



BIRDS IN SELECTED FOLK SONGS OF RAJASTHAN



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ABSTRACT

Folk songs play a substantial role in the cultural identity of a region. It is an expressive form of customs, traditions and daily life of the common folk which presents a multitude of stories and voices an array of feelings and emotions. Folk songs serve as testimony to the past events of war, community, customs and traditions, rites and rituals. Folk songs also identify and define the region, and help one understand the natural aspects like climate, seasons, topography, agriculture, flora and fauna. The present study focuses on the description and presence of Avifauna imagery and symbolism in Rajasthani folk songs, and the impact of industrialisation and migration resulting in the decline of bird population and folk song traditions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The folk tradition of Rajasthan is rich and vibrant in contrast to its arid desert topography and in complete consonance to the colourful, spirited cultural heritage of this land of rituals and royalty. Rajasthani language is diverse and has multiple dialects primarily- Marwari, Mewati, Hadoti, Dhundari and Mewari and many other regional variations; thus the folk songs carrying the universal themes, are sung with slight dialectic differences in the region. Some other hues of colour to this western state of golden landscapes is added by the myriads of colourful birds found in the region and many who flung in huge numbers to to escape the harsh northern winters of Siberia and enter India via Iran and Afghanistan; and rest their wings at sites likes Kaleodeo, Bharatpur, Sambhar Lake, Ranthambore, Sariska and many other smaller and large grasslands, water bodies, parks and sanctuaries. The state plays host to these feathered creatures, and incorporates them in its cultural iconography and imagery, one can witness the presence of these birds in the arts and songs of the state; from the miniature paintings of Bundi to the songs of the nomadic tribes. The Indian Peafowl, Parakeets, even the common Crow finds place in the folksongs, along with the exotic migratory birds like Demoiselle crane, Amur falcon and others.

Rajasthan, located in north west India is also attributed as land of chivalry and cultural heritage. It has some of the best melodies of folk songs conveying eventually, the whole of human life extensively. Rajasthani folk songs are divided into three categories: Religious or *Puranic* songs; songs on Gods and Local deities, Historical songs on the heroic adventures and past glory and Imaginary and Domestic songs that deal with the day to day lives of the common folk. Birds usually make an appearance in the Imaginary and Domestic folk songs, which can be further divided into categories based on occasion or mood, there are songs of Longing (*Virah Geet*), of Love and romance (*Shringar ras, Pranay Geet*) and Marriage Songs (*Vivah geet, especially Bidai geet*). There is another subsection which is solely dedicated to birds, called *Pankheru geet* which are either area specific or are sung in the entire region, they are descriptive, symbolic or love songs.

Folk song is not a mere literary tool, it is a portrait of life, it is dynamic in its representation of human life and is a beautiful amalgamation of the rustic lifestyle with aspects of nature. The meaning of folk songs is culturally dependent and one finds an intrinsic connection between music and emotions. Nature, especially the winged beauties, blends with the lives of the common folk of the region, in their songs of rain, marriage, love, and longing. It is important to note the social lives of the people of the region, as they form the base for any kind of folk arts. It is common in multiple cultures to compare daughters to birds, who leave the nest when of age and fly away to their husband's home.

2. MARRIAGE SONG BIDAAI GEET

Marriage is treated as an important necessity in the Indian subcontinent, it also helps keep in practice old customs and traditions, marriage songs vivify the marriage proceedings, from pre-nuptial to post-nuptial rites, songs are a significant part of the celebration. Women folk gather and sing hymns to gods and goddesses and also songs of fun and revery and songs of farewell.

'Lele Amarkot ko gaai'
(Lele has flown to Amarkot.)

The young bride is compared to *Lele*, a small song bird found in the region. And presented here to have flown to Amarkot, Amarkot (present Umarnkot) was once a part of Rajputana, but after partition of India in 1947, the region was incorporated in Sindh, Pakistan. Border marriages are still prevalent, amongst the Hindus of the neighbouring countries.

'Aayo sagaa ro suvatiyo, le gyo toli mah su taal,
Koyal bai seedh chalya'

The groom is addressed as *suvatiyo* (a parakeet) that someone who is different arrived and took away the bride from her flock and thus asked the bride addressing her as *koyal*, (cuckoo) where are you going to?

Another song

'Babul, thari chidakli udd jaaela'
(Oh, Father of the bride, your sparrow will fly away)

Bidaai Songs picks at the "heartlessness" of the bride's parents, they are left with an empty nest as the newly married bride takes her leave and is tied to new relations and has acquired a new status of daughter-in law.

A region infamous for child marriage in the past, the songs do tend to present the bride as tiny harmless songbirds addressed as sparrows, *Lele*, etc.

3. SONGS OF LOVE AND TEASING

In Rajasthan, traditional cultural norms are still followed, the wife doesn't speak directly to her husband in presence of elders, maintains a veil of shyness and reserve; and even the husband would address his wife by her relation to the other family members.

In folk songs about love and romance and playful teasing this tradition is maintained and the lovers tend to use affectionate pet names instead of addressing each other by their given names.

"Mhari Titri, than belbet ko lehengo lyadyu re"

The lover addresses the beloved as Teetri(partridge bird) and says he would bring a velvet skirt for her.

In another song

*Uddyo re uddyo, dodo dodo jaaye mharo suvatiyo,
Suvatiyo mhari choti nanad ro beer, mharo suvatiyo.*

Suvatiyo is the local name for the Indian parrot in Rajasthan, but in this song,

The woman says that her lover goes here and there and flies away,

Suvatiyo, is the brother of her young sister in law. Thus, keeping with the tradition of not addressing her 'beend' husband by name.

4. SONGS OF LONGING VIRAAH GEET

In the olden times, men migrated to bigger cities or even to different states, seeking opportunities for businesses and jobs, as evident from the presence of the Rajasthani diaspora (popularly called the marwari community) in other states of the country as far away as Nagaland and Assam in the north east, and even to the southern states. In the olden days, as means of communication and any form of correspondence were both expensive and scarce, they would remain away for years and it was the womenfolk who were left behind to tend to the family. This separation and longing is often depicted in the Virah geet of the region, where birds are often addressed as messengers to bring news as they travel miles and are blessed with wings and the freedom to fly away to different places, in this instance, to fly home.

4.1. PEACOCK

These majestic beautiful birds and its very famous dance associated with romance and rain finds a unique place in the folksongs of the state which receives scanty rainfall. Peacock is associated with weather forecasting as its song is associated with the arrival of Shravan, or 'saavan'(the rainy season) depicting different moods or *rasa*. Where the peacocks' amorous dance is associated with Pranay and shringaar raas, and a subtle eroticism is evoked when nature is compared to a young bride who veils herself in greenery and whose thirst is quenched by the rain showers . This season of bliss and blessings, makes the women long for her lover who has left the homeland in search of work, and thus they portray the pangs of separations felt by her through songs where she sings for her lover to come back home to her and to this beautiful land of theirs.

*Mor bole re, o malji, Abu re pahada me o malji, mor bole re
Bega aaijo re, o malji, Abu ri dharti me o malji, bega aaijo re
(The peacocks are singing in the hills of Abu,
Return my love, to the land of Abu.)*

In another song with dealing with the same emotion

*Moriya peeo peeo ki boli chodh de, chodh de, mhara peeo ji basse re pardesh moriya,
aachyo bolyo re dhalti raat ma*

(Peacock, Leave your melodious singing, my lover is in a foreign land,
You sing so beautifully as the nightfall approaches.)

The songs display the feeling of discomfort and a sense of jealousy in the women's heart that all nature is celebrating the arrival of spring and the peacock's amorous song resonates, while she is lonely and longs for her lover and witnesses the arrival of rains all alone.

4.2. CUCKOO

Another song bird associated with rains is the common hawk cuckoo,

Meetho meetho bol papiha, pyaaro pyaaro bol baagam bhara mewarsi meetho meetho bol
(Sing sweetly, oh cuckoo bird, fill these gardens with your sweet voice)

The song describes the sweet singing of the bird Papihara or Papiha (common hawk-cuckoo bird). The people urge the bird to keep singing as sweetly as ever, with the change in season.

4.3. CROW

In the famous *maand* song, 'Kesariya Balam aavo ni'

The famous lines of sufi saint Sheikh Fareed find place as the lovelorn woman awaits the return of her warrior lover.

I. *Kaga sab tan khaiyo, mora chun chun khaiyo maas,
Do naina mat khaiyo mohe piya milan ki aas*

Addressing the crow, that if I die, waiting for him, you may peck at all of my body, but requests it to spare her eyes, as even in death she would want to witness her lover, thus noticing the scavenger traits of these black birds.

II. *Ud Ud re mhara kaala re kaagla, kadh mhara peevji ghar aawe*

III. *kagaliya, gehro gehro bole ni re,
mharo parvano baataliyo pardesh,
paredesida ollyu thari aaveni re*

In both II. and III. The crowing of crows and the association with the age old myth that this not so pleasing birdsong is a foretelling of the arrival of guests is explored, as the lady wants the crow to sing and bring the message of her lover's return home.

And In III. The woman asks the crow to not sing, as she knows her lover is far away, and she misses him and can only anticipate his arrival.

4.4. DEMOISELLE CRANE (KURJAAN)

Continuing with the tradition of Virah Geets, the demoiselle crane presents the migratory bird phenomena and its annual journey to escape the harsh Siberian winters, arrival and departure have inspired songs of love, longing and separation.

'Tu che, Kurjan, mhare gaon ki, Laage dharam ki bhaan'

Kurjaan ye ranyo, bhanvar mila dyo ji, sandheso mhare piyaa nei pugaa dyo ji..

Kurjaan is an emotional song, evoking Virah Rasa, the pangs of separation as expressed by the voice of the lady in love addressing the migratory bird as sister and requesting it to carry her message to her husband who is miles away toiling. Kurjaan is a poetic rendition where a woman opens the folds of her aching heart addressing the bird to be her messenger, and to carry her feelings of love and the urge to be united with the husband, as the wives are always veiled away, folksongs play an important role as an emotional purging of all these otherwise repressed emotions.

5. CONCLUSION

Birds are associated with domestic spaces as they're in the courtyards every morning, and find space in the imaginative realms as free spirits, blessed with wings. The songs are not songs about birds, the songs speak of human emotions and feelings, while the birds are metaphors and symbols. With the rapid shift from rustic lifestyle to a metropolitan rush, folksongs and other rural traditions are losing importance, and thus it is necessary to preserve these oral traditions, and appreciate the strong ecological and environmental connection that the folk songs create by incorporating different natural elements and presenting them to the new generation. Increasing use of chemicals in agriculture and the adverse effects of industrialization has restricted the natural habitat and led to a downward whirlwind fall for many avian species, pushing a few to the brink of extinction and others declared endangered and similarly the folk traditions are reduced to a mere stage art, Folk songs in the modern context are in rapid decline with the younger generation failing to understand its relevance, preserving and promoting the folk arts is important as they carry messages of environmental consciousness and stories of profound human emotions.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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