

JHUMAR OF THE WEST BENGAL HIGHLANDS

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Jhumar originated as a type of fertility song of the tribal people usually sung as accompaniment to dance. The songs are rich in emotional depth and varied in range. Jhumur songs of the West Bengal Highlands in their rich variety strike us as a unique expression of the emotional life of the primitive tribes who inhabited this region and lived close to Nature. Geographical boundaries and the natural environment under which they lived conditioned their way of life, determined their mood and influenced their songs which were natural and spontaneous in expression. The movement of their life was inseparably associated with the cyclic movement of seasons in Nature. In order to appreciate the beauty of Jhumur songs and to study them in their proper perspective it is necessary to make an enquiry into the geographical characteristics and regional peculiarities of the land where such songs originated.

The entire districts of Purulia, the greater part of the districts of Bankura, Burdwan and the Western half of Midnapur of modern West Bengal, embrace a portion of the eastern fringe of the Chhota Nagpur plateau. It is the last step in the descent from the great elevated Highlands of Central India.

Chhota Nagpur plateau with its general elevation of 2000 ft to 2500 ft forms the intermediate stage.

This region of great inequalities, consisting of a succession of plateaux, hills and valleys, is drained by several large rivers, including the Mayurakhee, Ajai, Damodar, Darahishwar, Kansai and Subarnarekha.

The plateau on the whole is rather open and there is a fair amount of cultivation. The terrain is well cultivated and densely peopled. The Santals occupy the broader valleys. On the higher valleys the Paharias (Hill-men) cultivate steep slopes. The general characteristics of these Highlands consists

in great measure, of metamorphic rocks and spurs projected from the table-land on the West and swelling ridges of laterite.

Towards the east i.e. within the boundary of these districts of West Bengal the metamorphic rocks thin out and the laterite ridges thicken, the undulations less pronounced and the dips between the ridges being broader and more level ; the country is more open and presents the appearance of a series of rolling downs, dotted here and there with isolated conical hills locally called *dumgris*.

Towards the south, the Subarnarekha with lush valleys, low gullied terraces, fantastic cones and domes of gneiss, form the last border.

On the east of the Subarnarekha the plateau sinks gradually into the deltaic alluvium.

In the dry season, this vast region represents the general appearance of a barren waste. In the rains the prospect is very pleasing when the fresh green of the young rice plants shades off into the darker green of the grass which springs everywhere when the first shower falls and contrasts with the browns of the ripening crops on the Highlands and of the bare gravel ridges varied here and there by black masses of exposed rocks.

In the early hot season the jungle covered areas, whether on the hills or in the plains, present a brilliant spectacle; the red blossoms of the *Palas* (*Butca-frondosa*) contrasting in a striking fashion with the fresh green of the new leaves.

In the rainy season the hill-fed streams and rivers suddenly swell and play havoc. Rivers are whimsical so also human nature. Family ties are unrestrained and feelings unfettered.

This romantic region makes her people forlorn and with them, joy is forever mixed with sorrow, pleasure is blended with pain.

The people of this vast area can be classed in four groups from the point of view of contacts with civilisation,

- (a) the primitive tribes, outside Hindu society,
- (b) tribes who have a degree of association with Hindu castes,
- (c) tribes, that are Hinduised,
- (d) the Hindu-settlers.

The first three groups sing their fertility folk songs specially *Jhumar* as locally named. The primitive Proto-Australoid settlers of Chhota Nagpur plateau, along with their 'Neolithic culture complex' composed *Jhumar* songs at the very dawn of terrace cultivation. There are more than twenty types of *Jhumar*. The types are,

(1) *Pata* (2) *Jhika* (3) *Railo* (4) *Lagrey* (5) *Jheta* (6) *Burihi* (7) *Thant* (7) *Galoari* (7) *Riuja* (10) *Matoari* (11) *Baha* (12) *Magha* (13) *Khatinach* (14) *Nachni nach* (15) *Tand* (16) *Dand* (17) *Saharja* (18) *Jhikadang* (19) *Bhaduria* (20) *Karam* (21) *Jharkhandja* (22) *Sadhu* etc.

With the change of seasons the *Jhumar* songs vary. Also there are zonal variations.

The tracts the tribal people inhabit are full of many attractions. They are picturesque with lofty green hills and darting water-falls rushing along the sloping precipices and table-lands, gaping ravines and meandering hill-streams, lofty beds of rocks and thick jungles.

Such a countryside always makes people romantic and poetic. They reveal their emotions in their external behaviour, in their joys, dances and songs.

The tribal people of the Chhota Nagpur plateau and those of West Bengal Highlands compose *Jhumar* songs either in their own mother-tongue or in corrupt Bengali. Those who are Hinduised compose *Jhumars* in corrupt Bengali only.

Purely Tribal *Jhumars* are the best. They are the true representation, the reflection of the pure, simple and honest mind. But the *Jhumars* composed by the Hinduised clans and sects are but a reflection of a reflection, the echo of an echo.

The Munda speaking clans and tribes of West Bengal Highlands divided the year into three broad seasons *Jeta-sa* (Hot weather) *Jargida* (rainy season), *Rabang-sa* (cold season). The advent of summer is signalized by the blossoming of the Sal (*Shorea-robasta*) and by the budding of the Mahua (*Bassia-latifolia*) and this is called *Baha Chandu* (flower month) from the fact that all nature springs into new life and flowers abound everywhere.

During this season the whole atmosphere is drunk with the sweet fragrance of these jungle-flowers. The tribal people and schedule castes of West Bengal Highlands celebrate the *Baha* or *Sarhul* festival with appropriate *Jhumar* accompanied with dance.

The *Sarhul* festival begins with the following song,

Sajo Sajo Laya, Shalai phuley
Sajo Sajo Layan Sindur Kajaley.

O Laya! (village priest) dress up and decorate yourself in *Sal* flowers;
 O Layan. (the wife of the village priest) dress up and decorate yourself with
Sindur (vermilion) and *Kajal* (collyrium),

another Sarhul song from Purulia,

Bagan barir bhitarey
Titir sinau Karey lo
Gaye lal mati makhey

In the garden-house a *Titir* (wild bird) bathes. It smears its body with red-dust. When the *keoud* (*Diospyros-melanoxydon*) ripens it is time to begin the sowing (called by the tribal people *Hero-chandu*, sowing-month)

During this month *Dand Sal Jhumar* is also sung.

Dand Sal Jhumar from Purulia.

Amar Bandhu hal karey
Kend kanatir dhorey
Hai ! Hai ! mathar gham chokhey padey
Dekhey hiya fatey
Nanadini - lo ! ami jabo
'Basjam' ditey

My friend is ploughing
 Near Kend-kanale
 The sweat of his brow,
 Is trickling down over his eyes,
 Seeing this my heart breaks ;
 Oh sister-in-law! I will go
 To offer him stale rice.

(*Basiam* — a santali word means — stale rice).

When the *Pial* (*Buchanania* — *latifolia*) ripens and the atmosphere is smokey in appearance it is *jete chandu* (hot month). The tribal people of the area express their love for Nature as well as for their beloved in highly emotional *Jhumar* songs,

Santali *Jhumar* song from Ranibandh Dt Bankura,

Hana buru noa baru tarap bilieu
Chethey jam-tey moire ! data gabeyen
Tarap jam-tey dada ! money rapuyeu

and the same song in Bengali from Purulia,

*E-dungri u-dungri
Pial paklo
Kari khaney re mairi !
Dant gablo ?
Pial khaney re dada !
Man bhang lo.*

On this hill on that hill
Pial ripens
Oh dear! what have
you eaten to stain your teeth ?
Oh dada, by eating 'Pial'
My mind is dizzy.

(Dada — a Bengali word means — elder brother).

The rainy season is heralded by the blossoming of the *karam*. This period is also indicated by the drying up of the leaves of the Arjun tree.

The principal religious ceremony of the tribal people of the area is the *Kadleta* that is, the worship of the field spirit. It takes place in July.

The next and very important festival during the rainy season is the *karam*, in which a branch of the *karam* (*Adina cardifolia*) tree is placed in the ground and there is all night dancing and singing round it.

Karam Jhumar in Santale from Bankura

*Karam hilo : da : gey banu : a
O hai re da : da Chetey lekan
Da : da ardi foria arsilekana
O hai re da : da jhalka*

On the *karam* day it does not rain.
The rain is shining water.
The rain is glittering water.

A Santali *Jhumar* collected from Dt. Bankura.

*Chethana pukuri rila mala, lathare pukuri rila-mola
Salukad bara juring putawakana kong,*

*Imen sundar barakhana
Bara -nela thege juring jido hayayau*

*Dahado gole gole, dahade mile mile
Enereo ja juring godabapade.*

Water in the tank is clear and transparent. And the water-lily has blossomed; though the water spreads green and wide. I must try my best to pluck the flower.

A similar *Jhumar* in Bengali collected from Purulia

*Lal Saluker phul phutey adha raley
Bandhu ! Phutey adha raley
Jar sangey jar bhab mariley ki tutey
Bandhu ! ata rath kisey ; ata rath kisey ?
High audhar ratey bijali chamakey
Aman sankater diney aley ba kar sathey ?
Ata rath kisey Bandhu ! ata rath kisey
Ata rath kisey ?*

Red water-lily blooms at mid-night
Friend, it blooms at mid-night
The tie of love never ends in death,
Friend, why come you so late at night ?
The night is dark, it is overcast with clouds
And the lightning flashes,
In such a dreadful night
 With whom have you come ?
Why so late at-night
 Friend, why you are so late
Why you are so late in coming ?

In both these songs the girl is compared to a water-lily.

Jhumar song in Bengali from Dt. Bankura

*Bhadhar maley adar 'Biri' toraita khaneypurali
Hansey, hansey
Hansey, hansey tora deyarkay bhulate go
Hansey, hansey
Kumarar gadan Chhutarar milan
Sajeychhey kaman go
Hansey, hansey*

In the month of Bhadra (Aug-Sep) you have eaten all the sweet *Biri* pulses (Sathyrus-satira). You have seduced — your husband's younger brother by your repeated smiles. The shaping of a potter, the moulding of a Carpenter how finely blended. You have done mischief by your repeated smiles.

In this song the lover is compared to sweet *Biri* pulses.

In the same month of Bhadra in the barren wastes of West Bengal Highlands *Jhingas* (a sort of ridged cucumber) grow in abundance. Everyday at dusk the yellow flowers of the vegetable creeper bloom in abundance. Like the host of daffodils, they attract everybody and dazzle every eye. In a '*Jhumar*' collected from Purulia (Dt.), the charm of the flowers has been beautifully expressed,

Jhingey phul lilek jati kul lo
Jhingey phul lilel jati kul.
Ami band bo na band-bo na Chul lo-
Band-bo-na Chul

The beautiful *Jhingey* flower has robbed me of everything. My prestige, caste and family prejudice everything I have lost for it. It makes me restless, makes me wild. I shall not comb my hair nor will I bind them up.

Here the lover is compared to a *Jhingey* flower. The rhythm of the love song is just an echo of a meandering hill-stream. The lover's restlessness, her unfettered behaviour, her swelling emotions of love are identical with the whimsical hill-fed rivers and streams of this rugged region.

Similar *Jhumar* song from Dt. Banhura.

Hilo lilo lilo lo
Jard bang ta
Jaley jhamp dilo.

Hilo lilo lilo lo. (the rhythm of the tune) the *Jard-bang* (a big type of frog) has jumped into the water.

In this song the lover is compared with a big-type of Water-frog.

Another *Jhumar* song from Dt. Purulia,

Kachi Kadamer jali kan korana bhala bhali
Pakley kadam sabal khabey korbona baran
Kachi kadam Bandhu, Chhinio na akhan
Bandhu, pero na akhan
Bara bara rasik jara kachj-kadam chhiu na tara
Kachi kadam Bandhu, pero na akhan
Bandhu, Chhino na akhan

Every one is forbidden to look at a green *kadam* (*Adina-cardifolia*) fruit. When it ripens then all may enjoy it, then no-one will prevent you. Friend, do not touch a green *kadam* fruit now, do not pluck it down. True

lovers never touch a green *kadam* fruit, Friend! So I forbid you to touch and to pluck a green *kadam* fruit at present.

Here a young damsel is compared to the green *kadamba* fruit.

If it rains in torrents the joy of the people of the West Bengal Highlands know no bounds. In the 'rain-song' below the emotion of the tribal people of the area has been finely expressed,

A rain-song from Hazaribagh,

*Aso ka barkhabadi jor
Vingjai sorey jor
Aso ka barkhabadi jor
Ropali ham ropa dhan
Badari garajey Asman.
Banmey nachata Mor
Aso ka barkha badi jor.
Khet chained kishan thard
Bharala nadikey dikhey bard
Annadhan na hobaing thor
Aso ka barkha badi jor.*

Let it rain in torrents
Let us rejoice
Let there be rain in torrents
I have transplanted rice-plants.
Above us it thunders,
In the forest the peacock dances.
Let it rain in torrents
The field is well-cultivated
The ploughman is ready
Without rain precious rice
cannot be obtained.
Oh! let it rain in torrents!

The reverse is their emotion if there be no rain. In the following Santali song their heart-rending sorrow, their lamentation, their heavy sighs for drought have been vividly expressed. A drought-song in Santali from Kharagram Dt. Midnapur

*Notey ho dudgar
Sirama ho koasi
da gey banoya
Chimantey kagey gamaiya ?*

Asard Sraban mayodaraty ho banoya
Bhadaragey dharti norey jana
Chimantey kagey gamaiya ?
Sirimarey sing Bonga
Oterey marang deota
Chimantey Aagey gamaiya ?
Lai renaney da teytau
Djgey senotana
Chimantey kagey gamaiya ?

The sky is dusky. Above us it is smokey. The brown shadow envelops the earth :

Oh! Where is rain ?
 During the month of *Asard* and *Sraban*
 Not even a drop has fallen.
 Look! *Bhadar* is also passing
 Oh! Where is rain, where is rain ?
 Above our head the sun god shines
 Below mother earth remains
 Yet where is rain, where is rain?
 Within our stomach
 We feel the pinch of hunger
 Burning thirst breaks our hearts
 Alas! Where is rain — rain — rain
 Where is rain ?

O Amar Bhanga Ghare ke Mare Bantul
O Amar Pak Pokiye Ude Gelo Kunkda Katul

My house is broken
 In it there is no mirth.
 Who is that who slings at it
 Stones and pellets of earth ?
 My cockerel flies away
 Groaning loud in pain.
 Nor does the cuckoo want
 To stay to sing again.

In their *Jhumar* dances the tribes and schedule castes of the West Bengal Highlands depict, while they sing the *Jhumar* the cutting rice plants ; hurriedly carrying the bundles of rice-plants ; looking over the shoulder again and again, to their lover's coming; standing on tip toe to look into their beloved's face ; the catching of fish by bailing out water with their palms ; obliquely looking on both sides as if searching for a lost article ; the running of their hunting dogs ; the shooting of arrows ; the attempted flight of a jungle bird etc.

Their dance-posture, of searching for a lost article, reminds us of the 'cock and hen' dance of the *Juangs* of Orissa. The idea in the song associated with such a dance indicates that a young girl has lost her nose-ring out in the *Karam* clearing. But she pretends that she has dropped it in the house, for otherwise her parents may beat her. She weeps and her parents console her by promising her sweets. There is of course a suggestion that as the cock sleeps in the ashes, so the girl and her lover have slept among the ashes of the burnt forest and thus lost the ring.

So we see that the *Jhumar* songs and the accompanying dances reveal the entire economic life-cycle and emotional longings of the tribals and schedule castes of these areas. Just as the rivers and streams of the Highlands have their source in the plateau of Chhota-Nagpur and come down to the Highlands. So also the *Jhumar* songs and dances originating in the plateau region have come down to the Highlands of West Bengal.

In tune, rhythm and melody that remote early tradition is still followed. The tribes and schedule castes are one with Nature. By using simple metaphors they identify their lovers with the common and lovely things of Nature such as — *Jhingey phul*, *Jard Bang*, (Water-lily) *Biri* — (pulses) *Pial* fruit, *Mahua* buds, *Sal-flowers* etc.

In their songs and dances, in their joys and sorrows — in their expression of emotions one can feel the rhythm and melody of the darting water-falls, the murmuring of the ripples of hill-fed streams and rivers. In the *Jhumar* they use only the first three or four *swaras* (notes) such as — *sa re, ga, ma* out of the seven *swaras*. They do not use *srutis*, *kodi* or *komal swaras*. We do not know how or when these songs originated nor can we foresee their end. Like an eternal stream they seem to flow to eternity.

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