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Protest in Bengali Folk Songs

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Abstract : The folksingers are the people from the marginalized society. The *prima materia* of folk song is its materialistic attitude towards life. The prime aim of this song is not only to please the audience but also to delineate the picture of injustice, inequality and inequity in the society and state as well. To increase the awareness of building an exploitation-free society is the purpose of composing the folk songs.

Keywords- Folk song, exploitation, protest, revolt,

Songs composed and sung by the marginalized people are folk songs. Folk songs have not yet received its deserved importance from the state or the urban intellectuals. But this genre of music is very old. The roots of our society and culture are found in it. The subject matters of folk songs are the life experiences of the artist. The attitudes of the artists towards the society find their place in folk songs. Their protesting attitude towards the disorders of society also finds place in folk songs. This protesting characteristic of folk song is very important in increasing mass awakening and mass consciousness. As most of the people of our country live in the village, it is very unjust to underrate the folksingers as the representative of them.

The *prima materia* of folk song is its materialistic attitude towards life. The prime aim of this song is not only to please the audience but also to increase the awareness of the exploited class for freeing from exploitation. Human being has developed through struggle and has taken his deserved claim. He has also protested if he cannot get it. From this perspective this protesting attitude of the folk poets can be found in folk songs.

In the British ruled India, many movements were occurred against the British oppression. The folksingers also joined this movements by composing songs. "Hey nirdoy nilkorgon" (O merciless Indigo planters) is a song composed on Indigo revolt. The song goes like this -

"Hey nirdoy nilkorgon

Ar sohena prane a nil-dohon

Krishokera dhone prane dohile nil agune

Punarapi ki kudine kolle hetha podarpon.

Dadoner sukoushole, swet somajer bole

Luthechho sokol to hey, ki ar achhe ekhon.

Dinjone dukkho dite, kaharo na lage chite

Kebol niler heri pashan soman mon.

Britain swabhabe shoshe kali dilo bonge ese

Torile jolodhi jol porate swarna-bhaban."¹

("O merciless Indigo planters

Our hearts cannot tolerate Indigo burning anymore

The hearts and lives of the peasants have been burnt with blue flame

On what a bad day you have come here again.

With the tactic of loan, with the power of white society

Have plundered everything, what are the remains now.

To give pain to the poor, does not hurt anyone's heart

Your hearts are like stone only for the Indigo.")

Addressing the Indigo planters the poet says that the farmers are no more able to tolerate the tortures. The Indigo planters are looting from the farmers forcefully. They has become stone-hearted for Indigo. The pains and sufferings cannot touch the hearts of the Indigo planters. They came to kindle fire in this affluent country.

The folksingers joined in the peasant revolt in Rangpur with their songs. The East India Company appointed Debi Singh as the representative of the king's minor son after the death of the king of Dinajpur. Debi Singh started torture upon the farmers when he came into power. During the Settlement in 1783 he grabbed many lands in Rangpur and imposed various taxes upon the subjects. The administration also bolstered to this torture. When the peasants could not bear with this oppression they stood against it. In the months of January and February of 1783 the oppressed peasants protested against the inhuman torture of Debi Singh and

this revolt gradually spread in Rangpur, Dinajpur and Coochbihar. The ambiance of this revolt is depicted in the 'Jager Gaan' of Ratiram Das :

“Shibchandra Nandi koy shuno prajagon
Rajar tomrai anna tomrai dhon.
Rangapure jao sabe hajar hajar
Debi Singher bari loot bari bhango tar.”²
(“Shibchandra Nandi says listen subjects
You are the sustenance and wealth of the King.
Go to Rangapur in thousands
Rob the house of Debi Sangha and destroy it.”)

In this song the peasant leader Shibchandra has requested the subjects to go to Debi Singh's house in Rangpur. His house is to be demolished and looted. This fight against the inequity is historically true and the folk poet has taken the responsibility of spreading it through song among the people. In the next part of the song we have the outlook of the movement:

“Shibchandrer hukumete sob proja khyape
Hajar hajar proja dhay ek khyape
Lathi nilo khonti nilo nilo kachi dao
Apoty korite ar na thakilo knao.”
(“In the command of Shibchandra every
subject becomes furious
Thousand of subjects rush in a crowd
Takes sticks spuds scythes and choppers
There is no one to to complain.”)

The folk poets became the part of Chuar movement, Wahabi movement of Titumir, Sepoy mutiny, Pabna revolt, Santhal rebellion through their songs. They also became a part of the Indian freedom movement. They also took part in the freedom struggle of India. Their protesting songs against the oppression of the British government circulate even today. Most of the people of the then India stayed half-stomach due to economic exploitation and mismanagement of the British. Famine aroused now and then and thousands of people died due to starvation. But as the ruler of the country the British government did not take necessary initiatives. If anyone demanded and protested against it he/she got extreme punishment and the folk poets protested against the brutal torture through these words:

“O bhai dyasher ki dosha hoilo.
Bharatbasir ghore ghore chal nai je mele.
Alu potol kola kochu bajare je na pai kichhu
Sob kheyechhe banor chuncho...”³

(“O brother what has become the condition of the country
There is no rice in the houses of the Indians
Can not get potato pointed gourd banana taro
All have been eaten by apes and moles...”)

On 15th August of 1947 India became independent. But it was a farce in the name of freedom. India was given freedom by dividing it into two parts on two nation theory. Bengal was also divided into two parts--one part remained in India as West Bengal and another part went to Pakistan as East Pakistan. Because of hasty decision of the British government and the political leaders of India there came extreme misery on the lives of the Indians. Many folksingers composed songs on this situation. With the description of the miseries of the common people we have the pictures of indignation to the selfishness of the political leaders in these songs. In a 'Gambhira' song of Malda district we get this type of reaction:

“Dhonyo British rajer chal
O je koirole najehal
Shyashe mathar ghaye pagol hoiya
Uirya jahaje haoa khay.
Bapre bap jan bachan holo day.”⁴

(“The trick of the British government is admirable
It has harassed
At last becoming insane by sore of head
Breathe fresh air in aeroplane.
O father it is to difficult to save life.”)

In this song the the 'Gambhira' singers directly accuse the British government for the partition of the country. The singers of the 'Chhatrishhi' song also accuse the political leaders of the country for the partition:

“Dyasher koto je nyaata
Tader boro boro kotha
Paiya swadhinata laddu
Kunthe hoiya gelu gaddu.”⁵

(“How man leaders in the country
They speak big words
After achieving the laddu of freedom
Where have the gone.”)

When India become independent millions of people left their ancestral homes and lands. They started their journey for an unknown destiny. It was very hard to lead life in a new country where in every step people had to face poverty, starvation and disgrace. This picture is depicted in folk songs:

“Purbe mora Pakisthane nirapode roi
Bidhata diyachhe dukkho kar kachhe koi

Ekjon manush kilay Holudpur mathe
 Tar protishodh nilo Potuakhalir hate.”⁶
 (“Before we were safe in Pakistan
 Whom to express griefs given by God.
 One punches in the field of Haludpur
 Takes its revenge in the market of Patuakhali.”)

In the independent India also people suffered a lot. The country was in complete turmoil at that time. The common people were in a bad condition as the landlords, leaseholders and other leechers aroused with their tooth and nail. So the freedom did not bring the actual atmosphere of joy. It came as a disaster. A folksinger makes his reaction against this pseudo-freedom:

“Swadhin hoiya amra bhaire bhaibachhialm sobe
 Mota bhat mota kapor hoibar milibe.
 Khadyo chaile ki mile bhai shuno somachar
 Sakhshi dibe Dwarbhanga ar ranga Coochbihar.”⁷
 (“After becoming independent brother we thought
 We would get coarse cloth and rice
 O brother listen the news if we would want food
 Dwarbhanga and red Coochbihar would bear witness.”)

People go to the governmental and private institutions for official works but there they face mental and financial exploitation. As if the institutions have become the centre for the thieves and frauds. This pictures have been delineated by the folksingers:

“Ei desher sei jele tanti
 Kande tara diba-rati
 Payna tara suta jontropati bhat begore morlo tara
 Ghumta deoa banganari
 Payna ghumta dibar shari
 Lengta holo bou-jhiyari hay aaj desher ei chehara.”⁸
 (“The fishermen and weaver of this country
 Cry day and night
 They do not get thread and tools died without food.
 The veil-worn Bengali woman
 Does not get cloth to veil
 The wife and daughter have become naked, alas, this is the look of the country today.”)

Hospital is for the treatment of the common people. Government spends huge amount of money for it. But there also the common people are deprived of proper treatment. Some of the corrupt staffs of hospitals steal medicines, cheat the patients financially and also torture them mentally. Sometimes the incidents of the death of the patients happen due to the negligence of the nurses and doctors. We can see the depiction of this picture in many songs like----

“Maldar jompurir khobor
 Shune laigtachhe khub jobor.
 Jyanta rugire dhoirya morar ghore dilo dhoirya
 Pore mora rugi baincha uithya
 Jogdarbabuder gun gay.”⁹
 (“The news of the underworld of Malda
 Is very interesting to listen
 They have inserted a live patient into the morgue
 After becoming alive the dead patient
 Lauds the Jagdarbabus.”)

Here, the incidents of police atrocities can be remembered and the folksingers have also raised their voices against the police atrocities---

“Nirbichare,naranari chatrachatri hotya
 A jodi hoy shishu rastre ain nirapotta
 Tahole aj sobhar majhe uchcha kanthe kohi
 Panchsho hajar asankhyabar ami rajdrohi.”¹⁰
 (“If killing of mankind and students
 Is the security of the children state and law
 Then today I speak up in the assembly
 I am an insurgent for hundred and thousand times.”)

The folksingers not only raise their voice against the administration and its misrule but also against the divisions of society, religious narrowness and superstitions. Sufi Panja Sha also reacts against the inanity of the class division when he is harassed by the orthodox busybodies of the society:

“Jeter borai ki !
 Ihakal porokale jetey korbe ki ?
 Amar mon bole ognijele dei jeter mukhi.”¹¹
 (“What does happen the vaunt of caste !
 What will it do in this life and and in the next life ?
 My heart wants to set fire in the face of caste.”)

The powerful class has always exploited the powerless class and the folksingers have also stood against it through their songs. This exploitation is happened not only for the production but the human narrow intellect and degenerated values are the causes of it. The folksingers have tried to make the people conscious through their songs and by proclaiming their legitimate rights the folksingers have shown them the dream of a beautiful society.

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