



## The folk ballads or Gitikas of Bengal

Nasir Ahmed<sup>1</sup>, Piyali Chakraborty<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Teacher, Adhikary Krishnakanta High School, Darjeeling, West Bengal, India

<sup>2</sup> Guest Lecturer, Mass Communication & Videography, Vidyasagar University, West Bengal, India

### Abstract

The Folk Ballads or Gitikas are the heart of Bangai cultural and literary heritage. Gitikas or ballads are oral form of narrative poetry that narrate a single event or a dramatic story through dialogues. These Gitikas have an immense influence in Bengali literature. There are mainly two types of Gitikas in Bengali literasture-one is Purba bangla gitika or Maimansingha Gitika and the other is Nath Gitika. Maimansingha Gitika is also known by an alternative name, Purbabangla Gitika, is a collection of folk ballads from the region of Mymensingh, Bengal. They were published in English as Eastern Bengal Ballads. Chandra Kumar De and Dinesh Chandra Sen had patiently collected these songs, and the collection was published by the University of Calcutta, along with another similar publication named Purbabanga-gitika. This paper discussed the impact and importance of the Bengali gitikas in its literature.

**Keywords:** folk ballads literary heritage purba bangla gitika, maimansingha gitika, nath gitika

### Introduction

Bengali Gitikas has to be one of the most enriched branches of Bengali folklore. It is the tale that has been retold and passed over from generation to generation over the years through word of mouth. A great many characters are seen to appear in these tales: kings and queens, gods and goddesses, giants and ogres, ghosts and spirits, monks and priests, merchants and sailors and so on. These folktales not onyls ymbolises the cultural wealth of Bengal, but are also made rich by the in!uence of Arab and Indian folktales.

In the treasure trove of Bengali folklore, there are some folktales which are meant tobe musical representations. About four to five centuries ago, a series of tales originated in Bengal to make known to people the divine powers of the # ods. The story of \*erpent (#oddes 'ansha(which gave rise to a series of tales of serpent gods (was popularly known to the locals as the tale of Behula and Lakhindar. The Arab influence in the folktales of Bengal is strongly resonant in the tale of Oahim Badshahand Oupban. The story later became immensely popular through its renditions in lms and stage performances. These folktales of Bengal not only paint a vivid picture of the society of that time but also give lessons in morality, humanity and mortality. In these folktales, human compassion triumphs over the boundaries of religion, race and caste. In many of these tales, the women protagonists are highlighted by their character and perseverance rather than their beauty. In short, the indomitable passion for life has reverberated in these tales of.

### Origin and Genres

Since ancient days Bengal has fostered a rich cultural and literary heritage. Folk Ballads or Gitikas are considered the heart of cultural and literary legacy of Medieval Bengal. Gitikas or ballads are oral form of narrative poetry that recites

a single event or a dramatic story through dialogues. Gitikas have a great influence in our literature. Two types of Gitikas are found in Bengali literasture - one is Purba Bangla Gitika or Maimansingha Gitika and the other is Nath Gitika.

Dinesh Chandra Sen had some popular narrative ballads collected from greater Mymensingh with the help of local collectors and, after editing, published them in 1923 as a book under the title Maimansingha Gitika. After its publication it earned appreciation from all for richness of its contents and artistic quality. After reading 'Mahua', folk-lorist Stella Cromoreach commented- 'in the dizziness of fever I saw Mahua, Nader Chand and Humra as if in a vision. Whatever I have studied of Indian literature, I have not come across any story so touching, so simple and so fascinating. The sad story of Mahua dazed her.

Ashutosh Bhattacharya classified gitika into two categories. In addition to the East Bengal gitika, he classified some as belonging to South-East Bengal. Nizam Dakater Pala (The Story of a Pirate Named Nizam), Chowdhurir Ladai (The Fight between the Chowdhurys), Bheluya, Kafan Chor (The Shroud-thief), Ayna Bibi, Kamal Saodagar (Merchant Kamal), Nurunnessa O Kabarer Katha (Nurunnessa and the Stories of a Grave) are, according to Ashutosh Bhattacharya, examples of ballads of South-East Bengal, that is, the Noakhali and Chittagong regions. These gitika describe the occupations, adventurousness and cruelty of the people living in the coastal belt. Compared to these, the poems in Maimansingha-Gitika and Purbabanga-Gitika are more humane and gentle.

### Anecdotes and Evaluation

Maimansingha Gitika is one of the most celebrated and affluent treasures of Bengal. This is a collection of folk ballads from Mymensingh region and around Bengal. Most of the ballads were taken from the various true stories that

happened in parts of Mymensingh and were composed by the illiterate rural poets. Chandra Kumar De and Dinesh Chandra Sen collected most of those ballads and edited them. This collection was published from Calcutta University along with another publication named Purbabangla Gitika.

The basic themes of most of these folk ballads are love and romance with social conflicts arising out of several aspects of love. In these ballads we can also find a clear picture of the 17th century society of purba/ west-Mymensingh. At that period there was a Matri-tantrik/ stree prodhan shomaj bebostha (Women regulated social system)). That's why at every ballad we see women as the center character. The love and climax of rural lives were pretty skillfully depicted in these ballads by the country-poets. Some popular ballads from Maimansingha gitika are: Mahua, Malua, Chandravati, Komola, Dewan Bhabna, Dasyu Kenaram, Rupavati, Kanka O Leela, Kajalrekha, Dewan Madina, Isha Khan Dewan, Firoz Khan Dewan, Monohar Khan Dewan, Soorat Jamal O Adhua Sundari, Jiralni, Bhelua Sundari. MadanKumar O Madhumala, Gopini Kirtan, Vidyasundar Ramayan.

Mohua is one of famous ballads written by Dwija Kanai in seventeenth century. The hero and heroine of this ballad are Mahua and Nader Chand. This is an eternal love story. Mahua, a Brahmin girl, is the center character of the story. The story starts with 6 month old Mahua getting stolen by Humra Bede (Leader of a gypsy group), who brought her up in the gypsy community. Mahua's stunning beauty was the main reason for him to steal her. Their only job was to show performances. One day they reached Nader Chand's village where the destiny made him meet Mahua and fall in love at first sight. As soon as Humra came to know about their love affair he left that place immediately with Mahua. She tried to flee away from him to go back to Nader Chand. But the destiny took her to death slowly. On the way she was ill-treated by a merchant and a saint who would convince her that they could help her to get to her lover. She fought with every situation and got to her lover. But at the end they got trapped by Humra and the story ends with Mahua's tragic death. She had to kill herself to save her chastity and above all her love. In this story the country-poet has beautifully depicted a strong woman who represents Bengali women's beauty (both inner and outer), strength and love.

Chandrabati's tragic life touched many Bengali's heart. She was the first Bengali women poet of sixteenth century in a Hindu Brahman family. Chandrabati was very beautiful and fell in love with another Brahman boy Joaychandra. Soon they got married but their marital life didn't last long as Joychandra left her for another women. Chandrabati was broken hearted and chosen celibate life. Her father told her to engage herself in praying and made a temple next to his own temple for her. Chandrabati engaged herself in reciting and writing odes and in praying. By that time Joychandra realized his mistakes and wanted to win Chandrabatis heart again. When Joychandra came to chandrabati she was praying in her temple closing the door. Joychandra begged her to come back to him. As she was in deep prayer she didn't opened the door. Joaychandra wrote a love letter on the wall of the temple with red malati flowers (One kind of flower seen in Bengal) and committed suicide drowning on the river next to the temple. When Chandrabati finished her prayer and opened the door it was too late.

Chandrabati couldn't bear that separation of beloved ones. So, she also killed herself. Chandrabatis love and longing inspires Bengali women in their values of life.

The book contains ten ballads 'Malua, Chandravati, Kamala, Dewan Bhabna, Dasyu Kenaramer Pala, Rupabati, Kobko O Leela, Kajolrekha and Dewan Madina. The names of the writers of some of the ballads are known from their ritualistic introduction. For instance, Mahua's writer was Dwij Kanai, Chandravati's writer was Nayanchand Ghose, Kamala's writer was Dwij Eishan, Dasyu Kenaramer Pala's writer was Chandravati and Dewan Madina's writer was Mansur Bayati. The names of four writers are mentioned for Konka O Leela ' Damodar Das, Roghu Soot, Sreenath Binod and Nayanchand Ghose. The names of the writers of the other ballads are not yet known. The ballads having names of their writers are however indistinguishable in poetic style. In fact, they largely appear similar in themes, artistic and linguistic styles and presentation. The stories have been picked up from the folk society and local history.

These ballads primarily feature the life stories of the mortal beings and not of religion. Except the Dasyu Kenaramer Pala, all other nine ballads reflect the worldly loves of men and women, some ending as comedies and others as tragedies. The ballads are named after the heroines. The roles of the heroines are brighter and more lively compared to those of the heroes. The heroines struggle more and sacrifice more than their men in establishing the depth of love. The steadfastness of women's love and boldness of their character make some critics believe that the ballads may have been influenced by some matriarchal society. In eulogizing the roles of female characters,

Dinesh Chandra Sen claims in the foreword of the book: "The female characters of the ballads vividly reflect invincible forces in love, inviolable purity of self-respect and humiliating defeat of the oppressors. Womanhood has risen not by memorizing religious hymns but by way of love." Thus, the predominant theme in the gitika is that of love, licit and illicit, as in the following gitika: love- 'Mahuya', 'Maluya', 'Kamala'; spiritual love- 'Chandravati', post-marital love- 'Dewana Madina'. These primarily feature the life stories of the mortal beings and not onreligious belief.

In this context, mention may be made of the Purbababga Gitika. Following the success of his Maimansingha Gitika, Dineshchandra Sen collected many more ballads from such areas as Mymensingh, Noakhali and Chattagram and after editing published them as Purbobanga Gitika (1926) in three volumes. Local village people call them 'pala gan'. Dineshchandra Sen used 'gitika' to render English term 'ballad' into Bengali. Bengali ballads are narrative stories in songs. But these have enough spaces for dramatic dialogues. A singer narrates the entire story and dialogues of the dramatic characters in songs. Choristers repeat after him as the musicians play on their instruments.

### Conclusion

By analyzing the period of appearance of the writers, the themes of the ballads, socio-economic background and linguistic features, it is assumed that the ballads were written in the Middle Age. 'Kajolrekha' is a legendary ballad. Its theme is of ancient nature. All other ballads reflect the social

ideas and values of medieval society. Such characters as kings, zamindars, dewans, kazis, karkuns or revenue officials, saodagar or merchants, pirs and darveshes, sadhus and sanyasis indicate the obvious impact of Muslim rule.

These folk ballads of Bengal paint a vivid picture of the society of that time nay, give lessons in morality, humanity and mortality. In these folktales, human compassion triumphs over the boundaries of religion, race and caste. The predominant theme in the gitika is that of love, licit and illicit the common rural folks are the audience. They sit around the stage to enjoy in utter enchantment the musical and dramatic beauty of the ballads. On the other hand portrays an account of the rural life of that time period. Despite bearing the values of a feudal society, the ballads of Maimansingha Gitika uphold the supremacy of human love, individuality of persons, concern for worldly affairs and values of morality. These features have given the ballads such literary merit and status as comparable to those of the novels of the modern times.

### References

1. Dr. Dinesh. Chandra Sen, Moimonshingho Gitika (Bengali): A Collection of Bengali Poems, editionNEXT.com, 2014.
2. Bengali Folk-Ballads from Mymensingh and the Problem of Their Authenticity" by Dusan Zbavitel Review by: Niharranjan Ray, Indian Literature. 1964; 7(2):127-129. Sahitya Akademi, Stable URL: <https://www.jstf.or.org/stable/23329262>
3. Ahmed Wakil Ahmed. Maimansingha Gitika". In Islam, Sirajul; Jamal, Ahmed A. Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh (Second ed.). Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2012.
4. Badiuzzaman ed, Momenshahi Gitika, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1971.
5. Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen. History of Bengali Language And Literature (A Series of Lectures Delivered As Reader To The Culcutta University), vol.1,Gyan Publishing House, 2007, ISBN-13: 978-8121209359, 2007