FOLK CULTURE: A STUDY ON THE TRANSITION OF THE KAMRUPIA DHULIA OF THE NALBARI DISTRICT OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Culture itself a difficult term to define within a word or can shape in a particular frame. From different perspectives it has been defined with different meanings. Culture mainly associated with human behaviour, which includes evolution of man, changes of mentalities, transaction of society. Folk culture is one of the subunit of culture. In this paper I am going to focus on a topic of folk culture known as Dhulia. My specific area is the Kamrupia Dhulia. Here I am going to point out some of the features of these folk art or phenomena, such as- their origins and the present condition, their lifestyle, about the art form, developments, their transformation from the beginning to till date etc. This folk cultures was developed and popularized by the folks, means the general masses. They were influenced by some of the literate or developed people of society. The pattern of culture which was broadly related to the evolution of man, embraced all such developments of folk arts.

The famous folklorist Richard M. Dorson divided folk culture in four divisions, as- Oral literature, Material culture, Social folk customs and lastly the performing folk-art. The Dhulia culture is formed as a performing folk-art form in Kamrup area. The main objectives of the study is to find out the transition of the Dhulia art form from its origin to now and to define their changes and developments in the changing socio-economic as well as cultural fields. The methodologies for find out such things are based on both secondary and primary sources.

Key words: culture, folk, dhulia, art, social.

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture itself a difficult term to define within a word or can shape in a particular frame. From different perspectives it has been defined with different meanings. Culture mainly associated with human behaviour, which includes evolution of man, changes of mentalities, transaction of society. Folk culture is one of the subunit of culture. In this paper I am going to focus on a topic of folk culture known as Dhulia. My specific area is the Kamrupia Dhulia. Here I am going to
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2. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the study are -

a) To find out the art form of Kamrupia Dhulia
b) To discuss about the various Dhulia groups
c) To define the social status of these groups
d) To define their transitions in socio-economic as well as cultural fields.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodologies for find out the objectives are based on both secondary and primary sources-

a) Findings from various locally published journals
b) Personal observations and data collections
c) Oral sources
d) Books that published on Folk-Culture.

With the proper documentation of above mentioning sources, it is tried to draw a picture of the topic on folk art of ‘Kamrupia Dhulia’.

4. DISCUSSION

The famous folklorist Richard M. Dorson divided folk culture in four divisions, as-

a) Oral literature,
b) Material culture,
c) Social folk customs and
d) The performing folk-art.
Among them the performing folk-art is what we understand as something like descriptions of various stories, about people through a dance form or through drama, or by singing with the help of different classical instruments. Song, Dance and Drama are the basic features of performing art form. It is the cultural form performed by folks under some specific social norms. This art represents the socio-cultural norms along with the religious sentiments.

Regarding the instruments that had used in this form, Dhol (drum) is one of the most important of it. It is an instrument made of animal skin. The size of Dhol is different in different places of Assam. The sizes of the Dhol are different in Assam and known by different names. In ancient literature also Dhol was described as an important instruments used mostly in puja’s. Madhab Kandali in his Ramayana had mentioned that “Kohali Muhuri Veri Sabha Tumul, Dunduvi Mridanga Dam Baje Dhak Dhol”. Rajanikanta Bordoloi also mentioned about Dhol and Dhulia in his book titled as ‘Dondua Druh’. The person who plays dhol is known as Dhulia. Thus the Dhulia word was derived. The Dhulia performing art was developed in different places of Assam. In lower Assam this performing folk-art formed in Kamrup area. With the name of the place they are popularly termed as “Kamrupia Dhulia”. This term represents the cultural boundary of Kamrup. At a time from the past most of the villages of Kamrup represents Dhulia groups, but due to various causes they became history of society.

**The traditional art forms of Dhulia:**

The art form of Dhulia is the institution of the three instruments- Dhol (drum), Tal (cymbal) and Kali (clarion). According to the ancient rituals without Dhol and Tal rituals like Durga worship, Kali worship, Maroi worship etc are not able to be performed. Rituals are started with the sound that produced by the Dhol like ‘dhak dhak’. They are religiously important thus. Various ceremonies like- marriage ceremony, Shraddho, Xuagjara (a traditional custom of marriage), meetings etc are incomplete without Dhol.

During the birth time of this performing art there were no stages for them to perform; they managed it in open fields. Sometimes the committee members arranged roof made of Banana leaves (the roof was popularly known as ‘Samiyara’). People enjoyed the Dhulia show from their aristocrat seat of the stubble of paddy. In every corner the ‘Mohola (torch)’ was arranged as light. Sometimes one of the Dhulia kept one Mohola with him and take it in front of the face of other Dhulia’s to lightened the expression of that particular person. There was no mike system, light system in the earlier time. Dhulia people generally used to wear black shirts, white Dhuti or
Pajamas and used Paguris in their head. Like the Clown of circus some of them used paints in their faces. The rice powder was the only material that they used as foundation. Some Dhulia also had wear Masks (Mukhas).

There are various Dhulia people whose are related to different ceremonies like, a) marriage, b) religious rituals, c) Sabha or meetings, d) Bihu and other cultural ceremonies etc. In the Dhulia group who acted in the meetings there are 60-70 numbers of members. They are the Dhulia artist. They used 40-50 Dhol and included 20-25 of Taluoi (cymbaler) artist and 10-12 Kalia (clarion player) artist. These are the traditional figures and till remains in some places of Kamrup.

Each of the Dhulia group has been entrusted different roles such as-

a) Ghai Dhulia (chief drummer),
b) Dhulia (drummer),
c) Bayan or Bayin, Gayak or Gayin (singer),
d) Taluoi (player of cymble),
e) Vaoria or Vaira or Vavoria (actor),
f) Aariadhoria (keeper of Aaria, a torch),
g) The performers of Circus or Kusti,
h) Dhulia who played Sang or Acting and
i) Kaliya (player of the instrument ‘Kali’, a clarion).

From its birth time the traditional forms of Dhulia are of seven kinds. They had figure out seven forms within the Dhulia art.

a) The Dhulia group started with prologue or ‘Jagoni’, known as ‘guru ghat (guru bandana)’. It is a prayer of prosperity. Thus they signaled that the show is inaugurated.
b) Secondly the ‘Patidhol’ (small sizes of drums) and
c) Thirdly the ‘Gasdhol’ (Big Size of drums) are played by the Drummers. They had used four Dhol in this performance, two of Patidhol and two of Gasdhol.
d) During the performance of the Dulia Party in the meetings the Aariadhora had played an important role in it. They kept Aaria in their hands and with different steps of dance they entered in the meeting hall along with the recitation of different poems- songs. They danced in the beat of Patidhol (small in size) and Gasdhol (big in size). This process is known as ‘Git, Mat and Seu’. The main Dhulia has started the song and others just recite
it in the same beat. After the ‘guru ghat’ dhulia beating Dhol and one man beating ‘Tal’. This beat is popularly known as ‘Khola fureni Bajna’.

e) Fourthly they started Kusti (circus) and Khormora. There are no masters of the Kusti or Circus, they themselves learnt this art. It is very dangerous skills of these people. They used to play circus with ropes, rings, hisabulen etc. Although the Kusti is meant what we understand by the term Circus today, but is not the same like circus. They had no use of net, no ladder. They used large Dhol as their ladder. They act over the Dhols. In an act they steps in a rope that was tied with two bamboos in both sides without any help.

f) Then they play ‘Bhaona (a form of old Assamese theatrical performance)’, but it is different from the Bhaona of Upper Assam. It is religious in real sense but presented in a manner of comedy. Mainly they present two kinds of dramas- (i) one is stories that related to ancient times and other (ii) which is a presentation of day to day incidents in a comedy line, known as ‘Sang’. In its earlier time drama was not added to Dhulia, but with the changes of time to give some more entertainments to the audiences they add it. It also gave a significant place to the culture of ‘Khulia- Bhouria’ in this art, which was almost disappearing from the scene. They added Sang like, ‘biyar sang’, ‘aair sang’, ‘pandit r sang’ etc. They used the classical mantras with a comedy tune and present some of the social disorders through addition of some lines. Sometimes the Bhaoria or the actor of the Bhaona had instantly composed songs, dialogues instantly. The most famous figure of Dhulia culture Mohan Bhaira of Koihati was very much popular for his instant creativities, like-

‘O Mai He Dhanantari
Loto Poto Poto Kari
Loto Poto Jangler Jari
Janglat Ase Ata Bari
Tak Khuang Moi Kenai Kari
O Anupan Muthe Manot Nai He Jangler Jari
Akphalor Pai Aisu Jari
Jiman Paissu Aisu Mari
Ekeo Aisu Jairba
Kenke Paru Mairba
O Anupan Muthe Manot Nai He Jangler Jari…..’

(This song is the part of the famous Chnag ‘Kabiraja’)

Another one of the famous songs sung by Gopi Bhaoria of ‘Suh Puran’ was-

‘Tinita Man Suhpat Aru Ek Veuta Pani
Kei Tupman Gakhir Dilak
Burhi Gaitu Tani.
Vadraluke Suh Khai, Dei Gakhir Seni
Haule Suh Khai, Nimokh Garam Pani’.

Through this song he tried to show the social differences between the rich and poor.

Thus they depict stories of men of that period in their acting, songs.

g) In the last and seventh part they played Dhol with different tunes and the show thus comes to the end.

Thus the tradition of Dhulia Culture was formed. These are followed by all the parties in its earlier phase but now a day due to various causes only few Dhulia groups from Kamrup led their programs through this format.

Different Dhulia groups and their transitions:

The Dhulia art is a popular folk art form from Kamrup area, but with a study of such groups we may able to know their conditions for which maximum groups are vanished from the line, some are there with a situation like almost dead and others led this art form as paying respects to their fore fathers. Some of the most important Dhulia groups of Kamrup area are as mentioned below-

a) Dhulia of Chandkuchi
b) Dhulia group of Agnisala (Bahjani)
c) Dhulia group of Uabori
d) Dhulia group of Kaihati
e) Barkhelia Dhulia Group
f) Dhulia group of Namkhal

g) Dhulia group of Datara
h) Dhulia Group of Barigaon
i) Dhulia group of Balilesa
Those are some of the Dhulia groups of Kamrup. The transitions of these groups are discussed below-

From the traditional line, the Chandkuchi Dhulia group was the first party that had established. The famous figures like Jungu Bhaira, Gopiram Malakar of Simelibari, popularly known as Gopi Bhaoria. Gopi had learned about Dhol and its uses, acting of Dhulia from this group and became popular among the people as Bhaoria. They with a taunting tune depict the social scenario of that time. But soon this group was declined and Gopi went to another dhulia group of Agnisala.

The Agnisala Dhulia group was situated in Bahjani. Gopi had joined this group and was popular in people as ‘Gopi Bhaoria’. He led this group to the Assamese platform and made them famous with the help of other twenty members.

Late Sanaram of Ulabori area was another famous person who used to produce Dhol by himself and led the Dhulia group of Ulabori. Form his great grandfather’s time they led this culture. At a time Sanaram’s Dhol was an integral part of the Maroi Puja of Kamakhya. During the Assam Sahitya Sabha he was the main Drummer and placed more than 100 Dhols which was a startle for the gatherers.

A great Dhulia artist of the age was the great Mohan Dhulia or Bhaoria of Kaihati. Some other members of this group were as Burha Bhaira, Nioti Bhaira etc. This is a famous and old dhulia group of Kamrup. Mohan Bhaira was the main focus of this group. They had played a
Bhao on ‘Oil refineries’. Mohan Bhaoria was a man of creativities and thus he popularized this art form in various places of Assam. With their interesting Kusti, songs, dramas and specially the dialogue with comedian mixtures they are capable to win the hearts of the people. For such contributions Mohan Bhaoria during 1985 he was presented with the title of ‘Gana Silpi’ by Sangit Natak Academy. He made Assam feel proud for his commendable job in the field of folk culture. There were no female members in these groups. The male figures acts like female in need. They dressed with old gunny bag type of clothes, rice power is used as foundation, tree leafs are used as crowns, also they use masks of Horse (made of wood). The Kusti player of this group also did a trick in which they were walk in a straight bamboo which was placed under the earth. This trick is not available or practice by them now.

During 19th century in Barkhelia area a Dhulia group was formed. Some of the main drummers of this group were as, Birmal, Tambha, Ronuwa, Ningna. They had played acts of marriage, acts of Madam and Sahab etc mainly. They remain in the scene for a long about seventy years.

One person named Fafruram Das organized one group of Dhulia. He was the main Drummer of the group instituted at Namkhalu during 20th century. It was popularly known s ‘Namkheliya Dhulia Dol’. The Bhaorias of this group were as Seniram from Brahman Samarkuchi area, Madhu from Datara, Katia from Deharkuchi, Jalia from Lalit Bukia. Seniram and Madhuram Das are the main Bhaorias. Seniram was popularly known as ‘seina Bhaira’. Facial expressions, sound changing qualities were the features of Seniram. Brother of Fafru Telghuha, Posa from Brahman Samarkuchi, Debaru, Gojin of Manik Bukia, Psanda from Madhyama Namkhal played drummes. Ghutle Das was the Taluoi. Bhakatram was the trainer of this group.

During 19th century in Datara a new Dhulia group was founded by Aaliram from the same place. He was the chief drummer of this group. In a meeting he had played dhol like-

‘Dhunduli kut dhunduli kut
Kut dhunduli kut
Lun nai nai, tel nai nai
Gutei dhunduli kut.’
Thus he and his group became popular in people through his new ideas and presentations. Contemporarily in Barigaon also one Dhulia group was formed. Their main act was the ‘Masbesa Puhari (seller of fish)’.

At Balilesa during 19th century a Dhulia group was instituted. Persons like, Budhiram Bhaira, Bhakatram Bhaira, Mihiram, Krishnaram, Aanuram, Bhaguram etc were the main actors of this group. They even trainer of some other small groups nearby. The main focus of this group was their drama on ‘Aabar Yuddho (the war of Aabar)’. During Non-co Operation Movement of Gandhi they had played a Bhairami (drama) on this movement. People after showing this drama were fully inspired for such a movement. Thus they always played a contemporary issue that influenced general masses mostly.

After the decline of Balilesa Dhulia group there in Guwakuchi a new party was established. Bhakatram was the chief Dhulia of this group and Durgaram, Rabiram, Bandhuram were the bhaoria. ‘Khatasur Badh’ was the main Bhaona of this group.

Literate Rajanikanta Bordoloi in his write up on ‘kamrupia Dhulia vau’ he added about the Madhapuria Dhulia and their amusing song as-

‘U u kore mur
Haire moluwa
Gose gose jopiai
Haire molua
Mur moluwak kune marile
Haire moluwa re..’

Late Santiram Rajbongsi was popularly known as the founder establisher of the Joarddi Dhulia Party. He was the main Dhulia of the group and was helped by Binanda Barman and Dipra Rajbongshi. Later people like Nanda Boira (bayan), Lalit Rajbongshi, Maukha Rajbongshi, Joikani Bhaira, Faguna Rajbongshi etc found a new group and led this art form. Lalit Rajbongshi was a good Tluwoi and kusti performer also. In the Kusti part Dhulia of this
used to walk in a straight Bamboo, which was placed under earth. But with the passes of this
group was decline from the folk cultural scenario.

The Bhaira of Joarddi group, Jay Barman had changed his village to Gabradal and here he
formed a new Dhulia group with the name of Gabradal Milan Dhulia. They still managed to
survive with the traditional line of its origin. This is a group of seventeen people. As the earlier
still the male members used to act like female in this group. In the field of dress they had
changed the style and added some modern dresses to step with modern identities.

The Dhulia group of Barni known as Barne Ela, is also famous for this folk art. They lost
their popularity due to the death of their leaders, but still able to survive in small groups. They
now a day did not follow the traditional line for their insufficient balance, actors, performers.
They only attain worships or small gathering or meetings. They used rice powder as foundation
and added modern dress materials. Female members are also there and they played the female
roles as Bhaoria.

One person from Datkuchi, Prabhat Kaibarta is the owner of the ‘Samannay Natgosti
Bardhulia Party’ of Mohkhuli. The main traditional group was established under the guidance of
Bangshi Kaibarta and Bhaoria Butaram. This group was divided into four new parties, one of
them are led by Prabhat Kaibarta. Owned from his predecessors this art form is performed by
Prabhat Kaibarta as the leader of this group. Under his leadership the party with twenty five
members somehow survived in the changing and challenging scenario. They followed the
traditional Dhulia line but under the sub tradition they add some ingredients like Drama. Prabhat
Kaibarta had himself added Drama in this party from 1996. He is accompanied by Jayanta
Sarma, the chief Bhaoria of this group. For the entertainments they also added mikes, lights and
dresses like ‘Jokar’ for the Bhaoria. The female figures are also added to this group. Most
interestingly in this group the members are belonged to Kaibarta class, Brahman class and
Muslim class too. It showed that people from different category had used to join Dhulia party
and there was no discrimination of caste system. After the closing of traditional line this group
used to play drama, began with ‘Nritya Natika (dance drama)’ and then a play from epics,
puranas etc.
Another group of Dhulia from Roumara is led by Basistha Das and Ajit Das. An account of such brotherhood is also there as the main Bhaoria of this group is a Muslim person, Mh. Vainur Ali and Jiban Kaibarta is the Bayan. There is a female group of five members. They are highly modern as used modern dress materials, colours and facial make up. Along with Dhol they even played Tabla, Sadrama, harmonium, mikes and also used lights.

These are the accounts of some of the dhulia groups from Kamrup area. There are a few Dhulia groups that followed the traditional line. Unfortunately if we notice only the Kaihati Dhulia group represent the original form and others not. Behind this fact there are different causes, some are social and others are economical.

**Causes for the decline of this performing folk art:**

The people of the Dhulia party are mostly belonged to the lower class of people of society, like- Fisherman, potters, Koch-Rajbangshi people. Their condition depicts a village community of that time. They are poor. After acquiring the knowledge of Dhul they started this art form. The originator of this art was unknown but he was the man of respect for inauguration of such a high class art form. In its early phase people just enjoyed the comedies, Kusti and songs but not paid respect as an art form to it. Later with the gradual development of society this forms are considered as one of the best art form from Kamrup. They are popular in Assam as ‘Kamrupia Dhulia’. This identity is paid to them after a long term of struggle for it.

The importance and significance of this performing art form received a little acknowledgement from society. They are neglected and not considered as one of the important art form that could beat with others in the international platform. The deplorable condition of this art form are caused by- social changes, transition of folk like, economic transformation, impact of new technologies etc.

The transition we noticed from the rich tradition of performing folk art to just an entertainment machine is a matter of sadness. The transitions within the dress materials, make up, new forms like drama, female members, adding of new instruments are the important factors of Dhulia culture. The changes are come for some causes. The main cause of it the poor economy. The seven traditional lines were too much expensive that they could not able to maintain with their low budgets. They are not highly paid after their shows and that little money
is not sufficient to lead a family. For that reason almost every SILPI used to engaged in different jobs in the off seasons of their ‘Pala (show)’. They are not educated or belonged to high families. With the passage of time the people are bored with the same traditions and these groups day by day lost their popularities. During this time many groups are declined due to insufficient balance. A Dhol is of 4000-5000 rupees, which is an unbearable price for the Dhulias. The materials are so DAMI that they could not bear all these. With a low budget they could not able to survive and many Dhulia parties had dismissed from the scene. Pressured by the need of time the Dhulia SILPI added many ingredients to the traditional lines. It cost in the falloff the Dhulia tradition but was favourable for the Dhulia people as they got their lost tradition to some extent. But unfortunately it not lasted for a long term. The social manner had changed and they wished for some new tactics differs from this. The Dhulia people are helpless as they could not change the pattern as a better one. Thus the family tradition had lost its glory. They loose interests of new generations. The people of present generation are fond of new technologies like, mobile phones, audio or visual Medias and colourful lights, which are not there in the Dhulia art.

A bold step has been taken for the future protection of this folk art when in 1971 All Assam Dhulia Artist Association is formed. During 2011 the Assam Literate Association held Dhulia Meet with the association of Nalbari Literate Association. Miniters of Assam government has been declaring many grants for this folk culture and the Dhulia people. But it was a like a ‘Phutukar Fen (having no substance)’.

5. CONCLUSION

The performing folk art can considered as a platform for the folks or for their communities. Through the folk art performed the social customs religious touch is also there. Through folk art general masses able to show their personal skills and gathered support from people. They lead the culture as they have it from their forefathers. The love of the Kamrupia Dhulia for their culture is worth mentioning. They were not forced by their forefathers to have the same art form but they did it to run the culture in Assamese soil. At a time of economical distress they are never back stepped until they are forced badly. Their struggles are considerable. But with the transition of social atmosphere they are forced for new way outs within the art form. They are in a deplorable condition which is a total injustice for this folk art. It is our moral duty to pay support to these Dhulia groups. Change is a truth but with the changing time it should be managed.
through what this art can survive in the changing ways. Also Government should pay some attention on the matter of their survival with the new proper schemes. Social as well as Government support may help the folk art form of ‘Kamrupia Dhulia’ in their re-establishment of earlier prestigious position.

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