

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Assamese Devotional Folk Songs Zikir and Zari

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Abstract:

This paper will attempt to describe about the Assamese folk devotional songs Zikir and Zari. These songs are sung by the Assamese Muslim community of Assam. The content of these songs are philosophical overtones with literally meaning the consideration of the body. The Zikir songs are in a sense an Islamic counterpart of *dehbichar geet*. These songs are singing with handclapping dance movement with string instrument. Both male and woman folk take part in this performance. These songs were first introduced and composed by Ajan Fakir, a saint came from Bagdad to Assam influenced by *sufibad*. The central idea of futility of life and manmade institution forms the content of all the Zikir compositions. Through most of these Zikirs, the idea of illusion, resignation to allah and overpowering desire to loss one's identity with him runs in the way of the doctrines of *sufisim*.

Keywords: Text, tune

1. Introduction

Zikir and Zari represent a musical genre of devotional folk songs of Assam, they are a group of devotional songs prevalent among the Assamese muslim society of Assam popularly known as Ajan Fakirar Geet. Although Zikir and Zari are similar in tune Zikir songs are embody the teaching of Islam whereas the Zari songs are based on the tragic episodes of the Kalevala tragedy.

The word Zikir derived from Arabic word *Ziqr*, literally means singing or remembering Allah's name or spiritual chants. These songs are mainly composed and popularized during the reign of Gadadhar Singha by the 17th century Sufi saint and poet Hazarat Shah Miran, popularly known as Azan Fakir. Azan Fakir came to Assam from Bagdad and settled in Suwagori Sapori near present Shivsagar town of Assam. As per legend the poet received the name Ajan Fakir or Ajan Pir because he was the one who taught the Assamese Muslim to recite Ajan as its part of muslim ritual as Sir Edward Gait wrote "The Mahammadans who had come from Islamic land this form is practiced with dancing and singing with hand clapping like folk performance".

2. Review of Literature

Ajan Fakir composed around hundred and sixty Zikirs as Dr. Maheswar Neog mentioned __ '*barakuri bargit terakuri fakarar dare athkuri jikir asomiya bhasar amulya sampad*' (like 240 Borgeets and 260 proverbs, 160 jikirs are the resources of Assam) out of these very few has been collected from different sources specially by the scholar and writer Late Syad Abdul Malik, renowned literature of Assam, under the title *Asomiya Zikir aru Zari*. In this book included the available Zikirs collected from all over Assam. Apart from this there has been found some *zikirs* composed by Chand Kha, Bandar Fakir, Muniya Dewan, Golam Hussain etc.

3. Zikir

There are different types of Zikir songs based on some Assamese folk songs. It is very difficult to categorize them on the basis of their tune and lyrics. Ajan Saheb composed the jikirs in Assamese with a few Arabic and Persian words. Most of the Zikirs are composed in *matras*(beats) such as *chabi*, *dulari*, *pad* which were used by *vaishnavite* poets. The tune of *zikir* were similar with prevalent folk songs like Naam kirtan, Ojapali, Deh bichar geet etc. The impact of Vaishnavism, Ojapali has been found in this composition because Azan Fakir studied all the epics, Purans, Geeta, Vagawat, Kirtana, Namghosa and the compositions of his earlier saint. So he followed the writings of his earlier Assamese poets and perhaps inspired of them the *zikir* songs are apart from the contemporary North Indian Classical based songs khayal, dhrupad, quail, thumri, ghazal, bhajan and astapadi etc. These were composed only based on folk tune of Assam.

3.1 Most of the *zikir* songs based on *dehbichar geet*. The following song reflects the soul of a body gets salvation and rests in peace.

Pani mare piyahat, agni mare jarat

Khuda rasul lukai ase mominar majat...

(meaning: we are finding god everywhere but god is in our heart)

3.2 Some *zikirs* based on Vaishnavasim:

Sankare bandhile dharmar barepar
Madhave ghosare mathe.....
Ajan fakire jikir sarajile
Dhwanite brahmanda mohe.....

(meaning: saint Sankardeva and saint Madhabdev made the unity of religion whereas Ajan Fakir composed Jikir which sounds the universe)

3.3 Some *zikirs* based on Ojapali songs. In the ancient period muslim people had performed ojapali, manasa puja, borgit, husari, bhaona etc.

Bandai bandegi nakare palir bolay oja
Kabaloi o nuduwai mur, mur hol murar boja....

3.4 Songs based on Lulabies:

Sigari parbat allah ase gayabat
Hari ei pa, madhubare pa.....

3.5 Songs based on Hindu Islam assimilation

Sankha bajise namaz parhise
Mandirat pujari nai....

3.6 Zikir related to birth of Hajarat Mahammed

Haay o haay dayar mahammad nabi
Makkat janam loi
Haay khodar hokum pai.....

(meaning: Mahammad took birth in Makka by the order of Lord)

4. Context

Jikir songs are sung whole over the year in social as well as religious functions.

5. Zari

Zari is different from Zikir in content and style. Zaris or Mrsiya geet are mainly based on the tragedy of Kalebala episodes Hasan Hosein and stories from Islamic history like Hazarat Ali, Bibi Fatima, Sohar Banu, Musa and Firaun, Khowaz, Khijir, Jindapir, Barpir sahib etc. which has the demonstrative expressions of grief are an important part of *muhuram* celebrations. Zari songs are not only sung in Assam but also these are sung in the several part of the world in local tune based on Kalebala episode. The term Zari means lamentation and is sung in a group and in the saddest possible tone beats and marked by clapping. It is sung mostly during the annual Muharam festival along with the narration of the historic tragedy these songs also preach Islam among the unlettered Muslim folk. The devoted Muslims enjoy listening to Zari Gan till late hours of the night. Some of the *assamese* Zari may be called independent ballads giving the stories of Haidar Gaji prevalent in the Hajo region of Assam.

Haydar Gajir Geet (songs of Haydar Gaji)

Khaya daya Haydar Gaji Mukhat dila huka
Rajar gharar parana aisi Mane lagil dhoka.....

These songs are sung by men with accompanied by musical instrument dotara, a two string instrument in the month of *muhuram* and has similarities with *ojapali* performance of Assam. These songs are choral singing group with lead singer like the *oja* who indicates the singing and is later joined by members of the group like *palis*. As the group sings they move in a circle, clapping and following rhythmic steps. Lyrical compositions of those songs are Arabic, Persian and colloquial Assamese words, which reflect the cultural assimilation that has taken place over time in Assam. There is a sacred belief about *zari* songs among the muslim people that if somebody sings *zari* song rain would be come.

6. Musical presentation

Since these songs are transmitted orally from generation to generation, the authenticity of tune and poetry may not be exactly what Ajan Fakir had composed. In every *zikir* song, there has been found separate moods, sentiment. Most of the *zikir* songs are based on *bhakti* rasa while the *zari* songs based on *karun* rasa (patho mood). There is not any permanent rhythm to sing these songs like classical music but these are completely based on some chanda like dulari, chabi, pad. But in the modern period *kaharba* (8 beats), *khemta* (6 beats), *dadara* taal are used to sing these songs. Most of the songs are in pentatonic scale like other folk songs of this region. The following song reflects mood in *zikir* song.

Rasar bhara! pai ajane dile meli
Kalmia barakate sahib kafer nile theli.....

(meaning: Ajan spread *zikir* by getting the treasure of mood).

7. Conclusion

Zikir and Zari songs are transmitted orally generation to generation. Some prominent singers like Rekitabuddin Ahmed, Muhibur Rahman have taken serious part in popularizing and propounding the *zikir* songs of Ajan Fakir. There has been found some change of tune, rhythm in singing to satisfy audiences as well as for beneficiary aspect. It is not sufficient to establish *zikir* songs in a short manner. There is a great potentiality to study from musical point of view. Since Ajan Fakir composed the songs based on Sufivad and inspired by Vaishnavism all the compositions have the religious as well as spiritual sanctity. At that time the neo *vaishnavite* movement propounded by Sankardeva became very popular and many Muslims were great devotees of vaishnavite saints. Ajan Fakir composed *zikir* to teach them or bring them close to *Islam*. It can be said that these songs show the assimilation of both Hindu and Islamic culture and it represents the great humanity and universal brotherhood.

hindu ki musalman, ake allar farmaan.....

(meaning: hindu and muslim are the wish of same god).

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