

# The Folksongs of Jharkhand: An Intangible Cultural Heritage of Tribal India

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**Abstract**—Jharkhand is newly constituted 28th State in the eastern part of India which is known for the oldest settlement of the indigenous people. In the State of Jharkhand in which broadly three language family are found namely, Austric, Dravidian, and Indo-European. Ex-Mundari, kharia, Ho Santali come from the Austric Language family. Kurukh, Malto under Dravidian language family and Nagpuri Khorta etc. under Indo-European language family. There are 32 Indigenous Communities identified as Scheduled Tribe in the State of Jharkhand. Santhal, Munda, Kahria, Ho and Oraons are some of the major Tribe of the Jharkhand state. Jharkhand has a Rich Cultural heritage which includes Folk art, folklore, Folk Dance, Folk Music, Folk Songs for which diversity can be seen from place to place, season to season and all traditional Culture and practices. The languages as well as the songs are vulnerable to dominant culture and hence needed to be protected. The collection and documentation of these songs in their natural setting adds significant contribution to the conservation and propagation of the cultural elements. This paper reflects to bring out the Originality of the Collected Songs from remote areas of the plateau of Sothern Jharkhand as a rich intangible Cultural heritage of the Country. The research was done through participatory observation. In this research project more than 100 songs which were never documented before.

**Keywords**—Cultural heritage, India, Indigenous people, songs.

## I. INTRODUCTION

FOLKSONGS are known to be originated among the people of a particular area, passed through generations by means of oral traditions [1]. Jharkhand is a land covered with forest tracts and hilly terrain situated in the eastern part of India historically inhabited by The Indigenous Peoples, popularly known as the Adivasis. Adivasis of Jharkhand are known for their rich folk music, folk dance and folk songs. Folk songs of Jharkhand are very rich in terms of variations and diversity. There are 32 indigenous communities enlisted as scheduled tribes of the Jharkhand State. More or less all the tribes have their different languages or dialects. For example the Santhal tribe speaks Santhali, the Mundas speak Mundari and language of the Oraons is kurukh [2]. Jharkhand is a unique place on the earth where languages of three different families are in use [3]. Variation of language also varies with the place. These variations are also reflected in the folk traditions. Another important character of these songs is variability with the seasons. Folk music changes with the change in season. There are 12 sets of seasonal classifications known as baramasia.

On the other hand the Indigenous Peoples of the region are

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facing threats and challenges. One of the major threats is of acculturation and accommodation among the tribes. With the passage of time and space the tribal groups are adopting the cultural practices and religious patterns of caste groups. Hence their own religious and cultural practices get assimilated with the other cultural groups. Moreover due to rich mineral resources in the region mining and industrialization is taking place at a rapid pace. There is economic deprivation among the indigenous groups which was earlier subsistence economy has been taken over capitalist economy hence there is a bridge of gap and a feeling of alienation which leads them to the culture of isolation from the mainstream society.

## II. FESTIVAL SONGS

Tribes are also known for their festivity. There are numerous festivals which are celebrated by the different tribes. *Karam*, *sohrai*, *khaddi* and *Jatra* are some of the major festivals which are celebrated all around the Jharkhand. For all the seasons there are different fairs and festivals. There are special songs which are sung during these festivals [4]. Different sets of songs are sung at different occasions.

Most of the festivals are associated with agricultural practices. Some festivals are in relation to hunting and animal husbandry.

### A. *Karam* Festival



Fig. 1 *Pahan*, the traditional priests giving the direction at *Karam* festival

*Karam* is an important festival celebrated by all the tribes. This festival is celebrated not only in Jharkhand but also in the adjacent states. It is generally held in the month of August-September which is a rainy season. Paddy transplantation is completed before the festival. *Karam* is a tree (*Nauclea cordifolia*) which is considered as sacred deity [5]. *Karam*

festival is celebrated in a typical way. Branches are cut from the *karam* tree and planted in the courtyard or *akhra* where offerings are made and dances are held overnight. Next morning the branches are submerged into pond or river water.

The festival of *Karam* or Karma is associated with wellbeing of the environment as well as with the agricultural prosperity. The *Karam* tree is in direct connotation with the environment. Such concept keeps an important place in the earth today when we are dealing with the problem of climate change. A unique tradition of storytelling can also be observed on this occasion. The traditional folktale of Karma and *Dhrama* is cited on the night. There are lots of songs connected with the festival.

*Karam rae din chilka hiju lena re*  
*Karam rae samaya chilka hiju lena*

*Ashar sawan bhado seno jana re*  
*Kuwar mahina karam bid keda*

This is a song of karam festival in Mundari language which could be translated in English as –

“When comes the day of *karam*?  
 When does the time of *karam* come?”

It comes after the months of *ashar*, *sawan* and *bhado*.  
 (First three parts of rainy season)  
 It has come on the month of *kuwar*  
 (Fourth part of rainy season)”

#### B. Sohrai Festival



Fig. 2 Festival of Sohrai

*Sohrai* festival is celebrated in month of *Kartik* (October – November) which is early period of winter season. This festival is observed by all the tribes residing in Jharkhand. In this festival houses are painted and decorated. There is typical style of painting related to this occasion which is known as *sohrai* painting. Livestock are taken of special care to observe this event. There are special songs for this occasion.

*Sunder bhains mor*  
*Bhains mor kado let abay*  
*Sing lage dair tute*  
*Khur lage pathal phute*

This is a song that is sung during the Sohrai festival which means–

“How beautiful my buffalo is  
 My buffalo plays over the mud

When its horn stroke, branches of tree rupture  
 When its foot is put, the stones are fracture”

#### C. Sarhul Festival



Fig. 3 Youth in traditional attire for Sarhul festival

*Sarhul* festival is celebrated in the month of Chait, which is beginning of summer. This festival is also known as *Baa* or *Khaddi* which literally means flower. This is festival of flowers. Sal trees have important place in this festival. This is the season when the Sal trees are on blooms.

At present time *Sarhul* is considered to be one of the most important festivals of the Chhotanagpur plateau. This occasion is followed by procession which is organized in cities as well as in the rural areas, where people participate in large number. *Akhra* is the central place of this festival which is followed by Songs and dances which are important part of this festival.

*Fagu chando hiyo re ladna*  
*Khaddi chando dular re ladna*  
*Bhar chando chando re ladna*

The festival is generally celebrated in the days after the full moon that is considered as flower moon in the above mentioned song.

#### D. Jatra Festival



Fig. 4 Participation of girls in Jatra

*Jatras* [6] are generally held after the harvesting. Youth take active part in *jatra*. Songs and dances are the important component of *jatra*. *Jatra* provides inter village interactions.

*Gucha anti gucha haro*  
*Gola baraf melayo de*  
*Erpa te tikhir munjra*  
*Gola baraf melayo de*  
*Amme barralagi*  
*Chep barralagi*

The cited song means, "Let's go! Do hurry! It's raining and there is shortage of rice in the house."

Another song goes this way

*Simdega mela dada Simdega mela re*  
*Simdega mela dada baro mahina re*  
*Mela re tero mahina*

*Gulma mela dada Gulma mela re*  
*Gumla mela dada baro mahina re*  
*Mela re tero mahina*

*Ranchi mela dada Ranchi mela re*  
*Ranchi mela dada baro mahina re*  
*Mela re tero mahina*

The song could be translated in English as, "My dear elder brother the fair at Ranchi is going on. It continues all the twelve months. Rather it continues for even more"

Earlier *Jatra* was the festival which was celebrated at largest scale.

### III. MARRIAGE SONGS

Marriage ceremonies keep an important place in tribal life. Different observance and rituals are held with different songs which have special meanings for the occasion.

*Gucha anti gucha haro*  
*Jhar ondkan ho*  
*Benjro hole maiya*  
*Mahi bhener bhener*  
*Marua nu ray en bhulu ken dan*  
*En chukan chithri nu malla*  
*Paiya lagali*  
*Gucha haro gucha re*

Marriage ceremony is usually not a single day affair for tribes. There are lot of preparations and stages during, before and after the marriage rituals. For each occasion and stages three are different songs which are sung at that occasion only. There are songs to welcome. There are songs to ask permission to leave. For every juncture there are specific songs.

*Suruguja raji Suruguja raji ge nayo*  
*Suruguja raji lanka lakar pahar*

*Chalayte ne nayo gor jun janela*  
*Ara rata pahar ge nayo*  
*Ara rata pahar lanka lakar jungle*  
*Chalayte ne nayo gor jun janela*  
*Betike shadi ge nayo bare door ge nayo*  
*lanka lakar pahar*  
*Chalayte ne nayo gor jun janela*

This song is sung at the time of Barat. This means how far place the daughter has been married. The place is too far and the trail is too uneven and coarse. The foot only knows.

At the time of welcoming the guest the songs like these are used,

*Kahan se aaway pardesiya, pardesiya*

*Kolebira ho dera*  
*Simdega division*  
*Kolebira ho dera*  
*Bero thana*

*Poorab se aaway paradesiya, pardesiya*  
*Pashim se aaway paradesiya, pardesiya*

*Kolebira ho dera*  
*Simdega division*  
*Kolebira ho dera*  
*Bero thana*

*Uttar se aaway paradesiya, pardesiya*  
*Dakhin se aaway paradesiya, pardesiya*

This is the song to welcome the guests at the time of marriage. This means, where from the strangers have come?

They have come from the place known as *Kolebira* which is situated in *Simdega*.

The strangers have come from all the directions.

### IV. STORY TELLING

Often the real historic incidents are passed on in form of songs.

*Kahan raja jitay, kahan raja haray*  
*Sat sao baricha, nav sao manus ke maray*  
*Re ho re haire*

*Keshalpuriya jitay*  
*Jashpuriya haray*

*Jashpuriya jitay*  
*Keshalpuriya haray*

"Which king has won? Who has been defeated?  
700 spears have killed 900 men.

This kingdom won, that one loses.  
That one won, this king loses."

## V. RITUALS AND MANTRAS



Fig. 5 There are traditional forms of offering and worshiping. The prayers and mantras are made in form of music and song

*Baro bachhare, tero bachhare  
Manwa rin dharama sirjan nanjkay  
Dewra pareta gi tangrain bhaiya dharama  
Manwa rin bhala sirjan nanjkay  
Mokhage chides bhairo pitago chides  
Tin karam mane kiya  
Manwa rin bhala lukait nanjas bhairo chhupait nanjas*

“The God has created human with long endeavor. He has provided us food and shelter”

## VI. ISSUES RELATED

### A. Dominant Culture

Tribal culture has been often exposed to dominant culture in this modern era. At present the tribal languages are struggling to protect their identity and their age-old traditional cultural values [7]. The main stream culture and educational system is putting adverse impact on the cultural heritage of the tribes.

### B. Displacement Threat

Jharkhand has been homeland to Adivasis. A significant portion of the state comes under the schedule area which is considered to be traditional territory of the indigenous peoples. Tribes have claimed their rights over *jal jungle and jameen* (land, forest and water) over their territories. With the loss of their territory and their land *adivasis* are also losing their language and culture [8].

## VII. INITIATIVES REQUIRED

Protection and conservation of tribal culture and traditions must be given high priority. There are immense traditional knowledge and wisdom veiled in the folk songs.

There are needs for the preservation and propagation of the indigenous languages and cultural heritage.

At the same time there is also a need to protect their land, territory and natural resources as because without protecting them it would not be possible to protect the intangible cultural heritage of indigenous tribes.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The indigenous peoples of Jharkhand has rich intangible cultural heritage in the form of folk songs which goes away with folk dance and folk music. These are the heritage of mankind and needs to be preserved, for which we need to protect the tribes itself.

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