung by women in *Bhadra* to express their lived experiences and feelings they have particularly at their husband's house where they have to live a hard life full of suffering. They also sing it praying Shiva to get a good husband and his long life.

The words she uses in her song above represent her happy mood as she is now free to visit already familiar place Lampati beyond which lies her parents' house. Here the term "Lampati" refers to an actual place that lies in Wangla village development committee. The use of such word in the married women's songs of Teej festival has been the part of the total expression of their lived experiences. Of course, the term "Lampati" represents this woman's sensibilities associated with her birthplace or locality. Similarly, the term *bhote* (boatman)

represents the total potentiality of getting help as the place where she has come now is the part of her own locality or birth place.

When Teej festival comes, women gather from different directions at their birth places and start singing the songs that reveal in detail their lived experiences including those that they have on their ways to their parents' houses. The above song is one of them.

As Teej is the festival of women, the original singers of Teej songs are women, particularly the married ones. Most of the Teej songs are laden with the experiences that the married women have while playing the role of a wife, a daughter-in-law and a sister-in-law at their husbands' houses or places. When they have to pass through the bitter moments there, they cannot help remembering their fathers. They believe that the only strong person to console and protect their life is the father. Teej is a great chance for them to meet their fathers and share their experiences and feelings associated with their involvement in hard daily life activities at their husbands' houses. The above song ensures the woman singer's meeting with her father only after crossing the confluence of two rivers at Lampati by the help of a boatman. Grossberg's words are relevant here, "Cultural studies is the ongoing effort to define its own local specificity" (181).

Next to *Wali* and Teej songs, there are other folk songs that reflect the signs and symptoms of particular local places, objects and cultures. Such folk songs also include *savai* which is a descriptive folk song of mid tempo sung at any time of the year. There are many *savais* that suggest locality in this district. One among them goes this way:

Daralyān ra durulung darlāgdā bājā
Rātirāti hidne Gorkhāli rājā
Gorkhāli rājāle Mājkhota pāyā
Mājkhokto darbār jhingatile chhāyā
 Beating of some big drums feels terrible
 The king of Gurkha moves at night
 He won Majhkot and roofed the palace with the clay tile

Source: Haīta Acharya

The most of the words of this folk verse are related to the king of Gurkha and the place Majhkot is historically associated with the king. The onomatopoeic words like "daralyang ra durlung" reflect the beating of the drums by the army of the king around the localities of this district including Majhkot itself. The term "Majhkot paya" suggests the king's achievement of Majhkot.

As a descriptive folk poem, *savai* describes the details of life including natural as well as historical events. People recite this song everywhere at any time of the year. In Arghakhanchi district, it is also sung at the intervals of the course of *bhajan* at night.

Both women and men like to recite *savai*. It is very easy to sing. The above *savai* refers to the ancient time when the Gurkha king won the famous place of this district called Majhkot. The place Majhkot has thus a historical significance.

In this way, we have found that in Arghakhanchi district, there are folk songs with different backgrounds and musical organizations that have internalized, the local peculiar tunes, tastes and beauties and represent them in their own lively originality.

Regarding the folk songs of Gulmi district of Lumbini zone, they have their own ways of reflecting the regional virtues. Among many of such songs, there is one that represents the locality of Charpala in this way:

Nepala rājya Gulmi jillā, mouje Charpala madhye
Ghar Arbathok Tosha Begrung, sakkalimāko sadde
 Within the Nepal kingdom there is Gulmi district
 Within which falls Tosha Begrung of Arbathok,

One of the villages of Charpala area,
Having its own original virtues (Kandel 1)

This is the beginning part of the famous folk hymn called *Rabikrita Ramayan*. Though this is created by Rabi Lal Kandel of Begrung village, it has become the common property of all because of its simple folk tune and colloquialism. Since Rabi Lal started singing it with single string instrument, it is also known as *Ektāre Ramayan* or *Ektāre Bhajan*. In the beginning, Kandel sang it in the context of religious or ritual ceremonies. However, later on, people started reciting it every where by heart at any time while doing their daily life activities. Though every common people like to sing it now, its original singers are those who can sing it holding the same sincere religious spirit as Kandel had while singing it with *ektārebaja* (single-string instrument).

His thankfulness or respected feelings are well-reflected in the words of these lines. After producing the local place names like "Charpala", "Arbathok", "Tosha", and "Begrung", he uses the term "*Sakkalimako sadde*" (having original virtues) in his introductory part of creation. So, these words truly represent his respectful feelings associated with his locality.

In addition to the folk hymn of Kandel, there is another hymn in which we find religious feelings associated with the sacred river called Kali Gandaki, which flows through Gulmi district of Lumbini zone. Let's see how the hymn reveals the feelings invested for this river:

Siri Gangāmai Krishna Kali nāma timle pāi
Aayou timi mokshya dina lāi,

O Ganga, named as Kali Gandaki !

You appeared upon the Earth to cleanse our sins

Source: Indramani Ghimire, age- 61, Patauti-4, Arghakhanchi

Date: 2068/10/25

This folk hymn is usually sung in the religious or ritual context. However, we find some minstrels singing it with their *sarangis* as the part of their daily life: they sing it at the individual houses, public fairs, festivals, and on some journeys.

The words refer cleanly to the river flowing through the locality. The words like "Krishna" and "Kali" refer to the same river that flows through Ridi. The words in the second line that includes the term "Mokshya" suggest the religious sensibility associated with the river, particularly the part that flows at Ridi.

On the whole, the above folk songs of Gulmi district have shown that people in different localities of this district are able to produce different songs and musical associations to represent their own regional backgrounds of geographical as well as cultural truths and sensibilities. Volosinov rightly observes, "Cultural texts and practices are multi-accentual. They can be articulated with different accents by different people in different contexts" (qtd. in Storey 4).

Besides the folk songs of Arghakhanchi and Gulmi districts, the folk songs of Palpa district are equally worth notable here for their power of expressing the tastes and truths of locality. There are many folk songs of this type in this district. However, it is possible here to present only two of them, for example. One of them flows like this:

Rampure phantko linglinge pinga

Rampura phāntko linglinge pinga

Aau khelama sarumai dohori sarumai jobāna

Oh, how tall the swing!

In the wide space of Rampur

Let's rock the swing, friend

Facing each other

Source: Tila Pokhrel, age-65, Somadi-6, Palpa

Date: 2071/ 01/ 17

This song is sung at Teej festival. It is a usual tradition of Teej festival that during this period people make a swing and set it to the bamboo poles or a tree and then start rocking it. As this festival is mainly related to women, they are found, more than others, involved in swinging activity. This has been an essential part of Teej festival not only in Palpa district but also in other areas of Nepal. The activity of swinging, reinforced and renewed every year at Teej festival, is deep-seated in the minds of women and easily finds expression in their song. Of course, in a women's life, which is found in Palpa and other hilly districts of Lumbini zone, their participation in a free leisure activity like rocking a swing certainly provides them with a high scale of pleasure. Moreover, at Teej festival, most of them leave their routine of hard daily life at their husband's houses for their own parents' houses. These things in their limited life can be regarded as great ventilations and the above song represents their happy mood. Of course, what McRobbie argues is right. According to her, the object of cultural analysis is "the lived experience which breathes life into [the] . . . inanimate objects [of popular culture]" (27).

The words in the song are used not for nothing. They have contributed to reflecting the singers' freedom and pleasure. The word "*phant*" (a wide open space) and a "*ling linge pinga*" (a tall swing) that moves freely without any obstacle in the air or sky suggest the sense of freedom. Similarly, the words "*āukhelam*" (Let's rock a swing) and "*dohori*" (swing facing each other) symbolize pleasure. Thus, the act of swinging in a wide space gains a sense of freedom and pleasure for women and the present song associates the delightful feelings of swinging with Rampur locality.

There is another folk song of Palpa district that represents an awareness of particular locality. Let's see how the song suggests the sense of locality:

*Riksheshwarkā devatāle hāta jodi basekā
kale garlā meri chhori devatāko dhyān*

There is Riksheshwar God
Posed with his hands joined together
Who will worship him, my daughter?

Source: Jit Kumari Ghimire

The words the singer uses in her song are appropriate in the context to represent her mood. The first line of the song with the key word "Riksheshwar" refers to God located in Argali, Ridi, of Palpa district. In the second line, the terms "*Kale garla devatako dhyān*" (who will worship Him) and "*Meri chhori*" (my daughter) together reflect the concerns of the mother about the daughter and her encouragement for her to adore God.

This song refers to the context of Teej festival. There are many Teej songs in Palpa district. This is one among them. Riksheshwar is very famous all over Nepal. Most of the people go to Ridi almost every year to see and pray to Riksheshwar. The women with religious background do not forget the beautiful God Riksheshwar and naturally it comes to be reflected in their religious songs of Teej festival.

This song is usually sung by the matured women having some religious background and following the traditional way of life. They believe in God and whenever they have to pass through critical situations of their life, they tend to remember and worship a powerful God like Riksheshwar. Mothers are found often worried about their daughters, particularly in relation to their future life. As they believe that God can help their daughters to have a successful married life, they tend to encourage them to worship or adore some God. In the above song, we find such concerns of a mother and her encouraging tone for her daughter so that she will worship Riksheshwar God.

In this way, we have seen that the folk songs of Gulmi, Arghakhanchi and Palpa districts of Lumbini zone express the local objects, places, people and gods not simply in

their objective sense but in connection to the whole way of life existing there. They are reflected in the folk songs in association with the beliefs and feelings that are regularly attached with what people do and anticipate in their actual life. Of course, "Meaning is produced and exchanged in every personal and social interactions in which we take part" (Hall

Conclusion

Analyzing the different folk songs of the afore-mentioned districts has revealed that the sense of locality is one of the essential parts of whole way of life. Each district has its own different folk songs that represent people's feelings associated with their own localities. Another fact that I found in my analysis is that the folk songs of different regions not only just refer to the objects, places, people and gods in their objective sense but express them in connection to the whole way of life in association with the beliefs and sensibilities that are regularly attached with what they do and anticipate in their actual life. These folk songs have proved that folk music records and represents in its sound material the lived emotions and experiences of human beings of the contemporary time. Therefore, the effort should be made from both the government and individuals for the preservation of our folk songs so that future generations can know and realize through them their own lively history and original base.

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