

Vernacular Rhetoric to Local Culture: Challenging Narratives of Folk Songs in Social Media

Ipsita Banerjee ¹ and Dr. Rajesh Das ²

Abstract

In the last decade we have witnessed a sea change in the production and presentation of folk songs due to the introduction of digital technologies in different forms of social media. Be it through YouTube or through app-based communication networks, folk songs are now being perceived by the communities in different parts of India. Folk media itself is a rigid or semi-flexible form of medium, mainly reflecting diversified vernacular expression with cultural diversity. It speaks about its community driven by culture-centric rhetorical approach. In the era of social media, it has been considered that a new digitized convergence media form has a potential power to disseminate the traditional folk songs in multi-leveled platforms. After the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic this folk song industry has undergone many challenging situations leading to an obvious transformation towards a more digitised platform to promote these folk songs. In the outset social media platforms acted as an alternative support-system for the folk song performers and towards the audience also (reachness). With the ever-changing digital transformation, the present article has tried to explore the structure of the emerging pattern of vernacular expression of folk music in digital form. The present research also has tried to study the changes in narrative of audience's acceptance, participation, appreciation and feedback while enjoying folk music through social media. The present work has considered ten folk songs, (from Bengali and Assamese), considering their popularity on digital platforms (in the YouTube) for content analysis. This research has further investigated whether this new form of presentation is being equally applicable or not in comparison to the offline presentation of folk songs. This is because in the

case of folk music, proximity of audience (acceptance, interaction and popularity) is directly related to proximity of culture, rhetoric, tune and tempo and body gestures of the performers. The present study has followed an interpretivist philosophy through qualitative content analysis of selected folk music. The structural transformation of the contents of folk music will be explored using the Dialectical theory proposed by Hegel. Then the theories of post-modernism and modernism will be highlighted to ascertain the criticism on the technology-based dissemination of folk songs. Concepts like Diffusion of Innovation coined by Rogers, (1962) and Adorno's cultural criticism and society will also be used to criticize the same. This has further helped in exploring the potential of digital media based on the dimension of Information SuperHighway concept and cultural manipulation proposed by Manuel Castles, 2009.

Keywords: Digital Platform, Vernacular rhetoric , Folk songs, Dialectic approach, Social media, Cultural Proximity

Introduction

It was considered that the oral tradition, like folk songs in India, explored contemporary tradition or it had been able to narrate some social contexts or critics through performance. Beck and Roghair (1982) observed that the language of any folk forms like Indian epics were influenced by the 'song- rhythm' rather than by poetic perspective. Beck and Roghair marked the songs as the most effective traditional forms of performance and rhetorical arrangements got a special impetus in the niche of folk songs. But folk songs should be considered as a popular form of 'folk- communication' instead of 'folk media'. It was derived in the pre -media era so that it had retained its purity of forms, meaning rigidity or semi-flexibility in its context, content and presentation. Folk songs convey the catalysts of cultural components of any group or community and also serve as a medium to communicate their

ideas, heritage, aesthetics, emotions or social struggle. Folk songs can easily express an array of information, to a particular community (ethnographic approach). Sometimes, it gets difficult for the audience to decode complex information or certain concepts disseminated through that information. This is where folk songs play an important role in simplifying the process and thereby reaching out to people more easily. Here purity of forms may act as a platform to cater an essential knowledge for the local community that has preserved it. The purity of folk forms depends on the arts and science of effective persuasion and arrangement of words and other compositional techniques. Actually, the dialectic design is too important to retain the limpidness of any local folk forms like folk songs. This narrative supports a rhetorical foundation of folk songs after Lloyd Bitzer (1968) . From the pre media era to contemporary digitized information superhighway – if we look at the changing pathway of information production and dissemination process then the said typology of media narrative supports a complex paradigm from its linear structure. Perhaps, this is an obvious socio –cultural transformation in any modern society. Modern civilization also encourages ‘cultural-osmosis’ due to migration of human resources, cultural resources , socio- psychological resources and other architectures of human civilization. The rhetorical architectures of folk songs are covered by a network of semiotics. Changes of societal ideation in the modern era have also interfered with the rhetorical construction of folk media, like folk songs. The BAUL Songs (Baulsongs are devoted to finding humankind's relationship to God, and to achieving spiritual liberation. Their devotional songs can be traced back to the fifteenth century when they first appeared in Bengali literature. The word 'Baul' comes from the Sanskrit word 'Vatul,' which means 'mad' or 'eccentric. ' Bauls are wandering minstrels who have been associated with this form of music, mostly in West Bengal Assam and Bangladesh.), is a popular form that can apply in OTT series. Again, the CHHAU Dance (a semi classical Indian folk dance with martial and folk traditions where all the performers use a musk to cater their

characterisation and the dance performance speaks a story of mythology or related issue, very common in Purulia (West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha), can perform from any other part of the world except West Bengal or Odisha. That means the vernacular narrative may lose its purity due to a complex mode of cultural hybridization. When modernization brings about collective changes on societal periphery then rhetorical persuasion would change its narrative accordingly.

Elements of Culture

Vernacular rhetorical is contrasted with action; action of appeal, emotion or persuasion to cater a defined message or entertain a community of people . According to etymological school the term culture is an uncontroversial phenomenon. But anthropologists considered that the concept is quite a complex form of narrative. To articulate the baseline concept of culture here we considered some components that are also related with vernacular rhetorical approach.

I. Symbols: Those depictions that are used to signify a specific meaning of something that members of the same society can quickly identify (Lawley, 1994).

II. Language is a set of signals that enables communication between individuals (Swartz, 1997).

III. Values: Broad principles of desirability, virtue, beauty, and other things that are culturally specific and serve as guides for social behaviour (Griswold, 2004).

IV. Beliefs: Statements that individuals strongly consider to be true (Swidler, 1986).

The conceptual foundation for reviewing a large but fragmented body of literature from disciplines as diverse as psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and so on is society and individual-level viewpoints regarding culture. Understanding how culture influences perception and cognition is made easier by the conceptual framework and related literature evaluation. In particular, the use of cultural proxies demonstrates how cultural components, such as language, dominant modes of independent and interdependent self-construal, and

norms and values conveyed by individualist and collectivist societies, affect people's perception and cognition and ultimately lead to behavioural differences. (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999) .

Daniel Dennett claims that a large part of who we are comes from how society has shaped us, in his book *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (1996). It is evident that, as Dennett suggests, 'humans are impacted by the community' in which they are rooted in an endless number of different ways. There are major cultural variances in worldviews or belief systems that may affect how individuals think and act. The relevance of culturally formed patterns of values, aspirations, and beliefs is supported by the recurrent pattern of behavioural similarities and variances within and between cultures. It is clear that people from different cultures have a lot in common despite the distinctive patterns of ideas and values that exist. In fact, some claim that anthropologists and cross-cultural psychologists have neglected important underlying commonalities in favour of focusing primarily on patterns of cultural differences (Brown, 1991).

Folk Songs : An Overview

The east and the northeast part of India is said to host around 255 indigenous tribes or local tribes of the country. India has been native land to a number of different tribal communities who have their own ethnocentric culture and ethnocentric practices (Kiran, 2022). In this regard the geographical and ecological diversity of the Indian subcontinent has also acted as a catalyst to encourage ethnocentric behaviour among different communities. In this research the major states of study include West Bengal and Assam of India. When we talk about folk songs of Bengal it includes *Baul*, *Murshidi*, *Marfati* and *Bhatiyali* which are often performed individually (Alam et al., 2024). While on the other hand there are a number of forms of folk songs like *Kabi Gan*, *Leto*, *Gambhira*, *Alkap* which are sung in chorus. Similarly, Assamese

folk songs include *Bihu*, *Bhawaiya*, *Ojapali*, *KamrupiLokgeet*, *GoalpariyaLokgeet*, *Torkari Geet*(Bora et al., 2023). The term folk song is often called Loko Geeti in Bengali which means song of people (Alam et al., 2023). Initially originating from tribal culture these songs were often used to express the traditional and cultural dimension of a community. The content of such songs included a variety of categories such as religious, devotional, social life, marriages, awareness and reflection of this city in general. According to historians the earliest forms of music in Bengal were the chants done in Sanskrit under the influence of a variation of a poem like *Geeta Govindam* of Jayadeva introduced in the 13th century (Jafri & Nasreen, 2023).

Language and Local Culture: A Relationship

Language is crucial in determining how culture influences how one perceives oneself in relation to others. Whorf (1956) contends that language used has a significant impact on how individuals see themselves and interpret the world. Similar findings are made by Briley et al. (2005) and Ross et al. (2002b) that language can cause culturally specific self-perceptions, with English-speaking bi-cultural individuals reporting a sense of independence from others and Chinese-speaking bi-cultural individuals reporting a sense of interdependence. Chinese-born individuals who are bilingual in English and Chinese identify themselves in terms of their internal characteristics and qualities. These findings imply that in bicultural individuals, East Asian and Western identities are stored in independent knowledge structures, each of which is triggered by a language that corresponds to it and causes a culture-specific representation of the self. Ji et al. (2004) cite experimental evidence to support their claims that: (1) different representations are associated with different languages, and (2) language can have a curative

effect on reasoning styles that are indicative of flexible reasoning styles that can be changed by exposure to a different language or culture. In general, collectivist cultures cause an overlap between individual and communal identity through disparities in self-construction, values, and language, and as a result, they judge people based on how well they function in groups. In individualist cultures, when the contrary is true, group affiliations do not serve as a foundation for judgment, and persons are assessed on an individual basis. These variations have important effects on how various cultures assign causal responsibility and their capacity to embrace the viewpoint of others.

Aesthetics in Local Culture

Gyorgy Lukacs made one of the most significant remarks in his essay "Aesthetic Culture." First published in the journal *Renaissance* in 1910, "Aesthetic Culture" was reproduced in the essay collection that bore its name in 1913. (Miller, 1998)⁷⁶ Although aesthetic experiences are common in contemporary life, no complete scientific theory explaining what psychologically defines such experiences now exists. (Leder, et al., 2004)⁷⁷ The cognitive obstacles posed by abstract art as well as other conceptual, complex, and multidimensional stimuli were also explored, and a stage-by-stage model of information processing for aesthetic perception was presented. The five steps of the paradigm are perception, explicit categorization, implicit classification, cognitive mastery, and assessment. The approach distinguishes two forms of output: aesthetic feeling and aesthetic judgements. The processing of aesthetic information is frequently characterised as a multi-stage process. The idea that the process begins with the input of the stimulus, proceeds through multiple processing stages that are related to deeper

memory instances, and concludes with the final decision-making, which is an evaluation of the stimulus, is shared by many models. Ognjenovic (1991) proposed that aesthetic information processing occurs in three phases, with the last stage focusing on a more in-depth semantic component of the object. The first two stages are concerned with two different types of stimulus qualities (symmetry and complexity). This paradigm explains the variety of aesthetic taste (e.g., preference for simplicity vs. desire for complexity) by claiming that an aesthetic response may be realized at each level of processing.

Research Methodology

It is often argued that the uniqueness of folk songs lies in its rigidity and cultural proximity (Harding, 2021). However, in the post globalization era with the introduction of popular culture and westernized form of music the traditional Indian music forms has been under challenges for several times leading to a shift to digital domains. In this regard, case study analysis has been done with the help of 10 digitally popular Bengali and Assamese folk songs from YouTube this research has tried to evaluate how the composition and presentation of folk songs has been changed or modified to suit the popular demand of the audience. Following the philosophy of interpretivism a qualitative content analysis has been conducted where the type of folk song, its interpretation, visual representation and the use of instruments have been critically analysed. In addition to this, the number of views, likes, comments on YouTube have also been analysed as a part of the case study to evaluate its popularity among the audience.

The top ten songs from the search results have been selected based on the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Bengali and Assamese Folk Song/ Singing Performance. · Clarity of the channel from which the post has been done and the singers involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Song covers or only dancing performance by dancers and no involvement of singers. · Audio/Music playlists created by fans. · Songs which are not based on a folk tune or an original folk song.

Following the above-mentioned inclusion and exclusion criteria, this research has tried to evaluate the representation of folk songs on YouTube, their popularity and cultural representation. This research has further identified the blend in culture while digitally representing folk songs using the theoretical framework.

Dialectical Approach in Communication

This article attempts to examine the complex and baffling relationship between conversation and dialectics of folk song with a focus on their philosophical underpinnings. First, the terms dialectic and debate are defined, together with their background and range of applications. Retracing the history of these concepts via the evolution of the human mind is important. Second, it looks at how dialectics and dialogue relate to one another as well as numerous attempts to contrast, compare, or combine them. The major objective of this argument is to demonstrate that the dialogical approach and dialectics may be merged, despite their fundamental differences. It's critical to realize that links between various approaches, including dialogical and dialectical ones, are dynamic and change as the human mind does. What could have seemed unimaginable at one time in the development of human cognition becomes possible at another. It looks at the possibility of combining dialogism and dialectics as theoretical frameworks and the idea of their complementary development. Examining the philosophical and historical evolution of these connections can help dispel the myth that dialogues and dialectics are incompatible in any way, and it can also throw light on contemporary discussions in the field of dialogical education. Contrary to traditional learning, combining conversation and dialectics may allow for unexpected and unforeseen interactions in the realm of education. The integration of dialogue and dialectics in the sphere of education is outside the scope of the current study, which primarily concentrates on the logical analysis of dialogue and dialectics as theoretical frameworks.

Case Study 1: 'Moner Manush' (CokeStudio 2015)

'Moner Manush' is a popular folk song from Bengal originally written by the famous Bengali folk singer *'Lalon Fokir'*. Over the course of time this song has been improvised by a number of singers both from the genre of folk and contemporary music to enhance its popularity in recent times.

On coke studio India originally aired on MTV and now available on YouTube around 8 years ago this song was uploaded. This version of the song has been redesigned by Anupam Roy, Jeet Ganguly and Babul Supriyo. The folk part of this song was sung by Satyaki Banerjee but this representation has a blend of contemporary music and a portion in Hindi which is translated by the famous lyricist Javed Akhtar. The earthy voice of Satyaki Banerjee does complete justice to the original folk song 'Moner *Manush*'. However, if the representation of the song is clearly observed then along with traditional folk instruments like flute there is use of drums and contemporary musical instruments which leads to an improvised version of the original song. This episode has been uploaded on YouTube which features this song along with other songs composed by the musician trio. In addition to this, Coke studio has also uploaded this song separately due to its popularity among the audience. Even though this song was uploaded 8 years ago it still features among the top search results on YouTube when searched for Bengali folk songs and is also one of the most popular folk songs available on coke studio India.

This is a form of Baul song that talks about the soul mate and the plea of one partner to meet the other. This song also has a spiritual meaning where it can be interpreted that a devotee is requesting to meet God. **It can be further argued that this song transcends the mere literary meaning and has a spiritual implication of its own. According to this perspective, language itself has a dialogical aspect that applies to both written and spoken communication. Language might be understood as essentially an intersubjective social interaction rather than as a simple, formal, symbolic system. Bakhtin famously stated, "I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another." This is how he described the dialogic character of consciousness. (Bali, Boyd & Kalir, 2022). This definition of conversation may be seen as its fourth meaning, which goes beyond just language or literary events. The most important behaviours that comprise self-consciousness are determined by**

relationships to other consciousnesses (towards a thou). The closest communion may be made with a person's innermost selves. suggesting communication to indicate that one is for someone else while taking advantage of them for one's own gain.

On YouTube episode six of CokeStudio season four has 8.2 lakhs views and 187 comments. When this song was separately uploaded on the same channel it received 7.2 crore views and 14,603 comments. The latest comment on this video is on 14th April 2024 and is still counting. This shows that the popularity of this song is there till date even after eight years of it being uploaded. Some of the comments on this post expressed how the audience has repeatedly listened to this song on their days of happiness and sorrow and how they find it relevant till date. In terms of its representation, it can be said that this song has slightly drifted from its originality where along with the Baul form of song westernized formats of music has been introduced. The original song has been based on the Indian raga *Bheem Palasi* and it has been blended with western contemporary music and musical instruments like guitar and drums to give it a contemporary touch so that it reaches out to the mass audience.

Case Study 2: 'Jhumoor' (CokeStudio,2013)

Jhumor is a type of folk song that originated in the 15th century sage to be a part of pre-*Vaishnav Padabali* era. This form of folk song and folk dance has been an integral part of local festivals and rituals at the communities of Assam. Apparently, these folk songs talk about a number of cultures and rituals and are often used to carry information through messages to be easily interpreted by local people.

Dialogue is a key component of awareness. The word "consciousness" is derived from the Latin word conscious (con- 'together' + scientia- 'to know'). What is meant by "consciousness" is information sharing. A clever explanation of the term's origin is provided by Toulmin (1982): Naturally, the word "awareness" derives from the word

"knowledge. This is demonstrated by the Latin form, -sci-, that appears in the term's middle. If you consider the application in Roman law, the solution is not too difficult. When two or more actors cooperate after coming up with a common goal, putting together a shared strategy, and coordinating their activities, it results in conscience. Despite acting differently, they seem to be equally aware of one another's intentions. (Toulmin, 1982).

On coke studio India this song was aired on MTV in season 3, on 14 September 2013 this song has been uploaded on the YouTube channel of coke studio India and has gained 1.3 crore views and 2.8 thousand comments till date. The latest comment was made on 7th April 2024 and it's still counting.

On coke studio India this song is sung by Papon famous music composer, Duala Manki and SimanthaShekhar. This song represents the journey of tea gardeners from Assam. it beautifully addresses to a lady in an untidy bun comparing her to the view beauty of Vrindavan. gradually this song takes its audience to the reality of Paddy fields where wild birds often kills the crops. The song further depicts the struggle of farmers in Assam and how they struggle hard to chase the birds away from their land.

This folk song Talks about the painful journey of farmers and tea gardeners of Assam but the way in which it portrays the struggle is really mesmerising. While depicting the beauty of a lady, her untidy bun, silver chain that she's wearing and the Lotus flower that enhances her beauty the song depicts the struggle that farmers have to go through and how do they usually deal with such issue. This song has been appreciated by 1.3 crore viewers over the last 10 years and has been liked by 1.1 Lakh audience. This shows that digital platform it's like YouTube has enormous potential in making people aware about certain local culture which may or may not be known to them earlier.

In Assam the word “Jhum” depicts togetherness and the word “mor” represents coming in a line. So, in other words this form of music talks about bringing people together and being with them in the same line of thoughts and action. Jhumoor is also a form of tribal music or folk music in other parts of India like Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal but this version of the song at coke studio talks about Assam and the journey of Assamese farmers.

From the perspective of the representation of this song in this case as well modern instruments like guitar and drums have been used the singers have also worn modern attires like leather jackets while performing this song which completely drifts from the traditional culture embedded into the folk song.

Case Study 3: ‘Tokari’(CokeStudio, 2012)

Tokari is a Form of music instrument after which this song has been named. The song talks about Lord Krishna and how he plays a beautiful flute beside the banks of river Yamuna under the shade of a huge tree. This folk song from Assam narrates the life of little Krishna while he's playing with his female companions also known as *Gopis* and how they say that they would complain about him to his mother. The song also depicts how the mesmerizing tune on the flute makes the *Gopis* forget all the miseries and keeps them enchanted by its **tune**.

In this context it can be explained that the song promotes the notion of group efforts and motivating society. Hegel believed that knowledge is the result of a group effort. It bears many characteristics with the shift in the late 20th century from the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of inter subjectivity, which marked a substantial paradigm shift from the first-person singular to the first-person plural viewpoint. (Luther, 2009). Hegel's notion of absolute knowledge, however, and his presentation of his philosophical system as the pinnacle of the self-development of human intellect,

respectively, represent a monologic and an anti-dialectical idea. It is possible to find a conflict both within Hegel's understanding of dialectics and between his firmly held doctrine and his dialectical reasoning.

The representation of the song on coke studio India has tried to do justice to its original form. Along with western musical instruments like drums and guitar there are traditional folk instruments like *khol*, *tabla* and *tokari* which are often used as a part of the folk song in Assam. There is also a folk performer who dances on this song dressed in traditional attire adding up to the flavour of its representation.

This song originally aired on season 2 of coke studio and it was uploaded on the YouTube channel on 25th August 2012. Since then, the song has 94,00,000 views and has been liked by 93,000 people; it also has received 2354 comments till date with the latest comment being on 9th April 2024. This shows that even though the song was uploaded over a decade ago, it has gained immense popularity and is still appreciated by its audience till date.

Case Study 4: 'Bichua' (CokeStudio, 2011)

If the folk songs of Assam are discussed then the song Bichua holds a special place in the history of Indian music. The song was originally composed by Salil Chaudhary and sung by the legendary singers Lata Mangeshkar and Manna Dey for a film named Madhumati. This song has been based on Assamese folk tunes and it gained immense popularity among music lovers.

On the very first episode of season one of coke studio this song was recreated by Sunidhi Chohan, Mossom and Bondo. This song is the inaugural episode of Coke studio India had set the mood and tone for the audience to appreciate the new variety of folk song where modern instruments were clubbed with traditional instruments for the first time. Folk was earlier not thought to be contemporary among the urban and semi urban societies of India. It is with the

introduction of new format of music through coke studio that folk music gained popularity and it started being appreciated by the mass audience. **Considering the concept of the basic elements of folk music it can be explained that language plays an important role in communication between individuals through folk (Swartz, 1997).**

IV. Beliefs: Statements that individuals strongly consider to be true (Swidler, 1986).

It is always debatable whether folk media needs mass recognition or not but in order to preserve folk culture and spread awareness about the same it is important to ensure that people get to know about these cultures and their application. Apparently, this song talks about how a Scorpio has stung a woman but the inner meaning of the song talks about love and how love, even if it gets painful, has an intoxicating nature. This popular song based on a folk tune was recreated and uploaded on YouTube in the year 2011 and since then it has got 16,00,000 views and 408 comments with the recent comment being posted on March 2024. It can thereby be saved that even though these songs were uploaded over a decade ago yet its popularity remains high till date among the audience.

Case Study 5: 'Sundari Komola' (CokeStudio, 2013)

The song *Shundori Komola* is a traditional folk song from the hills of Bengal. This traditional form of folk song is known as *chukka* and it depicts feminine beauty celebrating the beauty of a lady Komola. For coke studio season 3 this song was recomposed by Ram Sampath and sung by Ursa Banerjee and Aditi Singh Sharma. At the introductory part of this song there are a few English lyrics sung to appreciate feminine beauty followed by the folk vocals with the original lyrics.

This song is a typical folk song talking about how beautiful a woman looks in a sari while she dances to the beats of *dotara*, a musical instrument. This composition included dotara as one

of the instruments being played along with other musical instruments like drums, guitar, percussions, saxophone and audio mixing instruments as seen during the performance. In terms of clothes, it can be seen that there is a mix of western and Indian outfits. The female singer who since the folk part is dressed up in a traditional sari while the ones singing the westernized contemporary part are dressed up in western attire. Similarly, there is a mixture of attires among the musicians who are seen at the performance. **From theoretical perspective it can be further analysed that the representation through attires plays an important role in the value system which is a set of principles of desirability, virtue, beauty, and other things that are culturally specific and serve as guides for social behaviour (Griswold, 2004). Hence, a conflict in behaviour can be observed here between the preconceived social behaviour and the need to blend with western culture for popularity.**

This song was uploaded on YouTube in August 2013 and since then it has received more than 2.7 crore views. This post has also received 5801 comments so far with the recent comment being posted on 14th April 2024. This song is related to the cultural proximity of people living in hills and appreciating the beauty of women from the hilly regions of Bengal. According to some anthropologists this song is a Rajbanshi song which is from the lower part of Assam and north Bengal. There is a controversy behind the history of this song. Some musicians comment that it's a form of Bavaria folk song which has evolved over the course of time in the 1950s originating in the 16th century under Vishwa Sinha. Even though there is a controversy behind the origin of this song it is no doubt one of the most popular folk songs from the east and northeastern region of India especially that of Bengal and Assam.

Case Study 6: 'Assam Jabo' (Banglar Gayen, 2021)

"Money Kori Assam Jabo" is a traditional folk song that talks about the pain and hardships of the poor people the lack of fuel to cook and how British people used to torture the poor. This

song is a part of a junior and Assamese folk song which originated in Assam. The song selected for the case study has been uploaded by a YouTube channel from Bangladesh named as *Banglar Gayen* In the year 2021 In this short span of time the song has gained 1.1 crore views with 1391 comments and 66,000 likes so far. The last comment was made on 14th April 2024. In this song it can be seen that the lead singer is entirely dressed in traditional Assamese folk attire starting from the make-up she's wearing and the headgear. The flowers and the jewellerys worn are also synced with the traditional attire of the community being represented. In terms of musical instruments here as well it can be observed that modern music instruments like guitar, drums, octopod and saxophone have been used along with traditional instruments likedhol, flute and dotara. However, in terms of visual representation of the culture it can be said that this performance shows the true flavour of Assam which was not seen before in the set up and attires represented in the previous case studies being analysed in this research. Even though this performance seems to be a picture perfect one yet there is a controversy in the comment section of this YouTube video where some of the audiences have written that this song is a sad song and the singers have sung this with smiling faces which lacked doing justice to its emotion. Moreover, this folk song does not talk about the popular concept of love or feminine beauty rather it talks about the struggles of the communities during the British era which is a more sensitive issue and requires more in-depth knowledge of the culture to be accurately interpreted by the audience.

Case Study 7: 'Kotha Koiyo Na' (CokeStudio Bangla, 2023)

*"Kotha Koiyo Na "*is a song which was recently made popular by Instagram reels in the last ten months. This song was uploaded by Coke Studio Bangla from Bangladesh in June 2023. Till date has got 5.9 crore reviews and 27.7000 comments with 5.6 lakh likes.

Even though this song is typically not from West Bengal and is based on the ancient folk ballads by *MaimansinghaGitika* from the eastern Bengal yet it is one of the most popular Bengali folk songs available on YouTube. In this regard this song has been selected for the case studies conducted for the present research. Just like the other performances this musical performance also includes the use of a number of western instruments like drums and guitar but the use of folk instruments here is far more than any other performances analysed in this research.

Instruments like , 'dholok, dholki, doogie and mandira', have been used with popular instruments like violin, sitar mandolin and flute. A combination of such a wide variety of musical instruments made this performance lively and has led to its enormous popularity in the last 10 months. This song has also contributed to the popularity of Coke Studio Bangla which is a version of coke studio from Bangladesh. **The song uses a dialogic approach which can be explained after Plato's dialogues, the earliest dialogical accounts in human history, were set in the ancient polis. After a lengthy gap in the history of human thinking, the conversation was revitalised in the 20th century in the writings of Russian literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. He developed a sophisticated theory of dialogism based on several concepts, such as dialogue, monologue, polyphony, heteroglossia, utterance, voice, speech categories, and chronotype. A wide range of dialogical techniques have been created and employed by several academics and professions.**

This song is also a love song that talks about the beauty of love just like the way in which a flower blooms blushing around. It also compares the beauty of the loved one to the beauty of the moon in the traditional way of folk. In terms of the attire, it can be seen that the female lead and the chorus are all dressed up in traditional clothes from Bangladesh however the lead male singers are dressed up in leather jackets adding up to the blend of contemporary texture to the

traditional folk song. This song is an exchange between the modern urban folk and the traditionally rooted voices through a dialogue action between the two groups of singers.

Case Study 8: ‘Bihu Naam’ (CokeStudio, 2011)

This song is an improvised version of Bihu songs of love which is a song at the new year in Assam or at the onset of this spring season. This song is recreated by Papon for Coke studio season 1 which was uploaded on YouTube in the year 2011. This is a romantic medley of Bihu songs where love and the new year is celebrated through various narratives.

This video has been liked by 35,000 people and has a view of 27,00,000 till date. It has received a total of 747 comments with the latest comment being posted on 13th of April 2024. This song has been sung absolutely in the traditional tone of Bihu with no introduction of Hindi or English or any other lyrics in other languages which retain the original vibe of the song. However, in terms of the use of musical instruments it can be seen that mostly western instruments have been used along with the flute to add up to the traditional song from Assam. **It is known that Language is a set of signals that enables communication between individuals (Swartz, 1997). In this content the use of the original language adds up to the cultural proximity of the folk song and its acceptance among the audience.**

Case study 9: ‘Dinae dinae’ (CokeStudio, 2013)

“*Dinae Dinae*” is a traditional *Goalpara* Assamese folk song sung by Papon on coke studio season 3. This video was uploaded on YouTube in September 2013 and since then it has received 2.3 crore reviews and 1.2 lakh likes. To add up to the beauty of this song, famous Punjabi singer Harshdeep Kaur has a portion of the song which has brought up a Punjabi texture to this song. This song talks about the lives of people and the cycle of life and death.

This is a song of high spirit that talks about letting go of all the worries of life and embrace it with happiness and joy. The addition of Punjabi version to this song in a way enhances the visual representation but in terms of the concept of folk music it deviates from the originality and the origin of this Assamese folk song. From this case study can we further question that when it comes to folk song what is more important is it reaching out to the wider number of audience or is it retaining to the original exclusivity of its music. **Language in folk song plays an important role, as said by Swartz, (1997), however, it can be seen that there is a use of mixed language in the performance which deviates the performance from the cultural proximity of the folk form of this music.**

Case Study 10: ‘Faguner Mohonaye’(Times Music Bangla, 2024)

“*Faguner Mohonaye*” is a folk song introduced by a Bengali band name *Bhoomi* in the year 2002 and since then this song has gained immense popularity. This folk song is originally based on the tracks of BU which is in the Assamese folk song with the lyrics in Bengali. However, the original song is not available on YouTube and the one which is topping the chart of the top 10 songs from the search results of this research is the one sung by Antara Nandy and Akita Nandy in 2024.

This music video has been uploaded by Times Music Bangla and it's not the live music performance done by the singers rather this is a dance performance by the singers and a group of performers who dance on this song in the video. In one month, this song has received 15,00,000 views on YouTube with 740 comments and 35,000 likes.

Even though all the performers in the music were dressed up in traditional Mongolian Assamese attire, the song is performed as a music video where the instrument used and the singing performance is not visible to the audience. This case study is definitely not like the other nine case studies done for this research but since it is in the top ten list and has gained

such huge popularity in just a month it definitely requires an analysis to see the reaction of audience to this folk song. **According to the Aristotelian concept its symmetrical thinking but digital super wave makes it asymmetrical on perception, appreciation and acceptance. When discourse reveals an osmosis exposure due to cultural hybridization and technological supremacy then vernacular rhetoric also defines a broader sense of human symbol, idea and emotion to satisfy global audiences. In case of this song a similar instance can be observed in terms of its representation.**

Conclusion

From this research it can be further concluded that when we talk about representation of folk songs on YouTube and other digital platforms the rigidity and ethnocentric nature of the music changes. This change has both a positive and a negative attribute. On the positive side the modern adaptation of the folk song helps to reach out to a wider range of audience across the globe. On the other hand, the blended version of such representation takes away the original flavour of the song and thereby the culture it has been associated with.

It is often argued that the nature of folk culture is to retain its ethnicity and ethnic centric behaviour. This is where many researchers have questioned why folk songs are required to be made popular among common people. Yet it can be further argued that since folk songs are an integral part of the culture of India it is important to restore it and let such beautiful representation of culture reach out to the widest range of audience possible. From the case

studies it has been observed that most of the popular songs are based on love or beauty of nature and femininity. On the contrary, Jhumoor is a typical local song talking about the life and struggle of a particular community which is more ethnocentric than the previous one. In addition to this the comments received till date shows how immensely popular this song is among its audience till date.

Unlike other songs which can be interpreted in different manners, folk songs have a story to tell which is very much exclusive to a particular community and it's not meant for the masses. The song "Assam Jabo" had led to a controversy among the audience because it is a sad song which was joyfully sung by the performers. This is where the cultural centricity of folk song lies. Folk culture cannot be classified into the available concepts of popular culture or mass culture. Now the challenge lies in retaining the popularity of folk songs with the intervention of digital media and at the same point of time keeping the soul of the song intact. Despite the controversies, it can be concluded from this research that digital platforms like YouTube have acted as a catalyst to propagate Bengali and Assamese Folk song across the globe.

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