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THE 'CHUKARI': A DYNAMIC CHARACTER IN RAJBANSHI FOLK CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The folk art of Chukari is performed in Rajbangshi culture, which is a unique genre of North East India, Bangladesh and North Bengal. This art is also spread across India in different forms and styles. The artists or characters of 'Chukari Shilpa' are called artists known as "Chukari" and are sometimes also known individually as "Chokra". A Chukari is a dynamic and versatile artist who sings, dances, speaks, does comedy and acts in theatre. A Chukari is a male artist who expresses and performs beauty in his art as a female artist. Similar characters are found all over India from different perspectives, such as Maruni of Sikkim, Jhumra of Bihar, Gotipowa of Odisha, etc. Chukari is capable of expressing specific emotions and feelings. In the past, women used to practice and participate in folk culture in their homes, as they were not allowed to perform in public places. This led to the development of the art known as Chukari. The aim of this study is to provide information about the dynamic character of the chukri in Rajvanshi culture.

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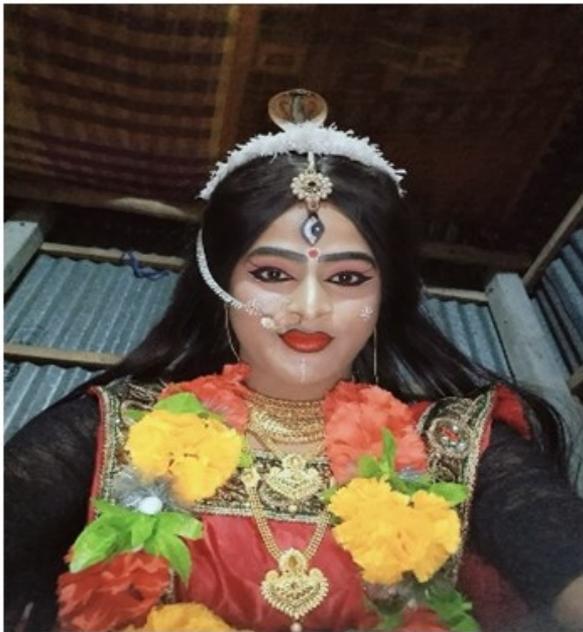
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INTRODUCTION

Folk music is a medium that expresses the lifestyles and philosophies of common people in the present, past and near-past. The term "folk" comes from ethnographic language "A group of associated people, a primitive kind of post-tribal social organization; the lower classes or common people of an area" (Barma, loksangeet, 2011). Folk culture refers to the localized lifestyle of a subsistence or otherwise, inward looking culture. It is usually handed down through oral tradition and a strong sense of community and values the "old ways" over novelty. Finally, folk culture is quite often imbued with a sense of place. (Subba, 2011). The Rajbangshi community is the largest branch of this group. Some anthropologists claim that the Rajbangshi belong to the Proto-Austroloid group based on their physical characteristics. The process of Aryanization began around the 6th century BCE and resulted in a fusion of Aryan and local cultures in the Northeast (Ray N. , 2016). The study concerns the Rajbangshis, the major group of people who claim to be the sons of the soil of the northern part of Bengal, popularly known as North Bengal which has recently been claimed as Kamtapur by a section of the ethnic group. By folk literature is meant the literature of the folk, the folk community. Folk community is a 'tribal social organization- the lower classes or common people of an area. Encyclopedia of Anthropology gives the definition of folk community as follows- a less ethnocentric and broader definition of folk would be any group of people who share at least one common factor (for example, common occupation, religion or ethnicity). So, folk literature of Rajbangshi encompasses the literature of the common people, at least the majority of them, of the area popularly known as North Bengal which includes the districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda (Barma, History Of North Bengal, 2018).

Chukri: 'Chukri' is a character and at the same time an art form that plays an important role in the society of Rajbangshi culture. The chukri pal leads the important parts of the song. Earlier, women were not allowed to perform in theatres for dancing, singing or acting. So men used to dress up like women. They performed their light dance, singing and acting for the entertainment of the audience. The chukri is capable of expressing specific emotions and feelings. In folk theatre, the sutradhar is called the gidal or main gidal (as the main singer of the play). Along with the gidals, the doaris are the main 'dohar' (supporting singer). There are 6/7 more assistants as dohar/instrument/actors and 4 to 6 stars for the dancers known as chukri (Burma, Folk Music, 2011).

The name of some chukri of North Bengal are Banshinath Dakua, Jagadish Barman, Shibu Barman, Praneshwar Sen, Fotku Sen, Naluk Dakua etc. Folk dramas are performed in an open field or in a large courtyard of a house in the middle of the village in a covered 'Asor-dance', Singing, Playing, and Acting along with dialogues. These Palagan include Datora Pala, Kushan Pala, Aban or Raban Pala, Bishahari Pala, Satyapir Pala, Nimai Sannayas, Chor-Chunni Pala, Palatia (Khas Pachali, Rang Pachali, Man Pachali), Rajdhari Pala, Natua Pala, Khan Pala, Gamira Pala etc. Chukris are used to perform in these pala. The Chukri basically performs in the mythological story and gives an educational message to society. The male artists perform as female to save the female art form. Chukri artists give a message to take this art form as a profession.



Chukri Artist: Chiranjit Barman

Music of Chukri: The rhythm of the Rajbanshi people's speech, the lyrical poems composed in the Rajbanshi or Kamrupi language, and the regional characteristics of Kamrup together gave rise to the musical tradition that became established in the region as Bhawaiya songs. (Barma, Bhawaiya sangeet e chanda taal badyajantra, 2014) The Chukri artists used to perform in various *Palas* of Rajbanshi culture. They sang in a female voice, and most of the songs are basically Bhawaiya. The language of the song is Rajbanshi. In between a pala at night time used to sing "Khemta" and this time they earned the coins from audience.



Dance of Chukri: Dance is an inseparable part of Pala songs. As mentioned earlier, since boys perform dressed as girls, this dance is called Chhokra Naach. In fact, in North Bengal, the term "dance" generally refers to this Chhokra Naach. Various hand and foot gestures are used in this dance. Depending on the theme of the song, the use of both connected and unconnected hand gestures plays a very important role (Barma, Bhawaiya sangeet e chanda taal badyajantra, 2014).

Role of Chukri in theatre: In folk dramas Gidal leads the song with doari surrounded by various musical instruments and dohars. The dohars follow him. In between songs, Gidal explains the events through words. Along with the music, the Chokra use to dance like women by dressing up as women. While the Gidal was explaining - moving the play forward on one side of the stage, the slow dance continued on the other side of the stage with very soft instrumental music. In between the explaining the act is also done by the Gidal, Doari, Chokra (Barma, loksangeet, 2011).



Ornamentation of Chukri Art form: They used costumes and ornaments such as sarees, bangles, and false hair. For makeup, they applied zinc oxide, piuri, and mina. They also used alta on their lips, and nowadays they use various modern cosmetic products.

CONCLUSION

In the society of Rajbanshi, the chukri artists play a dynamic role with their multi-talent. They perform like a female artist, sings in the female tone and sometimes they deliver dialogue in the folk drama of Rajbanshi culture. They are a prolocutor of females in drama in rajbanshi society.

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