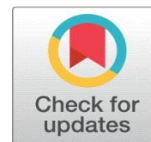


GALO FOLKSONGS: A STUDY OF YAAN AND KABEN

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ABSTRACT

The Galo tribe has a rich storehouse of folksongs which are continued orally from generations to generations. Both Yaan and Kaben are two important and popular folksongs which are often sung on important occasions like childbirth, marriage, festivals, etc. Due to lack of written script, the continuity and preservation of these folksongs for posterity is a major concern for the tribe. Moreover, research, documentation, and preservation of these forms of folk culture are very limited and still at an emerging stage. This study uses anthropological methods to collect data from the primary source and the data were collected from the field using two ethnographic qualitative research methods such as in-depth individual interviews and participant observation. Yaan and Kaben are two popular Galo folksongs, and they are commonly on various occasions. In fact, these folksongs are mandatorily sung during different marriage stages and situations. As a result, they are important components of Galo marriage. Without them, a Galo marriage ceremony is considered incomplete and deficient one. Nevertheless, a few Galo Christians organized the marriage ceremonies without them in recent times. This is one of the instances of change noticed in Galo marriages in present time. One of the important findings is that despite having different regional settlements and dialectal variations these folksongs show no changes till now. There is no change in their articulation and presentations. It continues to retain its pristine essence even in the modern times.

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Keywords: Galo Tribe, Folksongs, Nyikok, Yaan, Kaben

1. INTRODUCTION

In the northeastern India, Arunachal Pradesh is one such state which is known to have highest number of different ethnic groups each having their own distinct cultural heritage and traditions, indigenous religions, and dialects. Of these diverse tribes, the Galo is one of the major and prominent tribes in the state being the third largest tribe having a total population of 1, 12,272 according to 2011 Census. The Galo tribe belongs to Tibeto-Burman group of Mongoloid stock. Their rich and age-old cultures and traditions have been continuing till now orally from one generation to another. Jimi who is better known as Jimi Ane (mother) is considered as their creator and they claim to have descended directly from her progeny Tani who is again popularly known as Abo Tani by all Tani tribes such as Adi, Apatani, Galo, Nyishi and Tagin. The Galo's claim is well validated in their origin myth which clearly specifies that Jimi created Medo (sky) and Sichi or Sisi (earth), and out of their union, both Medo and Sisi appeared and thus they initiated the evolution of human race in the world. Their first offspring was Sibuk who bigot Buksin, Buksin was followed by Sintu; Sintu was followed by Turi and Turi was followed by Rini



or Tani (Abo Tani), the father of human race Nyori, T. (1993). History and Culture of the Adis. Omsons Publications. There are also other versions of their origin and myths, however, their evolution from Jimi and counting of genealogy from Abo Tani onwards are not different in all versions of myths. Hence, such minor variations in the versions do not create any difference in their origin myth. Before 2012, the Galo tribe was one of the major sub-tribes of Adi tribe, and that was also one of the reasons why British used to call them Abor, Doba-Abor and Gallong Abor during their regime in India. But these terms or nomenclatures were regarded as derogatory by them then and now. Thus, these terms were removed and changed to Adi which simply means "Hillman" after independence Nyori, T. (1993). History and Culture of the Adis. Omsons Publications. and all sub-tribes of Adi tribe were called Adi-Gallong, Adi-Minyong, Adi-Padam, Adi-Bori, etc. From 'Adi', 'Adi-Gallong' or 'Galong' to finally 'Galo' was done vide the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 2011, (No. 2 of 2012) on 8th January 2012.¹ Presently, majority of the Galos are living in four districts such as Lower Siang, Lepa Rada, West Siang, and Upper Subansiri of Arunachal Pradesh. In fact, many of them have also started to settle in different parts of the state especially in the Itanagar Capital Region, Papum Pare, East Siang, Lower Dibang Valley, Lohit, Namsai, East Kameng, Changlang districts, etc.

Folksong is one of the important genres of folklore. This traditional art form has great significance in all society of the world by which the community people can enjoy and receive enormous satisfaction. Like many folksongs of various social groups, the folksongs of Galo tribe have also originated from different socio-cultural practices associated with their life cycle and belief system. They have customary practices, ritualistic performances and socio-religious functions that are associated with and followed by folksongs. Therefore, these folksongs are found to have provided several functions for the community people as a whole. Usually, they are function oriented. A specific social and cultural situation needs a specific environment, where only a specific type of folksong suits. The Galo tribe has rich storehouse of folk cultures and traditions which have been continuing orally from one generation to another. Yaane and Kaben are two prominent folksongs of the tribe, and these are constantly sung during important socio-cultural functions like childbirth, marriage, festivals, etc.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study uses anthropological methods of data collection. The main source of the study is the primary source which is the oral source. The primary data have been collected from the fieldwork by using two ethnographic qualitative research methods i.e., in-depth individual interviews as well as participant observation. The researcher has done some fieldworks in select Galo areas of Arunachal Pradesh. With regard to tools and techniques of data collection, several renowned persons of the community especially a cross-section of Nyibo (Priest) and Nyikok (Orator)² usually women for Kaben and men for Yaan were exclusively interviewed with regard to these two categories of folksongs. Further, the researcher minutely observed some marriage ceremonies, festivals, and other occasions, in which these two folksongs of the community are sung, moreover, they are based on situations. A

¹ The Gazette of India, Ministry of Law and Justice, Govt. of India, The Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) Order (Amendment) Act, 2011, (No. 2 of 2012) dated 8th January 2012.

² Nyibo means priest and Nyikok means orator. These two groups of people are very important people in the Galo society as they are the storehouse or carrier of Galo folklores and other oral traditions.

few available secondary sources of data treasured in books, journals, etc. were also consulted carefully to draw data relevant to this study and to understand the concepts.

3. FOLKSONGS AND FOLK CULTURE

Folksongs are important component of folk culture like folk dance, folk crafts, folk art, folk music, folk architecture, folk costumes, folk religion, folk cookery, etc. of a community. Folksong as performing art is one of the important genres of folk culture. They have immense significance in every society of the world by which the community people can enjoy and receive satisfaction. For tribal society, it is mostly related to festival, marriage, agriculture and above all to their ways of life. It has inherent bond with the tribal society as it emanates from a cultural background. Being sophisticated and subtle in their various utility of forms, folksong has big functional roles, and their significance continues to stay in a society on account of such functionality. Different folksongs are sung according to their requirement for the occasion. As such almost all-important social customs and practices such as birth, marriage, death, festivals, and other social occasions have their own separate folksongs. In fact, the thoughts and sentiments of the people are expressed through these folksongs. It acts as an identity marker and helps in identifying and establishing the identity of a community. "Folk music, from the birth of the idea of a nation-state, has been one means of expressive culture used to generate, define, and reinforce national identity" Morrison, Cecily. (2003). *The Role of Folksong in Identity Process*, in Student Conference, Columbia University Press, 13-20.. By analysing and contextualizing how Hungarian folk music has been used to define identity, one can begin to understand how folk music actually helps to create and afterwards maintain identity. Similarly, Russel Ames, Russell. (1950). *Protest and Irony in Negro Folksong in Science and Society* (14) 193-213. explains that the Negroes use folksong as a medium to vent out their oppression and imply voice of protest. Thus, folksongs have immense significance in the society.

Apart from providing amusement and recreation, they also play serious and pivotal roles in a society. Datta, B. (1994). *A Handbook of Folklore materials of North-East India*. Anandoram Borah Institute of Language, Art, and Culture, 77. said that the folk communities in north-east India use folklore in constructing religious and political ideologies. He has further explored the fast-changing functions of folk narratives among the tribal population of the said region.

The study of folk culture and oral tradition in India may provide a tool to motivate the people in the desired manner to induce social change, which is the central objective of our development programmes. He said that such a study may help to identify the soft spots in our social organisms, through which we shall be able to crystallize our vision from sporadic expression of progress to the social formation which is the pivot of the desired course of change in our society Srivastava, S.L. (1974). *Folk Culture & Oral Tradition*. Abhinav Publisher..

4. TWO IMPORTANT FOLKSONGS GALO TRIBE

Yaan and Kaben as two important folksongs of the tribe are also considered as marriage songs by many Galos since it is sung mostly during marriage ceremony. These folksongs are significant in terms of their popularity and common performance. Moreover, these are secular in the sense that no particular religious rituals are associated with them. Unlike Kaben, the Yaan, in particular, can be sung

during any function or occasion organized by either individual family or society as a whole. The Yaan Kabne (one who sings Yaan) sings any Yaan that fits the function or situation. He has the liberty to choose any of its variant that befits the function or situation related to marriage, festival, or any other celebrations. On the other hand, in compared to Yaan, Kaben has much limited variants. It is solely on account of their secular nature, these two folksongs can be sung by any Galo Nyikok (orator) including the Galo Nyibo (shaman/priest) though Kaben as explained in the succeeding page is exclusively sung by the women folk (female nyikok) and hence, Kaben comes under women folk's domain.

As the tribe does not have their own written script, continuity, and preservation of these folksongs for posterity is a major concern for them. Moreover, research, documentation, and preservation of all these forms of Galo folk culture are very limited and at a nascent stage till now. Only a few cursory research works by some research scholars are found in some libraries and research centres. However, these are, more or less, a kind of ethnographic data compilation rather than analytical one. As one of the identity markers, these folksongs like several other forms of folklore reflect the cultural identity of the Galos as a separate tribal group of Arunachal Pradesh. But due to the influence of modernization and globalization, the Galo society, in the contemporary time, is undergoing changes socially, culturally, and economically. Added to it, another serious concern is that of rapid religious transformation among the community people. As a result, in recent decades, many Galo families have been converted to Christianity and very few, to Hinduism and the impact are far deeper which is more evident on their folk culture than in any other cultural aspects.

Invariably, these two folksongs are predominantly sung during marriage celebration in compared to any other festivities and occasions of the tribe. It is also the reason for their popularity. In general, during marriage ceremony, elderly, or expert members (usually male) of both Daapo (groom's group) and Daane (bride's group)³ exchange their views, wants, desires, even shortcomings and satisfactions of the other group's gifts, hospitality, and arrangements through Yaan. On the other hand, Kaben is usually sung by a female Nyikok to bless the bride for her marriage life ahead. It is also sung to console and bid adieu to the sacrificial animals used in Togu marriage. Nevertheless, it is a misnomer to understand and identify them as marriage songs because they are sung for several other occasions and events too. Hence, these two songs may better be classified as folksongs or traditional songs of the tribe. A separate consideration of these two folksongs may perhaps shed better light on these two cultural aspects.

4.1. YAAN

Yaan or Yaan Kabnam is one of the folksongs sung by extraordinarily learned person of Galo society popularly called 'Nyikok' and priest or shaman called 'Nyibo'. Literally, 'Yaan' means traditional song or folksong and 'Kabnam' means singing of song or folksong. Generally, it is sung by male Nyikok or Nyibo. In this context, comments of Lollen, T. (2017). *Symbolism in Tribal Oral Narratives : A Case Study of Galo Songs and Proverbs* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis). Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh. are pertinent, who said, 'Yaan singing is not a male prerogative and there's no established customary law that it can be sung by male

³ Daapo means groom's party and Daane means bride's party. Such use of different terms and division are done only during marriage ceremony for better clarity during exchange of views related to gifts, etc.

only. If a female is competent and confident, she too can sing Yaan. It is the male folks who have been singing it from time immemorial and gradually, it becomes a masculine custom not by tradition but practice'. He has drawn an analogy with Kaben, which is today sung by female only but there is no customary law which stipulate it to be sung by female exclusively and not by male. However, he further said that 'Kaben has become a female song and Yaan has a male song. Even today, a male can sing a Kaben, or a female can sing a Yaan. But this does not happen for all intents and purposes. Today, Kaben is invariably sung by females and Yaan by males' Lollen, T. (2017). Symbolism in Tribal Oral Narratives : A Case Study of Galo Songs and Proverbs (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis). Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh..

Some Galos misunderstood Yaan by considering it just as one kind of marriage song. It is partly true because it is a folksong having lot of socio-cultural values and at the same time, a flexible folksong which can be sung in any festive occasion or situation. Hence, it is sung during child delivery, shifting to a new house or housewarming function, harvesting function, reconciliation ceremonies, fairs, and festivals like Mopin and any other festive occasions besides marriage ceremonies. In fact, it is a rhapsodic song with themes related to various events and situations as cited above. No doubt, it is sung mostly during marriage ceremonies, but it is also sung to narrate the genealogical origin of clans, their migrations, myths, and legends, etc. Yaan is a solo-cum-group song because other male members in the gathering also sing with the Yaan Kabne (main singer) after intervals like the chorus both to cheer him up and to show their enthusiastic participation in the Yaan. Virtually, it is sung in a rotational manner. There is no hard and fast rule in terms of duration and presentation of the song. Anyone from the group may join and take the role of main singer when the first one finishes his turn. Likewise, it can continue for any number of singers. It is sung by male members mainly in the evening or at night while sitting around the burning hearth during marriage, Mopin, etc. but of course, it can be rendered during daytime too. The themes may also be on anything related to different socio-cultural aspects of the Galo tribe. In context of marriage, Yaan is meant to be sung during different stages of marriage ceremonies. Through it the singer narrates the origin of marriage in Galo society and also marriage myths related to Abo Tani, who is believed to have married different things, animals, and birds in his lifetime. It is also sung to extent and express hearty welcome to all marriage guests, and most importantly to pray almighty Donyi-Polo⁴ to bestow abundant blessings to both bride and groom for a happy conjugal life and lifelong marriage relationship. Thematically being all-encompassing and all-inclusive, Yaan can also be presented to express and acknowledge the difficulties, shortcomings and shortage encountered by either of the family in the marriage function. Additionally, it can also be sung to praise and express gratitude for generous hospitality and treatment extended during the entire marriage celebrations. Yaan can be sung by the people of both bride and groom's party during their assembly at the residence of the groom. Interestingly, sometimes both parties can inquiry and respond each other on various matters related to preparations, qualities of gifts items, quantity, and number of food items, etc. through Yaan instead of direct exchange of words. As a customary practice, in the last stage of marriage ceremony and to wrap up the whole programme, it is sung by an elder to advise and bless both bride and groom for their bright and happy future ahead.

'Siyum rule yumsi le, Silo lele dede le, Ane ge podi diko sogo,

⁴ Donyi-Polo means the belief system of the Galo tribe on Sun (Donyi) as Goddess and Moon (Polo) as God and both are considered as the creators of human beings and the universe.

*Abo ge podi bogdo sogo, Ngo mengo ge gui em menkok ge
Guga em koglen be dagna, Hotum pisi em murba gemo toka,
Horr takmo em ipe gemo toka, Besu rii em yayu gemo toka'.⁵*

The above-mentioned stanza of Yaan expresses the unfortunate and poor condition of the marriage family. The words Hotum (Bear), Horr (Boar) and Besu (Monkey child) represent the poor people who live an unfortunate and solitary life. Here the singer tries to compare man with wild animals that live a solitary and uncertain life without the capability to do any progressive work in life. Through this song the singer tries to entreat one marriage group to compassionately consider and accept the unfortunate and poor condition of the other marriage family.

*'Ngo mumi pibe na. Ngo mumo hebbe na. Ngo hitum ane.
Ngo jore abo. Kopu-kote ne hitum-jore ge kine hogo yirji kube ka.
Eji-eppo go bugge moto ka. Kero-tako go bugge moto ka'.⁶*

Here words Hitum-Jore refers to caretaker, Kopu-Kote to girl/bride, and Eji-Eppo and Kero-Tako to offspring. In this stanza, the groom's parents consider themselves as the caretaker and pray almighty Donyi-Polo to keep the bride in safe care and custody of the caretaker. They also pray and seek the blessings of almighty Donyi-Polo to bestow lovely and healthy progeny for their son and daughter-in-law in near future.

4.2. KABEN

The word 'Kaben' also refers to folksong. But it is more than simply a folksong. It is a kind of parting or farewell song which evokes a sense of grief and melancholy. But unlike an elegy, Kaben evokes sorrowfulness because of separation with a loved one. It is the separation or precisely, the leave of a daughter from her parents' home after her marriage. Kaben, is thus, sung when a daughter is sent off to the groom's home after marriage. By singing a Kaben, an elderly woman Nyikok not only bids farewell to a bride but also share her own personal knowledge, wisdom and experience on conjugal life, motherhood, womanhood, etc. that may be imbibed by bride in rest of her married life. Hence, Kaben is mostly sung on the occasion of marriage and that's the reason for making it more as a marriage song than anything else. But it is wrong to consider Kaben just as a kind of marriage song only because it is also sung on the occasion of Mopin in two different contexts. The first is sung for the mithun which is tied at the Mopin altar before its sacrifice. A woman sprinkles Iti (rice paste) on mithun and sings Kaben for it. The second context of Kaben is during Mopin festival when it is sung to obtain blessings both Ai-Agam ⁷ and Rili-Bongo ⁸ from Mopin Goddess and Pinku-Pinte (Mopin's daughters). When Popir groups visit every household, it is sung by an elderly female Nyikok who sit at a sacred corner of the house known as Kagri where necessary food items for daily consumptions of the concerned family are stocked.

It is to be understood that this folksong is sung only by elder females who have vast wisdom and knowledge on their age-old cultures and traditions. Like Yaan, it is also sung by a single person but there is no chorus in Kaben. Similar to Yaan, Kaben

⁵ Ropo, T. (2019, April 20). Personal Interview.

⁶ Doye, M. (2019, April 21). Personal Interview.

⁷ Ai-Agam means blessings for people's well-being and prosperity.

⁸ Rili-Bongo means blessings from the deities to human beings in the form of corns and agricultural implements, etc.

is sung on different stages of marriage ceremony. Through it the singer narrates the origin of marriage in Galo society especially the myths of Anyi Kari-Karnya or Anyi Karpu-Karlu.⁹ It is also sung to express a welcome gesture to all guests coming to attend the marriage ceremony. Essentially, it is sung as a solemn prayer to the almighty Donyi-Polo for lifelong conjugal bliss and material prosperity of both bride and groom. A few lines of Kaben songs are discussed below:

'Orgii ne tami ne dumpu be dakbe lalu be dakbe... e hoglo be dagbe megu be dakbe... e sidd no konyik go e nyode no konyik go yirya to yato. Orgii ne tami ne diirdo be iss be pimen be dakbe marmo be emm be parmen be dakbe. Gulu no konyik e yirya to yato, ramyo no konyik e yirya to yato. Orgii ne tami ne kero ge buku e tako ge buku e dele be dakbe, kopu ge buku e kote ge buku e dele be dakbe. Roku no konyik e rote no konyik e yirya to yato'.¹⁰

In the above Kaben, the word 'Orgii' refers to clan name of bride and the word 'Tami' refers to the girl or the bride. The words 'Sidd-Nyode, Gulu Mittu' refer to every corner of the house, 'Dumpu-Lalu' refers to long and healthy life, 'Diirdo-Marmo' to rich and respectable citizen, 'Kero-Tako' to offspring, 'Yirya/Yirnam' to blessing and 'Roku-Rote' refers to the God or creator.

The above-mentioned stanza of Kaben is sung by a female from the side of bride's family. It is sung to extend parent's farewell to the daughter who is leaving her parental home and ancestral village to live with her groom for rest of her life. Through Kaben the singer pleads the almighty Donyi-Polo to bless the bride for long, healthy, and happy life in groom's home and village. She further appeals every corner of groom's house to welcome the bride with blessings, for according to Galo belief system, a home is regarded as the protector and caretaker of all members of family. Finally, she prays for conjugal bliss which actually is possible only through endowment of healthy offspring to both bride and groom in their near future.

As pointed out in the foregoing page, Kaben is also sung to pacify and convince the mithun before it is sacrifice in Togu. Through this song the singer narrates the origin of mithun and the reason for its sacrifice in the marriage ceremony. It allows the owner to bid adieu to the mithun(s) and also grant opportunity to implore the creator (Donyi-Polo) to show right path to the sacrificial animals' souls on its journey.

'Melo le ogo le kenlo le ogo le jimi le ogo le, e Koyum le ogo le jimi le ogo le, e melo Donyi tolo pidum lo e polo tolo pidum lo, e Donyi ge gari e garlen dage ogo le e polo ge gari e garlen dage ogo le, e nyinyi ne gari e garlen dage ogo le honyi ne gari e garlen dage ogo le, e nyinyi ge lepum, lakpum e jajum be yenna la e honyi ge lepok e toro be yenna la'.¹¹

Literally, the words 'Melo-Kenlo, Koyum, Jimi' refer to past, the days and years that have passed, 'Donyi-Polo' to Sun and Moon as supreme deities, 'Gari-Garlen' to give birth or to create, 'Nyinyi' to human being, 'Honyi' to mithun, 'Lepum-Lakpum' to leg and hand of people and 'Lepok' to foot of mithun.

In the above stanza, the singer convinces and pacifies the mithuns by saying that they have been created and destined by almighty Donyi-Polo to be sacrificed in marriage ceremony and for other important ceremonies or rituals performed by human beings. Through this Kaben, the singer also gives the reason why human

⁹ Anyi Kari and Karnya/Anyi Karpu and Karlu were celestial sisters and they had brothers named Achi Kara-Karba. One of the myths of origin of marriage is traced on them.

¹⁰ Riba, B. (2019, April 22). Personal Interview.

¹¹ Riba, B. (2019, April 22). Personal Interview.

beings have been given the power to hold objects in their hands and why mithun and other animals cannot do so by narrating an anecdote in support of it.

5. CONCLUSION

The rich treasure of folksongs inherited from their ancestors are continued to be valued by the tribe till today and they consider it their moral obligation to share them with their younger generation and the posterity as well. The prime reasons behind it are the facts that they are important aspects of their folk culture, reflect a separate set of their traditional behaviours and practices, and manifest their distinct individual identity as a different kind of tribe in the world. Of these folksongs, some are meant not only to be sung but also to be followed by traditional rhythmic steps. In other words, some of these folksongs may better be classified and termed as folksong-cum-folkdance as songs and dances have to be performed simultaneously by them. But these two folksongs discussed in this paper are purely folksongs without any associated dance and cannot be put under the class of folksong-cum-folkdance.

Yaan and Kaben are two popular types of Galo folksongs because these are commonly sung for more than one situation or occasion. In fact, these folksongs are mandatorily sung during different marriage stages and situations. Consequently, many Galos started to assume it more as marriage songs than merely folksongs. As already discussed in the preceding pages, both Yaan and Kaben are important components of Galo marriage system because a Galo marriage to be regarded as correct and tradition based has to be performed with it. Without Yaan and Kaben, a Galo marriage ceremony is considered incomplete and deficient one. Nevertheless, it is alarming to find many cases of marriage ceremonies organized without Yaan and Kaben especially by those Galos who have been converted to Christianity in recent decades. This is one of the instances of change noticed in Galo marriages in the contemporary time.

This paper attempted to present two Galo folksongs, their significance, and tried to show the emerging changes in the present time. One of the fascinating findings is that the tribe despite having different sections due to their regional settlements, dialectal variations, and passage of several years show no changes in these folksongs till now. There is not any change in the manner of articulation and presentation of the folksongs. It continues to retain its pristine forms and features even in the modern times. But one interesting point to note here is about the basic difference between Yaan and Kaben. Yaan can be sung for both serious and humorous purposes whereas Kaben, on the whole, is serious and pensive. Moreover, it evokes a deep sense of sadness and melancholy because it is primarily a farewell folksong for married daughter and mithuns during Togu¹² marriage. At the same time, it is also a kind of blessing songs for the Galo people to receive blessings from Mother Goddess Mopin and eternal sisters Pinku-Pinte. Hence, Kaben is serious and evoke sense of sadness too.

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