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QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT REMEMBERED IN FOLK MUSIC

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Abstract

Voices from the past can still be heard today through the living social history of songs passed down through generations, whether they're still sung by tradition-bearers, recorded by folk song enthusiasts or printed in broadsides or books. Folk music refers to traditional music that has been transmitted orally within social groups. It typically does not adhere to any specific literary rules. Folk music often relates to rituals, games, folk religion, and other cultural practices. In contrast, classical songs follow the guidelines and principles outlined in Natya Shashtra and cultivate the Guru Shishya tradition. The origins of folk music in India can be traced back to the Vedic era, where folk songs known as Gathas were sung during various rituals. India is known for its rich diversity, especially in terms of folk music. Each state in India has its own unique style of folk music, such as Garba, Alha, Sortha, and Birha. During the national freedom movement of India, music played a crucial role in creating awareness among the people and inspiring them to actively participate in the movement. These folk songs often had religious connotations, portraying national leaders as gods and British rulers as evil demons or rakshasas. The purpose of these songs was to symbolize the duty of the gods to eliminate these demons and liberate the people from oppressive British rule. While folk songs repertoire is extensive and cannot be fully covered in one article, I have made an effort to shed some light on some of them to provide an understanding of the role of folk songs in Quit India Movement..

Keywords: *Quit India, Folk Songs, Bharat, Gandhi, Charkha.*

1. INTRODUCTION

As famous 19th century poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once said "Music is the universal language of mankind." Music possesses a unique power to impact humans unlike anything else. What better way to foster a sense of unity and national pride in a nation where dozens of languages are spoken than via music, a universal language. Throughout history, music has played a crucial role in supporting and spreading various freedom movements, acting as a unifying force that mobilizes people towards a shared purpose. It is a type of human creative activity which is closely tied to the general history of mankind, reflects the progress of social ideas and effectively participates in this progress.[i] The relationship between nationalism and music has been mutually beneficial, with each sustaining and utilizing the

other as a means of expression. While both music and nationalism have evolved over time, their deep connection remains unbroken. Patriotic songs, in particular, possess an enduring appeal that transcends specific contexts, making them popular across generations.

Folk music is a type of traditional and generally rural music that originally was passed down through families and other small social groups. Typically, folk music, like folk literature, lives in oral tradition; it is often learned through hearing rather than the reading of words or music, ordinarily in informal, small social networks of relatives or friends rather than in institutions such as school, temple or church. Apparently folk music is the music of the people, observers find a more precise definition to be elusive.[ii]

In comparison with art music, which brings aesthetic enjoyment, and popular music, which (often along with social dancing) functions as entertainment, folk music is more often associated with other activities, such as calendric or life-cycle rituals, work, games, enculturation, and folk religion; folk music is also more likely to be participatory than presentational.

In Indian sub-continent Folk music has existed since the Vedic era, which is evident from the ritual songs sung during sacrifices, birth, marriage, death rituals, thread ceremonies, etc. These songs were then referred to as "Gathas," which means songs. These Gathas were sung in conjunction with folk tunes, unlike Vedic chants. These Gathas took the shape of folk songs and ballads in the later period and laid the foundation of drama. Folk music incorporates traditional folk music and the contemporary genre that evolved from the former during the 20th-century folk revival.

Indian folk music is diverse because of India's enormous cultural diversity. Indian Folk Music includes a wide range of musical styles and genres, each with its own unique sound, instruments, and traditions. Almost every region in the country has its own folk music, which reflects the way of life. Folk music is primarily based on diverse themes. There are different types of folk music associated with a specific state. Wanawan, Panihari, Maand, Sohar, Baul, Khongjom Parva, Pandavani, Lavani, Powada, Mando, Kolattam/Kolannalu, Bhavageete, Bhatiali, Kummi Paatu,Ovi and Pai Song are some examples of prominent folk songs in India.

Folk-lores are not authenticate sources in the study of history, but they definitely contain a mixture of folk and poetic expressions of that time.[iii] Indian nationalism despite its various sources, shades and strands, has an intimate connection and association with patriotic songs. This association has a continuity which has defied barriers of space and time, form and style. Role of music in Indian freedom struggle have helped in creating great awareness among the people for gaining knowledge about the importance of independence.

During colonial period, when a great part of the colonial administration was manned by Indians, patriotic songs were often a surrogate for overt action for many Indian government officials. Such songs played a significant role in shaping the mentality of people who came of age at the time of independence. Anyone with an ear for music and a fondness for poetry would have imbibed notions of his or her identity as a citizen of a free country in terms of patriotic songs heard while growing up.

The genre of patriotic songs identified the land of one's birth with divinity, and the words and tunes appropriately corresponded to a piece of intensely devotional music. Music is only a reflection of people's moods; it is no substitute for action. Bengalis like to call themselves '*gaan pagol*' or mad about music. When one listens to the songs of Tagore, Atul Prasad or Rajanikanta there is lot of love for motherland. The musical legacy of the Swadeshi period has a strong Hindu communal element in it, especially when mass mobilization was part of the nationalist struggle after the 1920s. D.L. Roy's songs were never banned. He suffered more during freedom struggle period. Nazrul had a strong sense of national identity as well as provincial loyalty and did not see any contradiction in it as Subramania Bharati of Tamil Nadu.

With the lifting of the ban on the Communist party in 1942 and the anguish of the Famine of 1943 a number of singers and poets began to flower. Dramas and folk culture was the medium through which the Communist party rallied the middle class intellectuals to their intellectual support and in the IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association) where various new compositions and dramas were performed. But Rabindranath Tagore's patriotic songs, despite disapproval of some dedicated Communists who

considered the slow and dreary tunes as not sufficiently inspiring, remained the continuing link. Other important contributors of this phase were Jyotindranath Moitra, Hemango Biswas, Bhupen Hazarika and Salil Chowdhury and songs by Sibnath Sastri, Mukunda Das and Sukanta Chowdhury became very popular in this period.

During the colonial period, patriotic music was often composed in urban settings, but rural India also followed this trend and sometimes composed folk songs to express people's feelings toward the movement.

The freedom struggle against British rule, amongst other things, led to the creation of a vast body of patriotic literature in the various languages of India. The Gandhian era, in particular witnessed a tremendous proliferation of patriotic songs which were enthusiastically song all over the country. They were sung collectively at political gatherings and in protest processions, expressing as they did political sentiments of the masses. Utilizing many different folk forms such as raasdas, garba, bhajan, akhyan and pawda, riddles, regional popular lyrics, these songs established a whole new genre, which helped stir the patriotic fervour of the awakened Indian. The folk and popular literary forms in their turn, acquired new vigour from the patriotic content which infused these songs. Using traditional symbols, popular metaphors and idioms, these songs achieved their aim-to effectively disseminate patriotic and nationalistic messages to the people and to reach their heart.

What was unusual about such songs, was that they were not always written by well-known poets, but were often composed by anonymous patriots, literate and illiterate, who were inspired by the times they lived in and the intense patriotic fervour which pervaded the very air of those times. Because these songs are a reflection of the sentiments of the masses, they give us significant insights into their socio-cultural sensibilities, thus providing an important source of study of the history of the freedom struggle from below.

Gandhiji's arrival in Ahmedabad in 1915 soon transformed the politics and culture of Gujarat. He electrified Gujarat. This period witnessed a great spurt in the writing and composing of patriotic songs. The Gujarat Sahitya Sabha compiled the first collection of patriotic poems entitled 'Deshbhakti Na Kavyo I in 1905. But it was Swadeshi Kirtan which formed the first collection of popular patriotic songs composed to be sung collectively. It was compiled by the Swadeshi Mitra Mandal of Ahmedabad in 1909, priced at only half an anna, in order to invoke bhakti or devotion to Hind devi, the new object of worship.

The popular poets of this period were not always intellectuals. Many of them were patriots and were inspired by the love for their country. Many unknown and anonymous poets also composed some famous patriotic songs. Some prolific poets were, the blind poet Hansraj, Vasant Vinodi, Maganbhai C. Patel, Dr. Hariprasad, Lalit, Khabardar, Jyotsnaben Shukla, Keshavdas G. Shah, Gijubhai, Tribhovan Vyas, Kunvarji Mehta, Jugatram Dave etc.

The spinning wheel or Charkha became the national symbol of Swaraj. Khadi hand spun and hand woven cloth and Charkha became the subject matter of many popular songs. In 1922, Maganlal Bapuji (Godhrawala) composed a song in the folk form of garba which was addressed to women. It became very famous and popular.

Here, the poet appealed to women to give up foreign cloth, pomp, show, fashions and adopt Khadi however coarse it may be. He adds: "by doing so, Oh, my sister, we shall easily win Swaraj."

Another popular song was entitled: 'Balak ni Mangani' (A child's demand) written in simple language, by an anonymous poet.

(Oh mother: give me a Khadi cap, a Khadi Peharan (shirt) a dhoti, a Khadi bag and Khadi shoes. Make me look beautiful oh, mother, with Khadi.)

In 1942, during the Quit India Movement, songs became more militant and aggressive. Gandhi had provided the people with an inspiring slogan of 'Do or Die'.[iv] As many national leaders were in jail, the angry masses became violent. Poets too became militant and expressed their fury in songs. Many poets wrote garba songs, invoking fierce goddesses - Chandika, Kali, Durga, Bahuchari, Ambika - to destroy the British empire in India. They invoked the goddess in order to destroy the oppressive rule of the British.[v] Thus, they added a political dimension to garba. These political garbas were meant to incite people against British rule. Poets retained the garba's traditional lyrical structure and style. In these new political garbas the British were represented as demonic and evil while Indians were represented as benevolent and good.[vi] Churchill and other

British leaders were depicted as Satanic and wicked, while Gandhiji, Jawaharlal, Vallabhbhai, Subhashchandra were shown as good and heroic.

The navratri festival was a religious festival, but it assumed a new meaning during the colonial period. Many poets composed songs appealing goddess Durga or Amba, or Bahuchara to destroy the evil spirit in the form of white rulers. In 1930 a poet under the pseudo - name of Padrakar published a book titled Rashtriya navratri ras.[vii] These songs along with the other patriotic songs became quite popular in Gujarat. For instance, poet Hansraj belonging to Amreli town in Saurashtra, composed a highly patriotic song in 1922 saying that the "hat-men (the English people) have cracked down upon India and they have destroyed our farms and industrial crafts, but now the days of the evil British rule are numbered."[viii] Poet Hansraj was blind, but he became popular throughout Gujarat and his song was sung by large numbers of people in public meetings. The government tried him in the court of law for his "seditious activities'' but he pleaded not being guilty.[ix]

A large number of national songs were composed and were sung. But the navratri songs also proved to be entertaining. In view of the growing popularity of the navratri songs, the editors collected songs composed by one Chandidas and published them during the 'Quit India' movement, 1942. The book assumed a significant title, Ranchandi, that is, the goddess of the battlefield. The editors wrote in the preface that in view of the growing popularity of poet Chandidas navratri songs, they published them in a book form.[x] Now, "Chandidas" was itself a fictitious name and the editors used it as a cover to bide the identity of the real author. But in any case, the songs became very popular and thousands of men and women in Gujarat sang these songs as a part of the navratri festival- in the garba form. The following is the gist of the songs.

In the song titled "Avan to raj shan hoi ho bahuchari", the poet
says: "Oh, mother Bahuchari, how is it that the British people rule us so ruthlessly? They have exploited us and looted us. They have also imprisoned Gandhiji but, Oh Merciful Goddess, we are not afraid of them. We will destroy the tottering pillars of the British empire; let the earth be drenched with red blood." In "Chandika ramane Chadhya", the poet prays goddess Chandika to bless the devotees and to destroy sinful Britain. We have asked the British to quit, but they keep on sticking to our country. But Chandika has now started her dance of destruction and this will make the British dig their own burial ground. England has been forced by Germany and Japan to make a reverse movement, and now India is about to defeat it.

The songs are titled As "Amba Albeli", "Ma Ambano Ras" "Kalikane Prarthna", and "Mano Shap", but all of them actually have a common anti-colonial theme in which people, irrespective of their castes and creeds are advised to unite against their common enemy. The rulers are described as "sinful demons" who are just waiting for their annihilation at the feet of the goddesses.

These songs were sung in the garba during the 'Quit India movement. But the Bombay Police Department came to know about it, resulting in the seizure of hundreds of copies of the book. On further inquiry the police discovered that one Kuverji Keshavji Shah, one of the proprietors of the May Printers in Bombay had printed these songs. He was detained under clause 129 of the Defence of India Rules. In the course of this search a manuscript copy of other songs entitled "Call of India" was also seized. Mr Shah suffered imprisonment.[xi]

All these political and nationalistic garbas had a fiery tone and a patriotic content. These songs sung enthusiastically by the masses reflected the patriotic ethos of the country during the Gandhian period. They formed a significant part of the popular culture of those times. They referred to contemporary events and situations, and were meant to incite people against British rule in a situation which was already volatile, and were greatly successful in their aim.

In India, particularly within the Bhojpuri speaking community, European scholars played a significant role in the compilation of folk songs and stories. George Grierson was the pioneer in this field, as he began compiling Bhojpuri folklores. He published numerous Bhojpuri folksongs and stories in various Indian and foreign journals. In addition to Grierson, scholars such as William Crook, Erwin, and Frazer also contributed to the compilation of these folklores. The first attempt by an Indian scholar to compile Hindi folk songs was made by Pandit Ramnaresh Tripathi. He compiled Hindi folksongs in his book "Kavita-Kaumudi edition 5 (gram geet)."

The garba songs and Bhojpuri folksongs shared many similarities. The Bhojpuri folk songs started incorporating nationalist themes during the 1857 revolt, when Babu Kunwar Singh fought against the British. In 1917, when Gandhi visited Champaran, he inspired a whole generation to join the freedom movement.

Here's a folk song emerged during this time, depicting Gandhi's mission to dismantle the oppressive foreign regime-

अवतार महात्मा गाँधी के भारत के भार उतारे का
सिरी राम कै सेना बानर रही सिरीकिसन के सेना ग्वालबाल
गाँधी के सामने पब्लिक रहे भारत के भार उतारै का।
सिरीराम के साथे लछिमन रहे सिरी किसन साथे ग्वालबाल
गाँधी जी के साथ जवाहर भारत के भार उतारै का।
गांधी जी के हाथ चरखा रहा भारत के भार उतारै का
गांधी जी जगमा प्रकट भये अन्यायी राज हटाने का।[xii]

During the Quit India movement everyone was willing to sacrifice everything and go to jail to ensure country's freedom. Satyagrahis were subjected to many hardships in jail. Anticipation of these hardships of jail by devoted wives of the patriot is described in the folk song that is included below.

" रजऊ कइसे होइहे ना | टेक |
ओ ही जे जेल के कोठरिया । रजऊ०
गोड़वा में बेडिया, हाथ में हथकड़िया,
रजऊ कइसे चलिहि ना ।
बोझा गोड़वा में जताई। रजऊ०
घरवा में सइयां कुछ करते नाही रहले,
अटावा कइसे पीसिहें ना । रजऊ०
भारी जेहल के चकरिया,
रजऊ कइसे पीसिहें ना ।
घर के जेवनवा उनुकरा नीको नाहीं लागें,
उहवां कइसे खइहें ना,
जौ के रोटिया, घासि के सगवा उहवां कइसे खइहें ना ।"[xiii]

India attained independence in 1947, but Baliya, led by Chittu Pandey, proclaimed its independence in 1942 and set up a short-lived 13-day government. Through Bhojpuri folk songs, the 'Quit India Movement' became well-known in the Bhojpuri-speaking population. A folk song about Gandhi supposedly defeating the oppressive English rulers is provided below.

जेवना न जेवे कंगरेसी, कंगरेसी बलमा।
बिचवा में ठनले बा लड़इया, कंगरेसी बलमा।।
आरे के लइन तोरले, पटना के टेलीफोन।
बिचवा में ठनले बा लड़इया अंग्रेजवा दुश्मन।[xiv]

गांधी के लड़इयां नाहीं जीतबे फिरंगिया,
चाहे करु कतनो उपाइ।
भल भल मजवा उड़वले इहि देसवा में,
अब जइहें कोठिया बिकाइ।[xv]

In his book "Charkha Chaumasa," Maithili poet Chhedi Jha "Madhup" from the 20th century sheds light on the significance of Charkha during the freedom movement.[xvi]

पेखि जेठ प्रचण्ड ज्वाला परम क्लेशक आगरी
त्यागि गेला तीर्थ ठेला धरहि बैसू नागरी।
बैसि न व्यर्थ बिताविय,
चरखा चारु चलाविय,
देखि देश दरिद्रता नभ घुमरि घुमि घन मालिका
कानि अश्रु अषाढ़ टारथि वसन बिनु लखि बालिका।
सूत सुभग तनु काटिय
विरचि वसन तन धारिय
मास सावन करथु हा! हर विकल बेंस विदेशिया
अहाँ मन दय पीर बाँटू सूत काटू देशिया।
देशक सब धन बाँचत,
अरि डर थरथर काँपत,
छाड़ि चिन्ता, करू भादव भवन बैसि विभावरी
बारि बाती धरू चरखा करु वरखा आखरी
मधुप विपति सब बीतत
देश कठिन रण जीतत।[xvii]

Tapati Roy explored the popular world of the countryside in the Bundelkhand region and its relationship with the 1857 revolution.[xviii] Alha is a category of traditional folk song from northern India, particularly from the Bundelkhand region. Alha was not immune to this nationalism storm either. The English Raj was brutal, as this alha song describing it illustrates-

सीस नवाऊं गुरू अपने कूं, दुर्गा जी में ध्यान लगाय।
आल्हा गाऊं आजादी की, भैया सुन लेउ कान लगाय, कारे
मन के सभी फिरंगी जिनकी जालिम है सरकार ।
खून पीयै भारतवासिन के जे लोंभी कामी, मक्कार ।
सन 57 में भारत की गुस्सा गई जवानी खाय ।
झांसी वारी रानी ने ली तेज दुधारी हाथ उठाय ।
दन दन गोला गोली छूटे धाएं धाएं तोपे थर्राय ।

कट कट मुंड गिरे धरती पै, देख फिरंगी दहशत खांय ।[xix]

2. CONCLUSION

In summary, folk songs played a vital role in instilling a sense of national identity among Indians. They hold significant value as a cultural and social heritage, finally receiving the recognition they deserve. The impact of music in spreading nationalism was not only extensive but also enduring throughout the 20th century. What makes it even more intriguing is that music allowed the involvement of individuals who may not have otherwise participated directly, such as young school girls. Composers experimented with various musical styles to ensure that the songs had maximum impact on both the educated and those unfamiliar with music, as their involvement in the movements was crucial. Strategies like chorus singing and incorporating familiar folk tunes were employed to create a sense of familiarity and unity, essential for evoking patriotic sentiments. These folk songs often shed light on the stories of many unsung heroes of the freedom movement, who unfortunately did not receive recognition in mainstream history.

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