

AI NAM, THE SOFT ATTRACTIVE RELIGIOUS SONGS OF NORTH KAMRUP AREA: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Like any the other branches of folklore folk songs are the creation of folk society and all such songs carry with it peculiar note of attraction. Throughout the centuries from such folk songs human being get consolation, relief from mental and physical pain, receive worldly knowledge and thus get spirit to proceed amidst obstacles. Ai Nam is one of the same categories of songs. With its soft note of presentation, religious submission and magical, medicinal chanting it has been playing a tremendous role among folk people in curing disease and thereby emancipating reverence to invisible deities. However with progress of civilization and development of scientific temperament and environmental degradation such songs are losing its status that it used to avail earlier among the simple God fearing rural community. In the present research article an attempt is made to interpret such songs available in Pati Darrang area of the North Kamrup of Kamrup district.

Paper Identification



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Introduction:

Folk songs are the popular traditional culture characterized by melody and refrain. These were originated due to immense desire of primitive people to get success and overcome nature through power of magical words or charm or mantras. Such mantras are metamorphosed into songs. Such songs do not follow any specific rules like the classical songs rather they are created out of utmost love and sincere but simple love and reverence of common people on the matter or about the subject. Ai Nam is also such magical songs created by the rural folk bestowing with the immense love for the deity under enormous deep faith and confidence.

Objectives:

The objective of the present paper is to analyse a few *Ai Nam* available at Pati Darrang of North Kamrup area of Kamrup district.

Methodology:

Methodology is a part and parcel of research work. In this study the researcher has applied field work, analytical method, observation method and interview method. The researcher has visited District Library, Gauhati University K.K.H Library, Axom Sahitya Sabha Library for collection of information.

Discussion:

Prafulla Dutta Goswami said the ancient people takes resort to magic to control nature and environment. If anybody is suffering from bruise or is possessed by evil spirit he or she is treated with chanting mantras snubbing the evil spirit. The words they use while treating a patient are important. These words are mantras. (Axomiya Jana Sahitya, 1965 P-17) As such mantras are transmitted orally, its texture is changed. The oja adds some other words as per need and change of time and situation, they sing the oral poems later these songs become the folk songs.

The folk people believe in supernatural power of deity. Out of fear and wonder they submitted themselves before the divine entity. Thus they managed to feel security and absorbed in divine thoughts singing religious songs and getting boon as well. Human's subjective nature of purification, avoidance, asceticism, rites and rituals, taboo prayer etc. are the practices are based on religious awareness. Wallace defines the religion of a society as a conglomeration of rituals and beliefs whose components are integrated at the level of cult institutions. ⁷² The purpose of god fearing, practice of prayer is to get rid of ill luck, bad health and to get blessings in the form happy, healthy and prosperous life. To have it the folk community practiced certain rituals and these rituals

are always associated with prayer, music, psychological exercise, exhortation, reciting the code, imitating things and so forth. In primitive and peasant societies, myths, and legends as well as tales are also told. Songs and recitations which are associated with these rituals are known as religious songs.

In this research paper a few such songs available in the North Kamrup, popularly known as Pati-Darrang area are to be discussed: These songs are also known as Nam. The word Nam denotes the songs which are created being influenced by Neo Vaishnavite movement propounded by Srimanta Shankardeva. The Neo Vaishnavism preached by Sankardeva is known as *nam dharma*. So such songs might be the creation of the folk people being influenced by neo vaishnavite movement. Such *Nams* are classified as given below.

- a. Ainam
- b. Sadasivar Nam
- c. Apecara Nam

However in the present research paper discussion will be done on Ainam available in the area of study.

Ainam:

Magic and wonder as well as fear are the factors that gave rise to the concept of Gods and Goddesses. Ai is one of such Goddesses. The morph 'Ai' refers Mai. Or mother. Mother always possesses love for her siblings. In this context mother refers to a deity popularly known as 'Ai' i.e Goddess of Pox. As it is explained by the folk community she is very lovely, mild, helpful and source of kindness until and unless she possess upon someone and cause pox. She has with her seven or nine sisters.

In the village people did not treat few diseases in Allopathic or Ayurvedic method. Rather the illiterate folk belief that Ai appears and depart as per her own will as she is the Goddess of Pox and possess whims of her own. The simple villagers thought that the attack of pox can be averted adopting certain divine measures like chanting of the names of the Goddesses and mantras i.e charms. Thus particularly the women folk try to avert pox chanting the mantras of Goddess Pox in the way of songs. A person either a man or woman or a child when afflicted by pox feel burning sensation. To reduce the pain of burning villagers invoke Ai Sitala singing Ai Nam and beg for blessings.

A person thus affected by measles like disease, with skin rashes it is classed as small-pox or Ai has appeared in his body to give punishment. Ai is a female deity and only women folk are

assigned the task to worship the Goddess of pox. The Assamese community unquestionably submits to her maintaining purity, wearing white clothes, being clean and practicing ascetic life and eating only vegetarian food avoiding oil. During the stay of the disease the victim has to stay on banana leaf. An outsider is not allowed to enter into the room without cleaning hands and legs. The women community sings Ainam. This is practiced at any home where Ai or pox appears. Deep humility and a sense of submission to the Goddess is the main theme of the songs popularly known as Ai Nam.

Modern medical science mentions about three types of Ai or pox. – Saru Ai (Measles), Bar Ai (Small Pox), Maju Ai (Chicken Pox). However like the people of southern India who considers Marianama, the Goddess of Cholera has seven sisters, The Kols of Central India worship ‘seven sisters’ and identify them with Goddess Sarada or Durga with whom Sitala is also identified similarly the Assamese community too believe that Ai has seven sisters (As it is believed in upper Assam), and nine sisters (As is believed in the lower Assam.) However in the North Kamrup or Patidarrang area Ai has eighteen sisters. They are mentioned in the Ai Nam itself.

(1) Akhati Ai, (2.) Balle Ai, (3.) Cineli Ai, (4) Dayeli, (5) Faneli, (6) Dhanmala. (7) Gandube (8) Haguri, (9) Kahuri, (10) Keteri, (11) Lafamuri, (12) Macuri, (13) Mahamuri, (14) Maruwa, (15) Panimala, (16) Pansamari, (17) Rangmala, (18) Tileni

In North Kamrup area specially in the part of Pati Darrang women folk pray to Sitali Ai from the core of their heart. All the songs show the sense of regret, deep humility and submission to the Goddess of Pox. In the Ai Nam there is a namati or Pathika or Pattheni who initiates the songs with the *Pada* and the rest of the women who are known as *Pali* repeat the *Dihās* the rhyme refrains. The *Pathika* goes on singing the *Padas*. A few Ai Nam prevalent in the Pati-Darrang area are mentioned below.

1. *Jai keshna buli hari bola, hare
Nau bani, bara bani, othra banik cinti hari bola, hare
Siteli ai, daiyali ai, akhati aik cinti hari bola
laphamuri, pansamuri, gana dubek cinti hari bola hare.*¹

-Here the women folk community addressing the nine/twelve/eighteen sisters (Nau/baro/ethra bani), calling her Goddess of coolness, merciful and uttering her name prays to divine lord *Hari*. Again the women folk start to sing.

2. *Diha: aike pannam karo dui charane dharo*

*Pada: Nau bani, bara bani, othra banir charane dhari
 Sukhe samchar taro
 Siteli ai, dayali ai, akhati air charane dhari
 Sukhe samchar taro
 Buhra Gohair buhri aai r charane dhari
 Sukhe sanchar taro. ²*

-Lets pray to Goddess of Pox touching both her legs. Let's get salvation touching the holy feet of the nine, twelve and eighteen sisters here refers to the sisters of Pox deity. Let's be free from the bondage of the mundane world chanting the glories of Buhra Gosain and Buhri Gosani.

3. *Diha: e mucha kocha thaikheni phul malmal kare
 e mucha kocha thaikheni phul malmal kare*

*Pada: tate ahi nau bani, baro bani ati annan kare
 e mucha kocha thaikheni phul malmal kare
 tate ahi Siteli ai dayali ai ati annan kare
 e mucha kocha thaikheni phul malmal kare
 tate ahi laphamuri Panchamuri ati annan kare
 e mucha kocha thaikheni phul malmal kare. ³*

- Here the reference is given to the cleanliness of the place of worship. The place is full of the fragrance of flowers. Goddess of pox appears here and gets enjoyment. *Ai Sitala* is also equated with the Goddess Mahamaya. She is identical with Goddess Parvati. She is also regarded as daughter of Mahadeva. A song goes as given below.

4. *Diha: ahan pari diya bahok mahamaya
 Thakok hari katha suni hari-e
 Pada: agphale diya ahan tamolpan
 Mathare mairar pakhi hari-e
 Ahan pari diya bohok mahamaya
 Thakak hari katha suni hari-e
 Sik legia dhup nabet bareichu*

Mathare apare tuli hari. ⁴

- Let's make arrangement for the Goddess Mahamaya to sit. Let the seat laid for her. Let the Goddess listen the story of Lord Hari. Let her be worshiped offering beetle nut. Her head is decorated with the feather of peacock's tail. She is worshipped with reverence offering Naivedya and Dhup as is the custom while worshipping.

In some religious songs the stories of the origin of the Goddesses is also narrated. From the thematic point of view these songs are undoubtedly called as myth. According to a myth current among the women folk of Pati-Darrang area Goddess Sitala is a daughter of Hara (Mahadeva). The following song describes how the Goddess took birth and how her birth rites were celebrated. –

5. *Diha: e ai ahilare*
e jagat janani
Ai taren e
Pada: aka dine air ar hol ak mah
dui dine air ar hol dui mah
tini die air ar hol tin mah
sar dine air ar hol sar mah
e ai ahilare.....
pac dine air ar hol pac mah
chay dine air ar hol chay mah
sat dine air ar hol sat mah
ath dine air ar hol ath mah
nao dine air ar hol nao mah
dah dine air ar hol dah mah
dah mahe dah dine garbhe stithi haile
sdandhe belia ai bhumit parile
Bhumit pariya ai tini luti khay
Tini luti khay ai tini akhar kande
E ai shitalare e jagat janani
Ai tereni ei sonar karati ani
Nari kare ched,

uttam gangar jal ani aiyk dhuyela
dhuway pukhle aik kolat tuli loila
kolat tuli loi aik mukhe stan dile
jagat janani ai tareni e
tini dinar murat ai ganakak matile
ganei purei nam thala sitela gosain
e ai ailare e jagat janani
*ai tareli e.*⁵

-The village folk try to dedicate the process of the birth of Sitala in accordance with that of a village baby. Goddess Sitala took birth from her mother's womb. The mother after washing her took the baby in her lap and the mother fed the baby with the milk of her breast. At the time of her birth the Goddess Sitala laughed loudly and thus she gave the indication of her advent to Bharasta i.e India. The song goes thus-

6. *Diha: upajili siteli mai e*
E ai horror jiyari
Kar juri pranam karo
Durgati nasni
- Pada: dhuyei poxali aik kolat tuli laile*
Kolat tuli lai aik mukhe stan dile
Achak cambhabo ai hakhe khalakali
Bharastak ahe ai
Ati annan kari
Upajil siteli mai e
E ai haror jiyari
Kar juri pannam karo
*Durgati tareni.*⁶

Deity or Goddess Sitala is also known as Phuleswari i.e Goddess of Flowers. As per the belief of the villagers uttering the name of any of the disease is not acceptable. Similarly in villages of North Kamrup area also the word snake *Sap* should not be uttered at night. In this regard pox or Basanta is named after *Phul* flower. This is might be due to the belief that the disease pox is

caused by the vengeance of the Pox Goddess and if one takes her name the Goddess might be angry.

A few songs say that the goddess Phuleswari i.e (pox-deity) being attired herself with traditional costumes proceeded to meet her father before commencement of her journey to the earth. She stood up before her father Burha-Gosai. Having seen the beautiful maiden Buhra Gosai asked:

‘O girl, please tell me, whose girl are you?’ Goddess Phuleswari replied: ‘O I am your daughter’.

‘O dear one, don’t go to the mortal with such forms’. Please keep one form of you on the tree-*champa* flower and another form on the tree *Kathanda*. And keep one from the tree of *Jaluk* after keeping ten forms, please go to the mortal. I request you don’t do anything by which the mortals may be affected. Go to the *Barghar* and you will get there an honourable seat. The poor will salute you with folding hands.’ Thus the goddess took farewell from her father. Thus the song goes:

7. *Diha: Phuleswari ai e Phuleswari kar e*

*Pada: Sonar phanire ai muroke susili e
Cuciya majia ai bandhili khopa e
Phuleswari ai e Phuleswari kar e
Khopat pindhili ai malatir thopa e
Kapalat pindhili ai kamranga sindure
Nakot pindhili ai nakjati phul e
Kanut pindhili ai makara kundal e
Galot pindhili ai sateswari har e
Donat pindhili ai sonar japtar e
Dui hate pindhili dankan dui muthi e
Daso angulite pindhe sonar anguthi e
Paot pindhili ai utipindhe phule
Kakalat pindhili ai dibba sutar sari e
Urani lalile ai abaran kari e⁷*

-The songs refers to the Goddess Pox preparation and decoration of herself before setting out to her journey to *Bharasta*.

The folk minds always try to synchronise a myth in accordance with their known milieu. As per a popular folk belief available in the North Kamrup area, the goddess Sitala came to Bharasta, from Kailash by a boat crossing the river Manah. At that time she was eighteen years old. The river Manash is well known to the folk. Hence they believed that Goddess Sitala came to this world by crossing the river Manah.

In upper Assam there are some similar songs and such songs mention that the Goddess Sitala has come from Kamakhya, went forward up the Brahmaputra to Pichala in North Lakhimpur and at last she arrived at Sadiya.

The Ai Nam has certain process of celebration. Initially mother Goddess id invoked through prayer, then her birth history, beauty, tender nature or in a nutshell her virtues are explained through songs, finally she is requested to proceed through her journey to her next destination asking forgiveness and blessings. Thus at the end of the Nama-ceremony, i.e the ceremony or chanting the name of goddess *sitala* the women folk pray the goddess to forgive at the omissions and commissions that may be occurred in connection with her worship. The song goes thus:

8. *Diha: Asure ghumati jay, Jago mahamaya ai*
Tomar sewa puja thachu agabahrai Lawa chaku meli sai
Pada: Kailasore para aha ai e khamiba dai
*Ahe nao bani e ai khemiba dai*⁸

The deity is worshipped with white flowers. Patient is also clad with white cloth. The following song narrates to that effect.

9. *Diha: ai ahe sanchar phuri e Jay malatir phul*
Candan guli cite mare sarir pare jur
Pada: champa phulor mala mane aike lagi bhal
Rewati tuli thaiso aika lagi bhal
Kathanda phular mala aike lagi bhal
*Rewati tuli thaiso ahanor upar*⁹

As per tradition the worship of the Goddess Sitala may not be completed until and unless a *Thowa-nam* i.e. closing song is sung. The women folk pray to the Goddess for her kindness and grace. A few such songs are given below as for examples.

10. *Diha:* *ai diya nirmali e mathai tuli lau*
 Biday diya bhagabati ghara ghari jau.
- Pada:* *nao bani bara bani othara bani*
 Charanote pari karo sewa
 Abodha balikak sai kari jaba daya
 Siteli ai dayali ai
 akhati air saranate pari
 Karo sewa
 abodha balikak sai kari yaba daya
- Diha:* *biday dibar chale e rol kadam tale*
 sakal gopinir gakhir khala apon bahur bole
- Pada:* *biday diya uruliai jagata iswar*
 Kartik ganapatigane khele khele rangekoi
 Tat bahi range koi hemanta jiyari
 Astamike yaba gosain astamike yaba gosain
 Astamike yaba gosain dasa bhujar pujakhani
 Ala caular gura
- diha:* *ai tumi ei namee santosh hoba*
- Pada:* *nao bani bara bani*
 othara banir saranate karuni kariso
 aru sotabar sewa
 siteli ai dayali ai akhati air caranote
 karuni kariso aru satabar sewa
 *hari bola hare, har.*¹⁰

-Thus they close the song for the day.

There is another class of songs sung as *Nam* which is known as *Paka Bhug Diya Nam* sung towards the last day of the *Ai nam* in Pati Darrang area. These are the songs with which *Ai Sitala* is bade good bye. The women folk sing these songs when the affected portion of the body of the afflicted person starts to dry. The women folk pray *Sitala* to cool the affected portion and get rid of such pain. The soings goes thus.

11. *Bhagabatir bhug paril e paksir paril chaya*

Ibarokle raksha kara ai mahamaya ¹¹

The selection of words in such songs is symbolic. Pox is represented as flowers, *fuleswari* Bhagwati or goddess is described as *Sitala*, *Dayalu* (Kind hearted). She is prayed with devotion and she appears from *Kailasha* and proceeds ahead with her journey to some other places.

Conclusion:

A comprehensive analysis of the entire *Ai nams* undoubtedly add charm to our culture and religious history of Assam. However it is seen from the study of the songs that the language of such songs is not in their original structure due to wide oral circulation. The *Ai nams* carry the tenderness of lullaby as these songs are also for the consolation of the children. These songs glorify the greatness of Goddess *Sitala* and her sisters. The singers of such songs are away from the day to day greed and carry belief that human life and destiny are shaped with the whims and pleasures of certain Gods and Goddesses. These songs carry religious tone. They provide us resource to analyse the growth of Shakti cult through various rites and rituals associated with her worship. Although like other non-aryan Goddess she is not cruel but is worshipped as *dharami*, *marami*, *dayali*, *sitali*.

Such songs composed by anonymous folk people are rhythmical and created using simple language like other folk songs. The mode of expression and language of these songs are attractive and it presents the softness of Assamese women, their caring nature and devotion they show for the deities. Following are few examples to show the rhythmical nature of such songs-

- a. *Mocha kocha thai khini phul malmal kare.*
- b. *Ki diya pujim ai carana tomare.*

Thus the *Ai nam* are the simple songs spontaneously germinated with immense devotion out of the deep of the soft hearts of religious women of rural society. Through these songs the rural folk present the day today life cycle and characteristics of Assamese society and it reflects the imaginative magical power nature and linguistics structural creativity of the folk poets.

List of Informants:

Ref. No.	Name	Age	Address	Occupation
1, 6	Jogen Kumar	70	Titkuchi	Cultivator
2, 7	Sristi Kakati	85	Baredala	Cultivator
3	Nripendra Nath Talukdar	65	Salmara	Retd. Associate Professor
4, 10	Umech Ch. Deka	70	Nanara	Retd. Associate Professor
5, 8	Pitambar Baruah	71	Titkuchi	Retd. Principal
9,	Janaki Deka	75	Bezera	Housewife
11	Dhareswari Kumar	80	Titkuchi	Housewife

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