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ड. परिमल बर्मण

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A Folkloristic Study of Lullabies in Rajbanshi

Dr. Hari Madhab Ray, Asst. Professor, J.N.U.

1. Introduction

Folklore is historically considered as a custom, and knowledge of the peasant and non-literate communities (William John Thoms 1846). Dan Ben Amos (1973) defined folklore “as a body of knowledge, a mode of thought, and a means of communication that captured the broad spectrum of human knowledge”.¹ It is orally passed down from one generation to another and it is not properly written down or documented. But after the advent of technology and awareness among the communities of the oral tradition, they started recording it down for their community’s sake to protect the language, culture, folk aspects of life from the threat of cultural annihilation. Folklore tells us about facts, tells us about life, what is what? what is right or wrong from the perspective of the society. Folklore is the collective creation of society. It is the collective knowledge of the folks, peasants, people, community, culture, related to everything. According to Ramanujan, it also consists of “nonliterate part of me”.

In this study, lullabies, word songs of sleep, rhymes of mother love in Rajbanshi will be considered for analysis. The word nursery rhymes or children rhymes in Rajbanshi can be translated as *Chhora* or *ChhaoyaliChhora*. *Chhora* indicates traditional, unpolished, usually rustic or rural naïve verse with a focus on household things, sleep, play, festivity, and personified animals that is recited by mothers, caregivers, elders and siblings to very little children, and by the children themselves. The study of nursery rhymes tends to fall midway between the study of folklore and of children’s literature proper (Sircar: 1997). Lullabies are a special kind of song. Across

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centuries and across cultures, caregivers have created these cradle songs and melodies to calm children and to soothe babies into slumber (Honig 1985). Rabindra Nath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, Upendra Kishore Roy Chaudhary, Sukumar Ray, Dakshina Ranjan Mitra created tremendous children literature in this area in Bengali and Sukumar Ray's Bengali nonsense verses (Chaudhuri 1985), Jogindranath Sarkar's child rhymes (Chakravarti 1971), Abanindranath Tagore's comic parody verses (Chakravarti 1971) were translated into English. In this study, we will be looking at the Rajbanshi lullabies which are sung at the time of sleeping the child (3.1) and massaging the child (3.2).

2. Research Methodology

For this study, data were collected from both the sources: primary and secondary. The primary data collected based on interview and observation were from Sitai, Coochbehar District of West Bengal². The secondary sources for variations were consulted from the existing literature. In addition, the author collects information from online sources mainly using Facebook as tool to collect and gather information.³ The author posts the following on 11th January, 2022 in his Facebook page and following the Post many people from the Friendlist contacted the author and shared some valuable information on Rajbanshi lullabies.⁴

“Greetings! Recently I have been working on the lullabies which are sung to the young children in the area of North Bengal, Assam and Rangpur. Lullabies are known by many names; some people call it ‘chaoyanindaligan’ or ‘bhurka’. If you have some spare time could you text me, send me the voice recording of the lullabies of the Rajbanshi community and which will be helpful for my research. My email and WhatsApp number are given below; The data were analyzed from the perspective of the Folkloristics. The IPA

(International Phonetic Alphabet) is used to represent the actual sounds of the language. The lullabies are categorized into various types and in this study only two types of lullabies while sleeping the child (3.1) and massaging the child (3.2) are discussed.

3. Rajbanshi Lullabies

The lullabies in Rajbanshi are called *Chaoyabhurka* (Sanyal 1965), *Chaoyabhulanigan* (Dharma Narayan Barma 2000) *Chaoyabhurka/bhulkachora* (Debendra Nath Barma 2012), *Nindaligan/chaoyabhurkagan* (Bhakat 2013). Sanyal (1965) classifies lullabies into various categories and provides examples of each of the category. The categories are sleeping the child, bathing the child, massaging the child, frightening the child, showing the moon and dangling the child on the legs. In the following, we will only look at the two categories -sleeping the child (3.1) and massaging the child (3.2).⁵

3.1. Sleeping the child

Sleep or lack of it is a common concern for parents. As new parents quickly learn, the well-being of everyone in the household can depend on how well their baby sleeps. And when they are older, kids who do not get enough sleep can have trouble paying attention, mood swings, behaviour problems, and learning problems.⁶ Kids need adequate amount of sleep. According to Kidshealth website, how much sleep kids need varies by age; Infants (0–3 months): 14–17 hours, including naps Infants (4–12 months): 12–16 hours, including naps Toddlers (1–2 years): 11–14 hours, including naps Preschool (3–5 years): 10–13 hours, including naps School-age (6–13 years): 9–12 hours Teens (14–17 years): 8–10 hours Mothers, caregivers, adults in family employ different strategy for the babies to get adequate amount of sleep. If the baby cries most of the time in the day and night, it disturbs daily

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routines of the householders. The baby needs to be taken care of by the elders. Elders play with them, talk to them, swing them, tell them stories and lull them into sleep. The repetitive pattern, melody, soothing voice of the mother/elder helps the baby to get sleep. This folk rhyme or lullabies also help the baby effortlessly to learn their language of the environment. Followings are the examples of Rajbanshi lullabies which the elders sing or repeatedly utter before the baby (3.1. a-j).

3.1. (a) Rajbanshi lullaby: [ay nin ay, cTÚk°Úut* b°ÚafÚaband*e, ko^°ekarhabet*ernin, cTÚk°Úut* b°ÚafÚaband*e][ha^ÚerninpTÚt*°ernin, cTÚk°Úut* b°ÚafÚaband*e]

Literal Translation: "Come sleep come, make nest in the eye; from wherever you come the greedy sleep, make nest in the eye; sleep of the market, sleep of the road, make nest in the eye"

Observation and analysis: The metaphorical extension is noticeable in [cTÚk°Úut* b°ÚafÚaband*e]. In everyday discourse, we don't find this kind of words [ha^ÚerninpTÚt*°ernin], but children are lulled into the rhyme of the words.

3.1.(b) Rajbanshi lullaby: [ay nin baynin, t*eitoler pat*] [kanka^Úakukurai/Úce_Ú°ÚitkTÚri t*°Úak]

Literal Translation: "Come sleep come sleep, leaves of a tamarind tree, a ear cut dog comes and you be quite!"

Observation and Analysis: The child is lulled into sleep by calling the sleeping angel, leaves of tamarind tree is introduced to fit into the rhythm of the next line and contrastive aggressive image of a violent dog is introduced to frighten and quieten the child. The word

[t*eit*ol] ‘Tamarind’, [_Úhit*] म
ख ‘silent’, [nin] ‘sleep’ and [kanka^Úakukur] षान ear cut
dog’ beautifully fitted in the verse. It adds a regional and Rajbanshi
flavor.

3.1. (c) Rajbanshi lullaby: [ay nin bay nin, t*eit*oler
pat*kanka^afialai fe j° itk Tri t*°ak]

Literal Translation: “Come sleep come sleep, leaves of a
tamarind tree, an ear cut jackal comes and you be quite!”

Observation and Analysis: The lullaby 3.1 (b) and (c) are
similar. It only differs in the use of the lexical item [kanka^afial]
‘ear cut jackal’ instead of [kanka^akukur] षान ear cut dog’.

3.1. (d) Rajbanshi lullaby: [nin ay re nin ay][hamarbau^a (mai^a)
n i n _ a y] [b a f e r p a t * a r i n T r i c ° e ,
hamarbau^aha fic°e][hamarbau^ab°alkolat* nin_ay][bau
cu}at*°uisucTkirt*Tlot*] [nin ay nin ay] [bau
d*ud*°er[k^at*°u}it*°uifu][nin ay nin ay]

Literal Translation: “Sleep, come sleep, please come! Our child
(son/daughter) wants to sleep. The leaves of bamboo moves and
our child (son/daughter) smiles. Our son sleeps in good lap. Son, I
have kept flattened rice under the bed. Sleep come, sleep come.
Son, I have kept a pot of milk. Sleep come, sleep come.”

Observation and Analysis: The word [bau] and [mai] are the
diminutive address term for the son and daughter respectively. These
address words can only be used by someone who takes part in the
similar kind of kinship system as for example uncle or aunty. The
child is also given a promise for milk and rice if it goes to sleep.

3.1. (e) Rajbanshi lullaby: [ha^erninpTt*°ernind*, nind*
b°ald*°Tre] [kon^°ehat*ea filnind*, cTuk°melibarnad*e] **Literal
Translation:** “Sleep of the market, Sleep of the road, it is a peaceful
sleep. From where is this sleep come that the child cannot open its
eyes!”

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Observation and Analysis: The child at times goes to sleep without having milk or food. The mother or the caregiver in order to wake up the child may sing this verse and feeds the child. Once the child is fed, it is again lulled into sleep. The word [ha^ÙerninpTÙt*°ernind*] is fitted in the lullaby but in everyday language this kind of language use is hardly noticeable. (See 3.1.a)

3.1. (f) Rajbanshi lullaby: [ay nin ay, hamarfÙonabaccabapoi/mai, nin_Ùabarcae]

Literal Translation: “Come sleep come. Our golden small son/daughter wants to sleep.”

Observation and Analysis: See the analysis of [bau] and [mai] in 3.1. (d). The word [bau] and [bapoi] are lexical variations found in the language.

3.1. (g) Rajbanshi lullaby: [nind*obali ay ay, at*ipohaillet*orkibad*TfahTÙe]

Literal Translation: “Sleep angel come, please come! Once this night is over who knows what is going to happen to you (Sleep angel)!”

Observation and Analysis: The sleep angel is being called for repeatedly and she is also being threatened in a polite manner if the child is not asleep some action will be taken.

3.1.(h) Rajbanshi lullaby: [ay re hu}Ùabag°Ú, tuijaya_ÚTÚKgolott°Úak, hamarmaknind°ÚTÚrice]

Literal Translation: “Here come the big tiger, hey big tiger, you stay in the Jungle, our daughter is going to sleep!”

Observation and Analysis: The [hu}Ùabag°Ú] ‘big tiger’ is called for and immediately after the big tiger is being sent to the Jungle because the little child wants to sleep. The mother/caregiver employs different kinds of strategy in the lullaby to get the baby into sleep.

3.1. (i) Rajbnanshi lullaby: [nind*obalicTÚukot kali, nin jay b°Úat*arerba}Úi] [b°Úat*arkTÚy bole d*urfÚali, [d*TÚu}ÚifÚond*ay ha}Úiba}Úi]

Literal Translation: “Hey Sleep angel, you have ink/mascara in your eyes. The sleep has gone to your husband’s house. Your husband says, hey the naughty one! And you run to the kitchen.”

Observation and Analysis: This kind of lullaby is sung by the grand-father or grand-mother of the child. The mother, father, uncle or aunties in relation refrain from singing this lullaby. It uses vulgar and slang and also teases the child by this word-play.

3.1. (j) Rajbanshi lullaby: [ay re ay nind*obali, morbTÚinnin_ÚaTÚyar cay] [ay re b°Úot;a tu.. hufÚhufÚ] [ay re bhu^Úitu—d°ÚTÚrd°ÚTÚrd°ÚTÚr, hafÚhufÚ]

Literal Translation: “Come, please come Sleep angel. My sister is going to sleep. Come the big dog—Shoo Shoo! Come the bitch (female dog)—catch, catch, catch—Shoo Shoo!”

Observation and Analysis: This lullaby was sung by a grandmother. The little child (female) is addressed as [bTÚin] ‘sister’ in the lullaby. The grandmother uses contradictory tactics to lull the child into sleep, once the big dog is called for and immediately after it is chased away. The female dog (bitch) is also called for to drive away the big dog and different sound is used to drive away the big dog. The child is scared, a little frightened and also being entertained by the rhythm and shoos, hooting of the grandmother.

3.2 Massaging the child

The ancient art of infant massage has been practiced for centuries by cultures around the world and is one of the earliest stimuli a parent can provide for their infant. Massaging babies provides an important source of stimulation involving the sensation of touch (tactile stimulation) and this stimulation promotes development and well-being as early psychological and sensory input is vital in facilitating an infant's development. In addition, starting touch early in life improves parenting skills and promotes a baby's overall health.⁷ The mother, grandmother or the caregiver massages the child with mustard oil. This is also accompanied by various rhymes as for example in the following 3.2. (a)-(d).

3.2. (a) Rajbanshi lullaby: [ha}ba^oKku}ba^oK, t*or a_urnakka^oK][V[nV[rad[K, fitaiha^otb [ꞤceaifoK]

Literal Translation: “Let me massage your bone, backbone, whole body etc. Let me cut your maternal grandfather's nose. Let his ugly deeds be known, let me sell that nose to Sitaimarket.”

Observation and Analysis: The grandmother of the child massages the child and sings the lullaby. The mustard oil is applied for massage. The child enjoys the soft touch and the lyrics. The grandmother teases the child by word play, makes reference to her maternal grandfather and in a playful mood cuts her nose while touching the nose of the child. The cut nose is also sold in the nearby market. Data were collected from Sitai and we find reference of Sitai market in the lullaby. The name of the place and also the imaginary character whose nose will be cut off depends on who is massaging the child! As for example it can be said that [ha}ba^oKku}ba^oK, tor mafirnakka^oK] ¶Let me massage your bone, backbone, whole body etc. Let me cut your maternal aunt's nose.”

3.2.(b) Rajbanshi lullaby: [hT}hT}gT}gT},
kalaib°aKgiVailkTr]/eikalaiyerVailk°aibe, tor a_uaborg°Tr]

Literal Translation: “Crack crack, pop pop! You break the raw pulses and refine it. The pulses you broke will be cooked for your maternal grandfather and grandmother.”

Observation and Analysis: The grandmother sings the lyrics while massaging the child. The child is tickled and rotated on the lap like the way raw pulses are broken in sill batta (grinding stone). The reference of maternal grandfather (grandmother) is found in this lullaby because the grandmother of the child sings the verse. The child enjoys the massage and also the rhyme.

3.2. (c) Rajbanshi lullaby:[bag°marir_ aif, pTntab°atk°aif]

[b°Tyba[lak°aif]? [kalaid*[KsuruKTt, fTirfad[KsuruKTt]
[pa^pa^pa^af]

Literal Translation: “Do you want to hunt tiger? Do you eat stale rice? Will you be scared? Let me put some pulses in the big hole, let me put some mustard seed in the big empty hole. Crack crack! Pop pop!”

Observation and Analysis: The mother/grandmother or the care giver massages the child with a series of questions to the child. The young mind wonders, it is also scared of the tiger. The massager puts some oil on the skin and in the lyrics put some pulses and mustard seed in the big empty hole and while massaging the child the caregiver pats the child and also mimics the patting.

3.2. (d) Rajbanshi lullaby[am ba}inaka^olba}i] [hu}d[k° t*or
mamarba}i] [gala hTukj°a}ij°a}i] [firf°irahTuk]°

Literal Translation: “Is it mango field or jackfruit field? Oh! You can see your maternal uncle’s house. Let your neck be straightened!”

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Observation and Analysis: While massaging the child the grandmother carefully straightens the neck of the child. The child enjoys the massage and also beauty of the lyrics and wordplay.

4. Conclusion

The description of rural lives is manifested in these lullabies. It has been noticed that the translations of the syntax, meter and rhyme scheme of the original Rajbanshi lullabies will be lost somewhere in the target language as these are untranslatable. It is also impossible to capture the spirit of the rhymes. It is difficult to determine the basic source of the lullabies, as it is not written down and it travels fast from one region to another, changes with the language and also assimilates with the local culture with distinct flora and fauna. The lullaby carries lots of information about customs and costumes, ethnic foods, and folktales of the linguistic community discussed here. Lullaby lyrics may vary, since so often the songs are ancient and their origins lost in the mist of time.

Lullabies has lots of beautiful images, imagery and also narrative interest. It has many figures of speech-simile, metaphor, personification, pun and parody. Rare words which are old and archaic are also found in the lullabies. In many instances, the grandmother uses informal register or slangs. The variety of words and its contextual use help the children to enrich their vocabulary in the language. It can be said that the children do not care in which language a lullaby is sung. They settle down if the melody is soothing, gentle and repetitive. They love to hear the same familiar, treasured songs over and over. Lullabies provide a rich resource for enhancing multicultural breadth in an early childhood program. Learning music and words together, often accompanied by hand and body motions, is a wonderful way to wire brain connections for children's learning as well as bring children pleasure (Honig 1995; 2004).

As majority of the literate members of the Rajbanshi community has been assimilating Bengali traditional values and culture into Rajbanshi in the areas of North Bengal, the use of Rajbanshi lullabies is hardly noticeable among the urban and semieducated youth. It still exists in the rural areas. The introduction of the Rajbanshi language in the primary education will enrich and reinforce the creation and restoration of the lullabies in Rajbanshi.

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<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/sleep.html>

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Reference notes:

1. <https://www.britannica.com/art/folk-dance/Johann-Gottfried-von-Herder-and-the-idea-of-the-folk>
2. Sitai, Dinhata, Coochbehar, West Bengal
3. <https://www.facebook.com/harimadhab.ray>
4. See Appendix 1 and Appendix 2
5. The rest of the categories of the lullabies will be considered in the next article 'A Folkloristic study of Children Rhymes and Lullabies in Rajbanshi'
6. <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/sleep.html>
7. <https://www.chrichmond.org/blog/the-many-benefits-of-infant-massage>
8. [am ba} i] is also a place.

Appendices:



Hari Madhab Ray ...
11 January at 20:24 · 🌐

নমস্কার, দণ্ডবৎ! মুই ইদানীং কিছুদিন থাকি উত্তরবঙ্গ, আসাম আর রংপুরের ছাওয়া ভুবকা গান নিয়া একেনা কাজ করির নাগিচুং। ছাওয়া ভুবকা গান ম্যালা নামে পরিচিত, কাং কাং ছাওয়া নিন্দালি গান বা ভুবকাও কয়া থাকে। যদি তোমার হাতোত একেনা সময় থাকে তাহইলে রাজবংশী জনগোষ্ঠীর ছাওয়া ভুবকা কয়খান গান যদি মোক নেথিয়া বা ভইস মেসেজ পাঠাইলেন হয় তাহইলে থিব উপকৃত হলুং হয়। মোর ইমেইল আর হোয়াটস্যাপ নাম্বার নীচোত দিলুং!

Email id- harimadhabray@gmail.com, hmray@jnu.ac.in
Whatsaap No. 9873634502
আশা করং তোমরাগিলা সগায় ভালে আচেন। নয়া ২০২২ সালের শুভেচ্ছা নেন।
Thanks and regards
Dr. Hari Madhab Ray
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067.

👍❤️ 208 29 comments 6 shares

Appendix 2- A few instances of the responses of the Facebook friends on lullabies

Hemanta Roy

আয়রে নিন্দোবালি আয়... আয়... আয়.... হামার সোনা বাপইটা/
মাইটা নিন যাবার চায়।

Samar Roy

হামরা ছোটতে শুনিছি গান.. "আলসিয়ারে আলসিয়া খোলাই যায়
তোর ভাসিয়া, যাউক খোলাই ভাসিয়া আরো বানাইম বসিয়া ॥

Subhas Ray

মুগ্ধ যেটা জানোঙ সেটা হৈল--কবিরত্ন শ্যামাপদ বর্মন আর মানী
নগেন শীলশর্মা পৰ্থম ছাওয়া-ভুড়কা গান রেকর্ড করেন। শ্যামাপদ
বর্মনের "চান্দেব বুড়ি সুতা কাটে" আর নগেন শীলশর্মার "আয় রে
হোরো বাঘ" খিব সুনাম অর্জন করিছিলো।

Milan Adhikary

ভালো উদ্যোগ। কাজ করে যাও ভাই। গঙ্গাচরণ বিখ্যাত "আয়রে
নিন্দবালি আয় আয় আয়, হামার সোনা বাচ্চা বাপই---- "গানটিতে
কিছু তথ্য আছে। গোরক্ষনাথের গানেও কিছু তথ্য পাওয়া যেতে পারে।
উপেন্দ্র কিশোরের গল্পেও আছে। এই সব প্রাচীন তথ্যগুলি তৎকালীন
শিক্ষিত ব্যক্তিদের অবজ্ঞার ও উন্নাসিকতার জন্যই লিপিবদ্ধ হয় নাই।
এই তথ্যগুলি উদ্ধার করে লিপিবদ্ধ করলে আর হারিয়ে যাবে না এবং
প্রজন্মের পর প্রজন্ম জানতে পারবে। Good Job. দস্তবত।