

FOLK DANCES AND SONGS OF BIHAR

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An 18th Century European traveller in Bihar, Crawford, observed that people there would "spend the whole night in singing, dancing and hearing music". Francis Buchanan, another European traveller in Bihar early in the 19th century, has recorded that "of music and dance, there is extraordinary abundance".

In some regions of India, promotion of music and dancing was the result of patronage by princely rulers. In some others religious and devotional movements gave the stimulus and used these forms as the medium for their message.

Bihar has had both these influences in a small measure at one or other time in its history. But the abundance of music and dance which impressed European observers and which is a characteristic of present-day life, is manifest largely in folk songs and folk dances rather than in the tradition of chamber music or the music and dances of the temples. Both in quantity and variety, Bihar's folk songs and dances are a proud heritage and a vital, contemporary environment. They are not on the periphery but at the heart of a living culture.

Why are folk songs and dances still a central theme in Bihar's contemporary culture? In the first place, Bihar is predominantly a rural state; hardly 3% to 5% of Bihar's population lives in cities. The rural way of life and the rural pattern of social relationships have not been the objects of neglect or ridicule; rather, they have often set the pace for those in towns. Even Patna, the capital, cannot claim to be the pace-setter. It is the villages that have been the repository of culture. Many even among the intelligentsia who live in towns have had their roots in villages and until recently considered their Patna-homes to be mere *deras* or camps—a temporary residence.

The late Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha, one of the makers of modern Bihar, who was also one of the first Biharis to go overseas late in the 19th century (and to be ostracised temporarily), maintained, in the midst of his otherwise westernized home, a passionate love for his dialect, Bhojpuri, and insisted on speaking to Bihari visitors only in the dialect. Another contemporary of his—Sir Sultan Ahmad, at one time Member Viceroy's Executive Council, used every year to visit his village home for the Id festival.

Rural Roots

The central influence of the villages among the masses of Bihar and the continuance of the village-roots of the middle classes and the intelligentsia have meant the spontaneous, widespread use of, and respect for, the dialects, the ready acceptance of family ties and obligations, the strong (often undesirable) attachment of most people to castes and to the customs and ceremonials associated with them and the immense popularity of village festivals and fairs. All these stimulate and provide an ideal backdrop to folk songs and dances in Bihar's social life. Thus, in Bhojpuri, the robust dialect of Western Bihar and Eastern U.P. (spoken by over two crores of people), the wealth of folk songs is fabulous and their appeal to all classes of people is unmistakable, little wonder that commercially successful films in this dialect are replete with folk songs. Family rituals, caste, customs and ceremonies are incomplete without songs and so men and women must be ready with the appropriate repertoire. At fairs, (Bihar's Sonepur fair is the largest in India and one of the biggest in the world) where millions congregate for pilgrimage, or for buying and selling goods and cattle, nothing comes more spontaneously to them during the journeys or camping overnight, than uninhibited choruses that reach out to the gods or give a gorgeous expression to the joy of being together.

Another circumstance that explains the prevalence and prestige of Bihari folk songs is that in Mithila, which is culturally the richest region of Bihar, the court arts of music, dancing, drama and the finer crafts, were passed on to the rural groups or to families dispersed over a number of villages who have, over the last six centuries or so, nurtured them with loving care. In 1097 A.D. Nanya Deva, a scion of a royal family from Karnatak, founded a ruling dynasty in Mithila. This Karnatak dynasty which held sway for about 226 years, and its successor the Oinwar dynasty, kept contacts with South India and inducted into the earlier, livelier traditions of Mithila the colour and variety of a dynamic medieval culture of the distant south. Floods and invaders made the survival of townships in medieval Mithila almost impossible and thus the aristocracy of culture—the Pandits of Mithila—lived in villages where they and their women have kept alive the literary, poetical and musical heritage in their day-to-day life, in their domestic customs and rituals and in their festivities and celebrations. There is no other region of India where the writings of the most sophisticated local poet (who is also ranked among the greatest in Indian literature —

Vidyapati) have survived in the songs of rural women who, though unlettered, are incomparably mature in their sensitivity.

Thirdly, Bihar is fortunate in having a tribal population that is not a marginal phenomenon but a sizeable and significant mass. There are over 45 lakh tribals in Bihar (concentrated in Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas but also sprinkled over eastern and north-western districts) and they are an important element in the life of the State. *Oraon* are the most numerous, but the *Santhal*, the *Munda*, the *Ho* and several other tribes are a powerful influence in the parts they inhabit. Among the tribals here (as anywhere else in the world) community life has generally been closely integrated, and songs and dances are invariably a concomitant of integrated community life.

The interesting thing is that industrial development of Bihar has taken place in areas where community life has been relatively well-knit together and therefore better fortified against the corrosive influence of industrialization. Not that tribal solidarity has not been affected by the growing constellation of mines, steel works, manufacturing townships and all the stress, disquiet and artificiality that go with them. It has. But, had the industrial complex of Jamshedpur, Dhanbad and Ranchi been located in central Bihar or Mithila, the folk song would have been muted and the dance stilled among the Hindus and other non-tribals as has happened in other parts of India under the impact of industrialisation and urban development.

Resistance to the disintegrating influence of modernisation could be put up by folk songs and dances in Bihar because of the predominance of the rural social environment all over the State, the prestige and superiority of the cultural traditions of Mithila surviving in its villages and the tribal solidarity in areas where industrialisation has come.

There is a reverse side of the coin too; the almost proverbial economic backwardness of Bihar has had something to do with some aspects of the powerful and pervasive rural traditions in north Bihar and the tribal solidarity in the south. But it is perhaps too soon to judge what kind of modernisation would turn out to be a lasting blessing to Bihar, the adoption of the new technology in agriculture that does not necessarily impair the rural social and cultural structure, or rapid and heavy industrialisation that tends to concentrate wealth and disquiet in urban complexes.

Principles of Classification

Scholars have classified the folk songs and dances of Bihar on the basis of anthropological or aesthetic principles. But to a non-expert observer, four broad categories are identifiable. There are first the songs and dances of the *Oraon*, *Santhal*, *Ho*, *Kharia*, *Munda* and other tribal people. With a few exceptions, participation in their singing and dancing is jointly by men

and women. Moreover, songs and dances generally go together. There is also no division of these forms into professional and amateur. They are social activities and group-sports rather than performances.

On the fringes of the Chota Nagpur Plateau where it descends into the plains there are villages in the districts of Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Chaibasa, Dhanbad, and parts of Bhagalpur, where half-tribal, half-Hindu traditions of the performing arts have grown. The *Kumhar*, *Chamar* and *Ghosi* of Dimar and Koncho villages on the one extreme and the former ruling princes of Seraikella on the other, reflect this semi-tribal culture. Among them the folk dance becomes a presentation and one can see traces of professionalism. Costumes are suggestive of stage performances of the cities. Only men participate in these dances. The music accompanying the dances is mostly instrumental (the *shehnai*, the *nakara* etc.). It is noteworthy that a name used for many of these dances is 'rongeen' or 'mael' i.e. mixed. These are group dances without stories and distinctly tribal-based. There are also what they call *shastriya* or thematic dances, presenting stories and using masks and costumes. These *shastriya* dances were refined and developed into a stage dance by the princes of Seraikella in the Chaibasa district of Bihar and Mayurbhanj of Orissa and came to be known as the *Chhau* dance. In addition to *rongeen* and *shastriya*, there is another mixed form called the *nachni* and *natua* dances. These are almost professional entertainment given at fairs and festivals. The *nachini* is a woman and *rasik* is her male partner and their singing bears the impact of Bengali *Vaishnava* music. The *natua* is performed by a male pair, one Hindu and the other tribal, showing a vivid blend of the tribal and non-tribal in dress, movements and music.

As one goes into the plains of central Bihar, the semi-tribal, semi-professional styles disappear. Among the Bhojpuri-speaking Hindus of western plain districts and the Magahi-speaking people of the eastern ones, group-singing is generally unaccompanied by dances. It is a social activity related to family, social and seasonal occasions and without any suggestion of professionalism. Unlike in tribal dances and songs, men and women have separate community songs. Group songs by men are common among the so-called lower castes such as *Ahir*, *Kurmi*, *Mallah* tribes while those of women are a universal custom regardless of caste. Men's group songs have one feature not found in tribal songs: they like to sing ballads more than the lyrical choruses which are left to the women. While group songs are a non-professional, community activity, dances, in this region, are left to professionals—men and women of certain castes who would appear on festive occasions such as a birth in the family or at the fairs, and attired in somewhat medieval or quaint dresses, dance and sing as the occasion demands and earn their fee. Even such are the *Panwariyas* of the Bhojpuri speaking areas.

In Mithila, where folk-culture is more sophisticated and often indistinguishable from refined, traditional culture, women of all castes have their group songs as well as group dances. Men of the upper classes hardly ever sing. Group songs contain literary and Hindu mythological allusions in plenty and rituals are more elaborate and involve other artistic activities also, such as drawings on the floor and the wall. Dramatic song-dances such as the *jat-jatin* are also a charming tradition among women.

One can thus see that while in tribal culture dances and songs are a mixed activity, in non-tribal society, men and women are segregated and dances tend to become semiprofessional, though songs remain a social activity. Also thematic variety and refinement is greater in a traditional society such as Mithila. Songs and dances in tribal areas involve the whole village practically; in other regions, families provide the forum.

A comprehensive survey of Bihar's folk songs and dances would require not one but a series of articles. Here I would attempt to give selective glimpses only.

Non-Tribal Songs

Mithila has ever been conscious of its bountiful lore. A song proudly recalls,

Unique are the delights of Tirhut¹, the dhoti made of kokati silk, the curry made of patua², Tirhuti songs vibrant with passion, and lovely maidens whose beauty awakens romantic sentiments.

This zest for life perhaps accounts for the abundance of songs of gaiety, playfulness and lovers' union, along with songs of separation and desolation. Songs sung by women on the occasion of domestic ceremonials are, sometimes descriptive of the occasion but more often, provide the occasion for the expression of sentiments and experiences common to a young wife, a daughter, a mother, a father and any other members of the family, who may be central to the ceremonial. *Sohar* songs concern child-birth. *Janacoo* songs relate to the sacred thread ceremony of the young son. The abundant variety of the marriage songs corresponds to the numerous ceremonies and rituals, beginning with the formal engagement or *sagia*, the setting up of the *mandap* (the tent for the wedding), the *agwani* or the welcome of the party, the invitation to the bridegroom, the arrival of the bridegroom and his performing various kinds of *pujas* and thereafter ritualistic feedings of the bridegroom and his being escorted to the romantic honeymoon-room called *kohbar*. All these marriage songs fall in the category of *lagra* songs.

¹ Mithila.

² A vegetable.

Here is a song sung for the honeymoon-room or *kohbar*, of which the walls are painted with colourful figures. The lamp is put inside an earthen jug for a soft light,

In the kohbar daintily decorated, the bridegroom removed the cover from the bride's head and asked her—'With what jewels, my darling, have you bedecked yourself?'

She replied—'My love! You yourself will be the ornament of my hair-parting. My devar'¹ will be the rare conch-shell bangle for me. My mother-in-law is like the necklace, my nanad² the blouse with nine colours, my bhainsur³ the shining piece on the forehead, and when the son comes, he will be the delight of my eyes.

These, my love, are my jewels.'

Some marriage-songs are in the comic spirit, even bordering on the ribald. As the bridegroom comes to the bride's home with the ceremonial procession, he may be subjected to such "leg-pulling" as in the song below:

The full moon has lit the night. Let us, all girl-friends of the bride, welcome the bridegroom.

When the bridegroom walks with quick-steps, they laugh at him and wonder if his mother had married a horse to beget a trotting son.

When he moves slowly they allege that the mother must have had an elephant for a husband to beget a son like this.

And when, overcome with shyness, the bridegroom is unable to advance and stands still, they infer that the mother must have had a solid mountain as her bed-fellow in the midst of a sea.

Nothing perhaps is more poignant than the *samdasuni*, the songs sung when the bride leaves her parents' home:

Wherefrom has this doli⁴ come and which way will it go?

From the north comes the doli and towards the south it will go.

The doli turns to the north and my thought turns to my grandfather who took the same loving care of me as of his turban; but now this doli takes me to the father-in-law's regime where I shall be discarded as a fly in the milk.

¹ Bridegroom's younger brother.

² Sister-in-law.

³ Bridegroom's elder brother.

⁴ The palanquin in which the bride is carried.

The doli moves to the east and I think of my father who had kept me as carressingly as the folds of his dhoti, but the doli takes me to the father-in-law's place where I shall be like the humble broom to sweep the house.

As the doli moves to the south, my mother's memory wells up; she looked after me as a pet parrot in the little cage. This doli takes me to the father-in-law's place, where I shall be but a rag used to clean the floor.

As the doli turns west I think of my brother's wife who would look after me as the overnight rice-dish. But the doli carries me to the father-in-law's place where I shall be just a common slave of the household.

Love songs are generally about the romance between the newly-wed, though the husband's younger brother is also a romantic friend. The *jhoomar* (a name common all over northern India for romantic folk songs or for the group dance-in-the round) can be a message or just express the *l'allegro* spirit, *tirhuti* is the sweet but sad song of separation from the beloved, while *batagamani* is the song one hears from groups of women on the way to or back from fairs and village markets. The theme in all the three *jhoomar*, *tirhuti* and *batagamani*, is the erotic. Passion, its joys when tasted or its pangs when denied, is expressed sometimes through symbols and sometimes more directly, in either case creating a sensuous image readily vivid to the community.

Her friend asks the young wife: 'where did you plant the fragrant juhi and chameli and where the coconut?'

'At my door I planted juhi-chameli, and in my court-yard the pomegranate and the coconut.'

'And how many blossoms did the juhi-chameli bring forth and how many were the fruits on the coconut and the pomegranate plant?'

'Juhi-chameli was laden with ten flowers and the coconut and pomegranate had one fruit each.'

'My gay devar enjoyed the smell of juhi-chameli and my romantic husband had the fruits.'

Here the reference is to the little liberties and fun that the younger brother of the husband is permitted and to the physical joys of love that the young husband and wife share.

As in many other parts of India, Mithila has its seasonal songs,—*Phag*, for the spring and *Holi*, uninhibited in their sensuous imagery, *Chaitawar*, for the early summer, *Malar*, for the rainy season (sung separately by men

and women, the former gather around the drum while the latter around the swing), and the *Baarah-masa* which though sung in the rainy season, is really based on the cycle of the seasons.

With three other types of songs, are associated certain rituals or ritualistic enactments that are peculiar to Mithila. *Madhu-shravani* is sung, when in order to ensure prolonged conjugal happiness the young wife is subjected to an endurance test—the scorching of a small portion of her skin by a little flame. *Shyama-Chakewa* is a group play of girls, held in the autumn. Every evening the girls go to the fields singing and carrying baskets containing clay figures of a number of birds (*sama*, *chakwa*, *khanjan*, and partridges are the birds of which the figures are made) and of two other characters—*chungla* (a villain notorious for his back-biting) and *brindabad* (friendly figure). On the last day the bird-figures are broken and *chungla* is fixed in the field like a scarecrow. The songs are mostly about the affectionate bond between the girls and their brothers. I think that these action-songs were originally meant for a ritual while placing scarecrows in the fields to keep the birds away.

Jat-jatin is more or less a folk-play with songs and dances organised by women only, particularly when the rains fail. But the story and contents of the songs have little to do with the seasons. *Jat* is the husband and *jatin* the wife. A group of women represents *jat* and another, *jatin*. Dressed in white, their hair decorated with white flowers the two groups sing a dialogue to the accompaniment of dancing steps. Perhaps this is the only song-sequence of Mithila with group-dances, which have some resemblance to the well-knit tribal dances. But the songs trace a charming story about the engagement, marriage, honeymoon, domestic quarrels, separation and re-union of *jat* and *jatin*. It is a delightful enactment of the life of a young couple, the fun they have and the trials and tribulations they undergo. Here is a sample.

—‘O *jatin* (in your new home) you should move about meekly in deference to the elders, bent gently likely the paddy-plant laden with the grains.’

—‘Not me *jat*. I am the beloved daughter of my father. I shall move about straight and fearless like the bamboo-shoots.’

What marks the folk songs of Mithila from those of other regions in Bihar is the inclusion among them of many beautiful lyrics of Vidyapati, the great 15th century poet. Vidyapati was as accomplished a musician as he was a poet and it is in the rural households of Mithila that the original music of Vidyapati can still be heard. The *ragas* in which those lyrics are set are different from those in the Hindustani system of classical music. In fact they have a slight suggestion of the original Karnatak style, an influence attributable to the cultural exchange with the South that was main-

tained during the regime of the Karnatak and Oinwas dynasties in north Bihar (11th to 15th centuries). Though Vidyapati's hero and heroine are Radha and Krishna and his favourite deity is Shiva, he wrote of them as of people around him. The forms he chose were those in use for songs for various domestic occasions and ceremonials. The language was popular but the imagery out of the ordinary. All this gave to Mithila's folk songs a rare blend of sophistication and homeliness. In his frank and uninhibited delineation of human love, Vidyapati was more in line with the great Sanskrit poets than a predecessor of the poets of devotion and other-worldliness, who dominated Hindi poetry in the 16th century. Even his *nacharis* (devotional verses dedicated to Shiva) have an earthy quality that have endeared them to the common people.

Poetic Imagery

Compared to Mithila's folk songs those in the Bhojpuri-speaking areas of Bihar (mostly western Bihar) are less mellifluous. But they have greater spontaneity and vigour and their idiom is forceful. Here is a *jhoomar* song in which the young wife complains of her husband's indifference to her call of love,

The young wife's eyes are red with the strain of crying, red as if filled with gulal¹

In the golden plate is served a sumptuous meal. Alas, he tastes it not.

In the jhajhari and gadua² is served pure ganga-jal³ Alas, he sips it not.

Her eyes are all red with crying.

Here the golden plate and the vessels are the youthful body of the young wife and the sumptuous meal and the cool, refreshing water betoken the pleasures of love. Both in symbolic imagery and in straight figures of speech, Bhojpuri songs of love are often very original. A young wife's memory is haunted thus by her Prince Charming,

*'O my greedy one, your face is sunlight itself.
You have eyes like long slices of mango;
And your eyebrows are like a pair of drawn bows.
O, your lips are beetle leaves cleanly cut.'*

Bhojpuri men often move out to Nepal, Calcutta and to plantations in order to seek work, and young wives have to suffer months and sometimes

1 Red powder sprinkled during Holi

2 Jugs for water

3 Ganges water

years of separation. This suffering is poignantly expressed in songs of separation that go by the name *bidesia* (the dear one who has gone to *bidesh*—another land). A style of folk play popularised by Bhikhari Thakur has used this theme very effectively.

The bulk of Bhojpuri folk songs revolve round rituals, domestic ceremonies (*sohar*, *jhoomar*, marriage songs, *janeoo* songs etc.). But there is a large body of work-centred songs known as *jaant* songs. *Jaant* is the hand-grinding mill for grain; since women of the household work on this hand-mill (*chakki*) in the early morning-hours, it is then that the refrains of these songs enliven the air like the early bird-songs. In these as well as in the ritual songs, the many facets of a village-home are reflected, the radiating point being the woman, as a young bride, as the sister of the bridegroom, as the mother, as the barren wife denied the blessing of a son, as the neglected widow, as a prayerful devotee of the home-deity (*kula-devata*).

Songs by men are far more common in Bhojpuri than in Maithili. They are vibrant with the pace and power of outdoor life. Some like the *birahas* (usually sung in the rainy season) and the *chaita* (heralding the onset of spring) are a special delight of groups of men from the so-called backward castes such as the *Ahirs*. In them as in the famous style of *kajli*, ethical ideas jostle shoulders with the most sensuous ones. Compare this *birha*—

*The Ganga swallows the dead bodies and all manner of carcasses.
But her water remains pure, as it is ever on the flow,"*

with this one,

*The buxom village belle has gone to the town;
On seeing her round and rising bosom, they laugh in fun.
'Fair one, here is the money; give us the lemons.
You cannot manage them.'*

Ballads

Bhojpuri area has a tradition—dating to the medieval times of the ballad recited with great vigour and emotion by groups of men or by semi-professional singers. *Panwaras* are a kind of ballad—renderings similar to *alha-udal* of Central India. In the last hundred years, some inspiring ballads have been composed around the great mutiny hero, Kunwar Singh. Bhojpuri also shares with another great dialect of Bihar—Magahi, a traditional ballad which is almost an epic—*Lorikayan*. It is not a heroic poem, but a tale of blood-thirsty rivalry for love, of deception and clashes, of the fury of a woman's love challenging social taboos.

Bhojpuri songs, even more than other folk songs of Bihar, lose much of their character in translation. Apart from the meaning, much more is communicated through the manner of recital. One peculiarity is that the vowel preceding the last consonant of a song is lengthened to more than

double its normal duration. In some songs a few words are added almost without the context. These "additives" (which are similar to the *stobhas* in the recital of the *Sama Veda*), are particularly noticed in the *chaita* songs and usually consist of the words—"Ki aaho morey Rama" or just "Ho Rama". The *tala*, or beats, are usually limited to three, a *kaharwa*, *jat* and *dipchandi*. Some, like *jhoomar*, are sung in the quick rhythm, while others like *chaita* are rendered in the slow rhythm.

Magahi, the dialect of central and eastern Bihar, has also a rich tradition of folk-music. Most rituals and ceremonies are common with those of Mithila and western Bihar. In parts of Bhagalpur division one occasionally comes across a blend of Magahi and tribal tunes or Magahi and Bengali strains. Such synthesis seems to come naturally to professional and semi-professional groups in those districts. Another example of synthesis is the *jharni* dance (and song) of the Shia muslims in the villages of north and central Bihar. During the Muharram, when the *Tazia* procession moves along the village-street, the dancers (who are only males) form a circle with the drummer in the centre. Each dancer holds two short bamboo sticks, with cracks in them, so that when the dancer strikes one stick against the other a trembling sound is produced to the accompaniment of which a chorus is sung. It is rather mournful in the beginning but gathers tempo as it speedily gains in grandeur. The dancers in the round not only follow a set pattern of steps but also interweave into them, postures of various kinds that heighten the dramatic mood. In pathos, few lyrics equal those of *jharni*, bewailing the martyrdom of Hasan and Husain.

Tribal Dances

Tribal songs and dances cannot be separated from each other. To the tribals of Bihar the human body and the human voice are a composite medium for the song and the rhythm. There are in all 29 tribes in Bihar numbering nearly 45 lakhs. Even minor tribes like the *Birjia*, *Birhor* and *Asur* have each their distinctive dances. But the major tribes are the *Oraon*, the *Munda Santhal*, *Ho* and *Kharis*. I shall here briefly refer to the *Oraon* and *Santhal* forms only, though the others are no less colourful and exciting.

W. G. Archer has classified the *Oraon* dances into four categories:

1. "festival" dances like the *sarhul* (which is a spring festival symbolising fecundity) and the *karam* (celebrated during the rains).
2. *Jatra* dances, held at the time of periodical gathering of neighbouring clans.
3. "Transitional" social dances including items such as *jadur*, *dhuria* and *math*.
4. Marriage dances.

Recent research has shown that despite such classifications, the dances are thematically not expressive of the ritual or action of the occasion or

even the seasons. The change in season, religious rituals or other events merely provide the occasion for performing the dances. Basically, *Oraon* dances are a community sport, and are conditioned essentially by the spirit of delight. Of course some pantomimic effect is perceptible in the *karam* dances which suggest the agricultural operations in the paddy-fields with rows of men and women sowing the land, or in the *jatra* dance which seems to imitate warlike action. Among the *Oraons*, the dance is associated with three social institutions; the *dhumkuria*, is a youth dormitory, a kind of club where young people are initiated into the arts (music and dance), manners, and social customs. The word — *dhumkuria* means the “house of light”, a very apt description indeed. *Akhra* is the second institution; it is the dancing area where young men and women assemble for night-long dances on a raised mud-platform near which stands a tamarind tree. The third institution is the *sarna*, the place for religious sacrifices where, on special occasions, dances are held after the main ceremonies. The dances revolve around these three institutions.

The formations of the dances may be circular, semi-circular or linear. The drummer generally stands in the middle and moves with the rows. Most dances are mixed and men and women may either have a row each to themselves or arrange themselves alternately.¹ Movements are generally vigorous, comprising jumps, walking steps and even fast running. Infinite are the ways in which dancers hold each other's hands. In fact even steps, movements and group formation sometimes vary from village to village.

It is by identifying the time of the song coordinated with the beats or *tala* of the musical instruments that one can tell one kind of dance from another. Every song is set in a model pattern similar to a *raga*. Every song is divided into pieces of four or six lines each. The first two lines of every song are in the nature of a question that is repeated like a refrain all through the song. In long dance-songs, the fifth and sixth, and the seventh and eight lines are repeated.

Perhaps the *Oraons* have their most intense moments in songs of romantic love, generally of the newly-wed. The imagery comes through like the magic word, dramatic in its surprise, touching in its lyricism. Here is a *karam* song, sung around the cremonially installed branch of the *karam* tree during the rainy season,

*From where did the dark clouds rise
And the thunder clap?
In the east the black clouds gather
The lightening roars.*

1. See photographs, Cover and article on Folk Dance Festival.

*And in the west rain is falling.
Whose is the red turban which the rain is wetting?*

*O listen, the cloud is making a noise!
Whose is the long hair which the rain is wetting?
O listen, the cloud is making a noise !
The red turban of the gay young man is getting wet.
And the long hair of the fair girl.*

*O listen the cloud is making a noise !
Where shall I dry the red turban, dear?
O listen the cloud is making a noise !
Where shall I dry this long hair ?*

*O listen the cloud is making a noise !
Inside the hut your red turban will be dried.
O listen the cloud is making a noise !
In my warm heart you will dry your hair, dear.*

The *Santhals* also have dances for different rituals and occasions. Their *karma* is a festival meant to evoke the memories of the ancestors. *Painkiha* is the name given to the processional dance on the occasion of weddings. In *lagane*, the peculiarity is that participants shake their knees according to the rhythm of the dance. *Dong* is also a wedding dance, while *durumja* is usually the finale to a festival. In a typical *Santhal* dance the participants come out clad in gay, colourful clothes, some holding banners, others carrying wooden frames over which peacock feathers and flowers are displayed. The drum (called *maadar* by *Santhals* as also by most other tribals) gives the call for the rally. A group of boys precedes the dancers demonstrating their skill in sword-play. Quite often such processional dances are performed in the heart of a wood or in a grove.

Environmental Factors

How do folk dances and songs respond to changes in the environment? Many an admirer of tribal culture and lore is distressed by signs of change. But the cultural frame can never remain constant. The important thing is first, that the change coincides with a felt need, an inner urge and, secondly, that it is assimilated and does not remain an intrusion. During World War II the then Government forcibly acquired some agricultural land of the tribal people in order to construct barracks for foreign soldiers. But *Patwaris* (revenue officials) used to go to villages to measure the land before acquisition. One of the *Oraon* songs reacted to it thus;

*Patwari, how eagerly you measure the length and breadth of our farmland.
Would you care to measure the hollowness of our empty stomachs?*

A Bhojpuri song expresses the longing of the emigrant from this area to foreign lands as indentured labourer. Many a song speaks of the sacrifices of freedom-fighters. But all these were spontaneous expressions. When in 1953, I was asked to send a group of Bihar folk dances, to the National Folk Dance Festival, New Delhi, I selected a group of *kumhars* from village Barlanga. They asked me if I could arrange to give them shirts and trousers because "after all we have to perform before distinguished people in the Capital". I told them "Please go in your original costumes and let me know if they admire you for them or look down upon you." On their return I observed that they had gained a new confidence in their cultural life.

In spite of some criticism by the high-brow among the art critics, the National Folk Dance Festival has not only given a new lease of life to folk dances but also strengthened confidence in community life. Yet the opportunity to display their dances before an audience has led to innovations particularly in the grouping, movements and duration of *Oraon* dances. These changes are also spontaneous and since they are gradual they seem to be well assimilated.

The greatest danger to folk songs and dances is from mass-media and formal education. Mass-media like films are a ruthless and rapid influence unknown ever before in history. Therefore those who say that we should not resent changes due to the environment of mass-media because the change has been inevitable in the past, have to appreciate that community life of the tribal and rural people was never in the past subjected to such massive and artificial impacts.

Formal education is even more corrosive. I was told by parents in a Mithila village that some of them did not send their daughters to schools because in school they would not be able to learn to sing Vidyapathi's songs and to do the ceremonial decorations! It is almost tragic that the school system in India right from the 19th century, completely ignored cultural forms in community life and in the homes. Consequently prestige attached to the recipient of formal education carried with it a sense of inferiority with regard to domestic and traditional cultural forms. It is this which is going to create a heart-rending dilemma for the tribal and rural people and not the industrialisation of Bihar nor its economic progress.

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