

Modern Assamese Lyrical Literature: An Analysis

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Abstract:

The history of Assamese lyrical literature is very ancient. Its seeds are embedded in Assamese folk songs. Folk songs were individuals or collective expressions that were absorbed from the deep feelings of the common man. These songs have been flowing from one generation to another through oral traditions. The early stages of Assamese lyrical literature are found in *charyageets*. However, Assamese lyrical literature has obtained a historical form only in the pre-Shankari and Shankari period during 14th-15th century AD. From this stage to Assamese songs taking a modern form there is a wide history. This research paper attempts to highlight the evolution of modern Assamese lyrical literature.

Keywords: Assamese, lyrical literature, Song.

1.0 Introduction:

Lyricism has been widespread in social life since ancient times. This can be realized only by looking at the unexplored folk life journey. At every stage of rural and traditional life, examples of indigenous songs and voices are saturated. Assamese lyrics have gained a voluminous form by incorporating many new elements right from the primitive folk society to various levels till date, getting changed over time at times in the history. The origin of Assamese lyrical literature could be traced back to the midst of the 8th-11th century. However, scholars are of the view that *Charyapada* is not only a common asset

in Assamese but also available in Bengali, Odiya language. Therefore, it is only coming a few decades ahead of *Charyapada* from 15th century onwards that the mature form of Assamese songs can be found in spirit. It should be mentioned that during this time that the seeds of Neo-Vaishnavism were produced under the painstaking efforts of Shankardeva and Madhavdeva .

The *Borgeets* composed by them made a significant contribution to the development of Assamese songs by bringing it a different level of standard and uniqueness. The *Pachali* songs created by the Pachali poets abundantly contained elements of rural and folk literature to a great extent. At the same time, the presence of outer elements did also influence the compositions of Assamese lyrics at that time. For instance, singing according to *Chaitainya* from Bengal and the import of Hindustani classical music during the reign of Rudrasingha refer to such kind of influence notable in the context of lyrical literature. In the first half of the 19th century, Assamese lyrics and their own characteristics were intact. Subsequently the heritage and glory of Assamese music declined for multiple reasons in recent times. Inner clashes, Moamaria Revolt, which appeared in the last period of the Ahom reign, attacks of values and above all the unequal rights of the British had negatively affected the genre of Assamese music that has been in the making since the pre-Shankari and Shankari era of Assamese literature. Music as prevailed in the Shankari era lost its freedom and it survived only as a living being in the floors of Satras fulfilling their spiritual pursuits. The indigenous songs and voices prevalent in the folk community of Assam also started getting stuck in the grass root of social unrest. There was another factor of influence behind this. It was the Assamese middle-class tradition that inspired the emergence of Bengali culture and the English ingenuity of the Bengali culture which created a sense of indifference towards the indigenous songs of Assam. Assamese writers even considered the tradition of writing under the Bengali influence to be a potential factor of establishing their own reputation in the society.

People started forgetting their own songs in Assam. During this period some lyricist took the initiative to preserve the unique characteristics of Assamese music. Satyanath Bora and Lakshmiram Bora were the pioneers of this new generation in the musical field. Lakshmiram Baruah collected songs from many lyricists who had composed songs with purpose at that time and published the collection *Sangeetkaush* (1909). Satyanath Bara composed some songs in a modern way to diminish the influence of Bengali songs in Assam. His collection entitled *Geetawali* (1912) can be considered as the first instance of modern Assamese songs.

2.0 Methodology:

The information required for the research paper has been collected from published books on Assamese lyrics, various papers and magazines etc. Historical and analytical method has been used in this regard while preparing the paper.

3.0 Aims:

The objectives of this research paper are as follows:

- a. Drawing a outline of the history of Assamese modern music.
- b. Highlighting the role played by various lyricists in the prosperity and growth of Assamese lyrical literature.
- c. Discuss the genre of music created by lyricists.
- d. Highlighting the lyrics of the lyricists.

4.0 Analysis:

In the early 20th century, many lyricists deliberately focused on song writing to remove the Bengali tendency from Assamese songs. Lakshmiram Barua's music cell contains songs of many lyricists at that time. Among them are Satyanath Bora, Bhenuddhar

Rajkhowa, Raghunath Chaudhary, Hemchandra Goswami, Chandradhar Baruah, Radhanath Phukan, Kankalal Barua, Durgaswar Sharma, Ambikagiri Raichoudhury, Girishchandra Bardoloi. Cultural deny, social unrest, averse to the national life of contemporary Assam were the main subsistence of the then Assamese songs. However, religious, erotic, etc. thoughts do not have the basis of song writing. During this period, a lot of songs were also added to the plays of Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Padmanath Gohanibarua, mainly playwrights. These songs, which are connected in the form of Bengali dramas, often directed the tunes of Hindustani music. The songs of Bezbaruah's *Jayamati* play are particularly noteworthy. Through the songs of 'O mur apunar desh', he tried to inculcate patriotism in the contemporary people. He tried to inculcate patriotism in the contemporary people. Ambikagiri Raychoudhury is one of the most talented musicians in the Assamese music industry in the early 20th century. He has composed a lot of songs in a wonderful combination of language qualities and musical consciousness. Today, the song, filled with fiery words like *Aji Bando Ki Sandere* (The Way I must Worship) inspired the people of the then country to tear the shackles of subjugation. Another person of this period who contributed to Assamese songs is Kirtinath Sharma Bordoloi. He was the first to point out the indigenous elements in Assamese music and its uniqueness. He also highlighted various topics that could happen in the music world of Assam. *Sur Parichoy (Introduction to Musical Notes)* and *Kamrupi Sangeet (Songs of Kamrup)* are two of his significant works. He has also made attempts to sing the songs composed by Padmadhar Chaliha and Benudhar Rajkhowa. Umesh Chandra Choudhury's role in the field of lyrics is also noteworthy. The extent of the content of his songs is also striking. The idea of nationalism and the idea of patriotism is the prevailing content of his songs and they are highly melodious. In the second and third decades of the 20th century, Choudhury composed songs such as *Agot Aji Taba Atithi*, *Neejanote Phulisil Ador*

Maloti, Bohagi Luitor Bihuwali Sutit etc. are some of his popular songs. *Pratidhwani* (1939) and *Mandakini* (1940) are two of his collection of lyrical songs.

Padmadhar Chaliha, Parvatiprasad Baruah, Anandiram Das are some of the other lyricists who contributed to the field of Assamese songs from the second decade to the fourth decade of the 20th century. His songs are included in all the three song collections of Padmadhar Chalihar Phoolni (1915), Swaraj Sangeet (1921), Geeti Lahari. Some of the songs written by Parvatiprasad Baruah gained popularity at this time but the full yearned form of his song can be seen only in its later period. So far the journey of Assamese lyrics can be seen on the road.

That, by the second decade of the 20th century, the modern genre of Assamese songs began to get a form. The modern genre of Assamese lyricists gradually emerged with the unstinting contribution of lyricists like Kamalananda Bhattacharya, Mitraddev Mahanta, Raghunath Choudhari, Jatindranath Duara, Nalinibala Devi, Purushottam Das, Prasannalal Chaudhary etc.

Anandiram Das's contribution to popularizing Assamese modern songs is noteworthy. He has composed a class of modern songs called 'Bangeet' in harmony with the tunes of folk songs like Bihugeet, Banghosha etc. and the lyrics of folk life. He is awarded the name 'Bon-Konwar'. Songs like *Ruphi Majuli* by *Luhitor bukure rupohi majuli*, *Herou Kalia Rai Pepati baa, oi Phaguni* gained popularity in the public community. The songs of Anandiram Das are included in the collections *virah* (1937) and *sur Nijara*.

The world of Assamese songs is a novelty in the application of the Assamese music and it has a unique role to play in the application of the local tunes and in the unusual expressions. Jyotiprasad Agarwal is one of prominent composers, who glorified the modern lyrical literature in a new way. He created a new style of expression in Assamese music by applying indigenous melodies and enriched the modern genre of Assamese songs. *Gose Gose*

Pati Dile, More Jivaonore Sokha Krishno, Joy Alukmoy,, Biswa Bijoyi Nobajuwan, Luitor Parore Ami Dekha Lora, Seuji Seuji etc are the finest compositions of Jyotiprasad Agarwal. His songs range from romantic love and excitement to a higher level of perception. Another contemporary lyricist of Jyotiprasad Agarwala is Bishnuprasad Rabha. His songs include the indigenous lyrics of Assam as well as elements of Indian classical music and Western music. The songs expressing love and dispassion like *Lagan Ukoli Gol, Nahar Phule Nuxuwai* etc. are very much appreciated by the Assamese people. The main subsistence of the song written by Bishnuprasad Rabha is the pain and sufferings of the deprived and oppressed people. Both Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Bishnuprasad Rabha have given a special dimension to Assamese modern music. In other words, the two musicians established the life of Assamese modern music with the inspiration of the previous lyricists as content. Lyricist Parvati Prasad Barua was able to create a unique collection of songs filled with love and harmony, natural beauty and patriotism as the basis. The use of simple language in his songs has made the song very interesting. The books of poetry and songs written by him are-*Sunor Suleng* (1955), *Luiti* (1959), *Gungunoni* (1957), *Bhonga Tukarir Sur* (1959), *Sukula Dawor oi Kohua Ful* (1963), *khel bhangar khel* (1969) etc.

Radio's recognized lyricist Leela Gogoi has made an important contribution to modern Assamese music literature by writing song books titled *Geeti Mallonch* (1964), *Sonali* (1978), *Jonakar geet* (1979). His songs are mainly rich in the form of folk life, the equality of consciousness and natural life. Bhupen Hazarika is the lyricist who created a new era in Assamese lyrical literature. The diversity of themes incorporating elements from nature to people, country, soil and time etc. has provided a rich and diversified beauty to his songs. The world-oriented spirit reflected in his songs has endowed the songs with richness at both the individual level as well as the universal level. He was truly a mass artist. *Manuhe Manuhor Babe, Sagor Sangomot, Bimurto Mur Nisha*, etc are the classic songs by this

legend. Bhupen Hazarika, has also made the world of Assamese songs watched with lyrics, tunes and his own songs. *Jilikab Luitore Par* (1955), *Sangram Logne Aaji* (1962), *Agoli Bahor Lahiri Gagna* (1964), *Bahniman Brahmaputra* (1980), *Gitavali* (1993) are some of his major creation in the field of Assamese music.

Independence immediately ushered in a special change in the music world of Assam. Many artists appeared through the radio station that connected Shillong-Guwahati together in the year. Kamal Narayan Choudhary, Purushottam Das, Bhupen Hazarika, Dilip Kumar Sharma, those Assamese singers were well established during this period. Dhirendranath Das, Darpanath Sharma, Tarabuddin Ahmed, Durga Bhuyan, Vivekananda Bhattacharya etc. were among the artists who contributed to Assamese modern songs between the thirties and forties of the 20th century.

Rudra Baruah and Brojen Baruah are the two prominent lyricists of this period who tasted some innovation in the traditional genre of Assamese modern songs. Especially by Brojen Baruah composing music for Assamese films. These Assamese lyricists were able to bring exceptional tunes to the music world. Rudra Baruah also managed to bring a new taste to Assamese music by composing songs like *Dukhar Ratitu Ketia Puwabo*, *Silimili Tuponit Kune Ahi Matile*, *O Tultul O Bulbul*, *Poka Dhanor Maje Maje*, *Tatore Durepoti* etc.

Many lyricists gathered in the field of Assamese modern music in the late past. Among them are Keshav Mahanta, Nabakanta Baruah and Nirmalprabha Bardoloi. Keshav Mahanta has created a repository of Assamese lyrics by writing a book of songs titled '*Kuwali Atori ja*', *Dikh Dhuwali Varan*, *Bukut ejak Dhumuha*, *Mur Je kiman Hepah*. His songs blend the life of Assamese people with the smell of extract, soil and roots. These songs of Khagen Mahanta's voice are still popular today. *Ahinok Kune Aane*, *dhun dhun Dhunia*,

bogoli boga phut di jaa, akash amak akani akash diya, Barasha Tumar Sokut Meghar ranjan
etc.

Nirmalprabha Bardoloi, recognized as one of the leading female poets of the 20th century, is also known as a lyricist. Nature has found a special place in his songs. Deep sense of life, aspirations of the female mind, national consciousness, women and men's relationships, love, separation and agony have dominated her songs. *Barasha Ritu Bhalpau Moi, Mayamoi Rupali Junak, o kajal kajal Megh* is her popular songs. Syed Abdul Malik also fuelled the growth of Assamese modern music by writing a book of songs titled *Tumar Kontho Mur Kotha*. Lakshyahira Das has made a significant contribution to Assamese modern lyricism with songs like *Prathama, Sursetu, Gitartha, Mayurpankhi, Antargata Nadi, Amar Chikuni Desh, Lakshhirar Geet* etc. Tafajul Ali is one of the most sensitive lyricists in the modern genre of Assamese music. *Bohudin Bokular Gundha Pua nai Champavati tumar Ghatot, Madhumalathi Tuponi jua* etc are some of his popular songs. Ali has given a wide range of callivars to modern Assamese lyrics. Ramen Baruah is another notable lyricist who enriched Assamese modern music with the music direction of Assamese cinema in the 1970s. The songs composed for Assamese films have reached the pinnacle of popularity in recent times. Prashanta Bordoloi, Alimunnisa Peer, Eli Ahmed, Karbi Deka Hazarika, Manorama Bargohain, Bibidevi Barbarua, Satyaprabha Das, Anuradha Das, Kalpana Bhunya, Syed Chadullah, Surya Das, Mukul Baruah, Mrinal Baruah, Bhupen Ujir, Nanda Banerjee, J.P. Das, Sher Chaudhary, Avani Pathak, Atul Medhi, Jayant Das, Manoj Sharma, Jatin Sharma, Rajiv Bhattacharya, Dr Hitesh Baruah, Loknath Goswami, Composers like Kula Baruah, Apoorva Bezbaruah, Arun Das, Geeta Hatikakati have been playing an important role in the introduction of Assamese modern music. In the early 21st century, lyricist Jitul Sonowal was able to give a special dimension to Assamese modern music. Jitul Sonowal brings a novelty to Assamese music with a mix of western music content by capturing the genre of Assamese

modern music created by previous lyricists. This experimental music by Sonowal has a huge appreciation among the audience. Zubeen Garg is another artist who made his debut at this time. Zubeen Garg has a wider contribution to modern music in Assam ranging from his immensely popular music album *Anamika* to *Gaan Ki Ane* has given special volume to modern music. Among the lyricists who have been active since before Zubeen Garg are Digant Bharti, Manash Robin, Tarali Sharma, Angarag Mahanta, Anupam Saikia etc. However, apart from a couple of modern songs, lyricists like Manash Robin, Anupam Saikia, Mausam Gogoi are composing only modern Bihu songs to an extent. Tarali Sharma is a talented lyricist of this time. Angarag Mahanta has been able to innovated Assamese modern music with songs like *Jonaki Raat*, *Maan Mur Udash Udash*, *Phagun*, *Sandhya Jetia Naame* etc.

5.0 Conclusions:

The stream of Assamese lyrics started with oral tradition before the first demonstration of Assamese written literature. Assamese lyricists, who have started with oral traditions, have received newer forms for various social, political, cultural reasons. The folk music of the erstwhile non literate people remained instilled in spirituality till the post-Shankari period and later became a new form influenced by Hindustani music. The role of two persons in liberating Assamese lyricists from this Hindustani influence and re-establishing it with its own characteristics is noteworthy.

They are Lakshmiram Baruah and Satyanath Bara. Lakshmiram Baruah collected songs of many lyricists who had deliberately composed songs to establish the soul of Assamese music and published a collection called *Sangeetkosh* (1909). Satyanath Bora composed some songs in a modern way to reduce the tendency of Bengali songs from Assamese songs. These songs contained in the *Gitavali* (1912) book can be called the first

Assamese modern song. Later, many Assamese lyricists enriched the Assamese lyrical literature with new ideas and experiments.

Benudhar Rajkhowa, Raghunath Choudhary, Hemchandra Goswami, Chandradhar Baruah, Radhanath Phukan, Kankalal Baruah, Durgaeswar Sharma, Ambikagiri Raychoudhury, Girishchandra Bardoloi, Lakshminath Bezbaruah-those lyricist have firmly established the modern Assamese lyrical literature. Jyoti Prasad Agarwal truly established the life of Assamese music after lyricists like Padmanath Gohainbarua, Padmadhar Chaliha, Benudhar Rajkhowa, Parvatiprasad Baruah, Anandiram Das etc. He was able to give a new dimension to Assamese modern songs with the tune of indigenous Assamese folk songs. Contemporary Bishnuprasad Rabha also gave Assamese music a new form with his contributions. By giving a new dimension to modern Assamese lyrics, Assamese songs were made mass oriented and world-oriented by Bhupen Hazarika.

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