

# Kaleidoscope of Baiga Folksongs: Reading the Generic Forms and Literary Devices

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The Baiga is one of the primitive tribes who basically reside in the provinces of Central India. In early days they used to live in dense forests; and even today they live in highly remote areas where there is no mobile and road connectivity. Being of shy nature, they hardly get mixed up with other communities and with that of the main stream life. Highly rich in literariness and literary devices, the Baiga literature reflects tribal culture and the tribal mindset. Literature is so infabricated in their lives that they worship with it; they travel with it; they sing while grazing their cattle and working in the fields, while going to jungle while cutting the wood. There is hardly any literature in the world which is as varied in themes and subjects as the Baiga literature is. In Baiga culture, a very minor activity, a very minor incident is celebrated and that celebration is always followed or complemented by some literary performance.

Baigas have a rich literary tradition breeding several streams or genres of literature. The very exquisite thing about their literature is that they have different forms of songs for different purposes and occasions. Say, for sending a friendship proposal, for going to work, for women discussing their own experiences, for marriage and songs of separation along with songs sung at different times and occasions of the year.

Anthropologists like Verrier Elwin state that Baiga poetry lacks in exact form or body. Their songs and music depend mostly on dance and very often they are created to suit the occasion, while, other songs are forms of an extempore with certain variations in their rhyme and rhythm. References are also found that few of the Baiga songs belong to individuals who have a rare poetic gift to create songs on different themes and on their personal experiences. Verrier Elwin also might have had the same observation when he writes, "A few (songs) belong to gifted individuals: they are not exactly copy right property, but they are generally associated with the owners' names, and normally sung only in their presence. Thus the beautiful Pharria of Amtera has her own *Karma*, which she introduces whenever she goes to dance: she used to sing it quietly to her husband in the early days of their affection, and it bound her strongly to him." (Verrier Elwin 437) Elwin again comments on the measures and literary techniques of the Baiga folksongs. He writes, "The form of the songs depend so entirely on the dance or the tune to which they are sung that it is impossible to give standard measures for each kind. Words are clipped, altered or repeated, quantities are changed, meaningless ejaculations are inserted in complete freedom in order to fit the main burden of the song to the tune." (Elwin 437)

Keeping an anthropologist's eye, Elwin might not have observed the depth and richness of Baiga literary forms and sub forms in terms of their form and content. Rest of the works done on Baiga literature is only a compilation of songs, giving no description about their generic specialties. If we read Baiga literature from the viewpoint of a student of literature, keeping in mind the literary devices, literary terms and figures of speech, an altogether different picture of what have already been said will appear. Taking up the forms and sub forms and an in-depth study of the aesthetic aspects will present a justification.

Now to read the Baiga literature in depth, it will be necessary to know the folksongs and other branches of their literature in terms of generic specifications along with its various forms and sub forms as: **Karma Songs:** *Chadhanu Karma, Utaru Karma, Jhumar Karma, Khadgaiya Karma, Jhapeta Karma, Lahaki Karma*; **Dadariya Songs:** *Thadhi Dadariya, Jhulaniya Dadariya, Jodani Dadariya*; **Jharapat Songs;** **Bilma songs;** **Religious Songs:** *Nacha Geet, Bar Geet, Dhol Geet, Paitharu Geet*; **Reena and Suwa Songs;** **Danda Geet;** **Rahi Songs;** **Kissa (Folktales), Mythak (Myths), Dhandha (Riddles), Aahanran Proverbs; Mantra (Mantras) etc.**

**Karma Songs.** The most popular and widely sung by the Baiga community, the *Karma* Song has six sub forms, depending on the pace of the song and dance. All these songs are sung in this very sequence; and if started it has to be completed with *Lahaki Karma*. All these *Karmas* are dance songs accompanied by various musical instruments like *Mandar, Thiski, Timki, Paijana* etc. It is a form of literature that the Baigas sing to celebrate a festival, function, an occasion, and also to express personal feelings and emotions for their partners. About the *Karma* songs, Elwin writes, "The karma songs are much longer than the Dadariya; they are generally sung at a dance, but sometimes privately between lovers or carelessly as a man might sing a refrain from an opera." (Elwin 444). About the metrical specifications of the *Karma*, Elwin writes, "they are occasionally rhymed and are then called the *Lahaki Karma* which are able to tear a man away from his family and make him forget the whole world in wonder of the rhythm." (Elwin 444) This statement appears untrue, Elwin might have viewed rhythm in the context of English poetry. He might not have taken the word rhythm in the real sense of the term rather he has misunderstood it with beat since *Lahaki Karma* is no exception from the other *Karma* sub forms. The only difference is that it is fastest in beat. Most of the documented *Karma* songs appear to follow the rhyme scheme and a certain rhythm. He further states that "the form of the *Karma* varies greatly and there is more delightful onomatopoeic nonsense in these songs than in any other." (Elwin 444) The sounds which Elwin has called "onomatopoeic nonsense" is called **thek** in Baiga literary terminology which actually are words or sounds used just for the sake of maintaining rhythm and enhancing the aesthetic affect and are having no meaning of their own. For example, "Haa rey", "Haijar Maayaa", "Kaabangaiga", "Ree-ree-reenaa", "Daihaa Sahich" etc.

The *Karma* has six sub forms which are more or less similar in themes but different in dance beat and rhythm. They are: *Chadhanu Karma, Utaru Karma, Jhumar karma, Khadgaiyan Karma, Jhapeta Karma and Lahki Karma*.

a) **Chadhanu Karma.** *Chadhanu karma* sets the beginning of dance and singing. It has varied themes, ranging from prayer, love songs, about weather, marriage etc. These songs are fast in rhythm and the musical instruments used in dance are *mandar, thiski, timki, paijana* etc.

b) **Utaru Karma.** This song is sung after *Chadhanu* and is in decreasing rhythm and pace as the name "Utaru" signifies. *Utaru Karma* is sung to give relief to singers and dancers. Like *Chadhanu Karma*, this is sung on almost all the themes; but, unlike the former, while singing the singers and dancers dance in a circle.

c) **Jhumar Karma.** *Jhumar Karma* comes after *Utaru* and is sung about all the themes as *Chadhanu* and *Utaru Karma* songs are sung. Like *Utaru*, the singers and dancers

dance in a circle while singing but the pace and rhythm becomes even slower than that of the Utaru Karma. It is again sung to relief the singers from weariness.

d) *Khadgaiyan Karma*. In Khadgaiyan Karma, the song and the dance is a bit faster than that of the Utaru and Jhumar Karma. The singers and the dancers also sing about all the themes as they sing in Chadhanu, Utaru and in Jhumar Karma and dance in a circle.

e) *Jhapeta Karma*. The theme of the Jhapeta Karma is same as is that of the previous sung Karma songs. But the pace and rhythm is faster than that of the previous one. The Jhapeta Karma that the Baiga people sing is different from Jhapeta that the Gond sings. It differs from the latter in dance, song and musical instruments.

f) *Lahki Karma*. Lahaki Karma is sung with the fastest rhythm, pace and beat because this is a sort of "Epilogue" to all the forms of Karma songs. In this song, the singers sing with utmost vigour and zeal and the dancers reciprocate the same. With the Lahaki Karma, the singers and dancers conclude their song and the arena of the song is similar as that of the other Karma songs.

**Dadariya Songs.** Unlike *Karma* which is a dance song, the *Dadariya* song is meant only to be sung i.e. no dance accompanies the song. There are two parties one of boys and one of girls who sing *Dadariya* on various occasions like going to forest, fare and festivals or going to work and mainly in wedding. About the *Dadariya* song, Elwin states, "The *Dadariya* . . . are the true ban-bhajan or forest songs. They are sung by the Baiga and other hill tribes as they go to the work in the forest. A group of Baiga by the fire often suddenly burst out in singing – and it is the *Dadariya* that they sing. Young lovers sing them to each other, and many a proposal has been made and elopement arranged in verse. . . . (F)rom the depths of the forest comes a song fresh and thrilling, with a lilt, a joy, an excitement that that never stales." (Elwin 438)

*Dadariya* is very short and most of the time many *dadariya* songs are merged together to make a longer poem. The *Dadariya* is sung in a question answer form i.e. it is a form of *kowali* where the singers are divided into two parties; one party questions in verse to the other party and the latter answers. Similarly, while singing the *Dadariya* song, the Baigas are divided into two groups: one group will be of boys and the other groups will be of girls. Hence, it becomes one of the most significant source of recreation for the Baiga people. Like *Karma*, the *Dadariya* is also sung on all occasions including marriage. The *Dadariya* has three sub forms: the *Thadhi Dadariya*, the *Jhulaniya Dadariya* and *Jodani Dadariya*.

a) *Thadi Dadariya*. It is very simple song in question answer form. Since one group will have to question and the other has to answer, both the parties have to create the song immediately.

b) *Jhulaniya Dadariya*. It is also like the *Thadi Dadariya* but its rhythm and rhyme changes to change the mode and theme of the song. It is noteworthy that most of the time both *Thadi* and *Jhulaniya Dadariya* start from question.

c) *Jodani Dadariya*. Unlike *Thadi* and *Jhulaniya Dadariya*, *Jodani Dadariya* is sung in form of an answer, i.e. if one group or person has to answer the question raised by the first group or person, he/she will sing *Jodani Dadariya*.

**Jharpat Songs:** The *Jharpat* is a song which is sung by a group of boys or girls while entering another village on any occasion. If the *Jharpat* song is initiated by a group of boys, it will be answered by a group of girls and vice-versa. This song is sung to celebrate any occasion, especially when a group of singers (boys or girls) goes to another village with a proposal of friendship, the *Jharpat* song is sung by them. It is very interesting and astonishing that during the celebration, the boys and girls have liberty to propose and choose their partners; if a girl chooses a boy she likes and follows him to his village after the celebration gets over, the boy will, if he is bachelor, have to marry her and he cannot refuse her proposal. Like other Baiga songs, *Jharpat* songs also “give us vivid, intimate pictures of Baiga life such as no study or questioning could elicit. They illuminate not only the love affairs, but ordinary details of everyday life.” (Elwin 454).

**Bilma Songs:** *Bilma* song may be identified as a kind of Epithalamion in Baiga culture. It's a marriage song sung at the time of wedding. About the *Bilma* song, Elwin says that it is a marriage song where the Baigas celebrate their wedding with *Bilma* song and dance. Throwing light on the musical instruments use in *Bilma* song, he writes, “The *Bilma* is marriage dance. It differs from the *Karma* and the *Jharpat* which are danced to the *mandar* drum, and the *Dassera* which is danced to the *dhol* drum by being accompanied by the big deep *nangara*.” (Elwin 436). He further meditates, “Like the marriage itself, it is exciting and confused. The (singers and the) dancers gather near the drum, and when there are enough they cry, “kiring kiring”, the drums begin, and everybody begins to dance just where they are, men and women mixed together, bending low, stepping up and down very fast.” (Elwin 436).

*Bilma* songs very often have various aspects of feelings of a couple as love, marriage, pangs of parting of the lovers, sweet recollections of a widow/widower about her/his partner after her/his death or absence etc. as its theme. *Bilma* song is also related to certain rituals in marriage ceremony; so, it has a great cultural and religious importance amongst the Baiga tribe. Here it becomes very significant to notice that Baiga literature in all forms can help a person to know about the Baiga culture, their beliefs, rituals and above all their mindset not from one but from many stand points.

**Reena Suwa Songs.** *Reena* song is sung by girls only. This song is sung from Dushehara to Diwali. Girls of two different villages sing *Reena* song and then meet with each other as friends. In other words, this song is a kind of friendship proposal from one Baiga girl to another. It is important to note that on this occasion, only song is sung with a dance; and no musical instrument is played but *thiski*. The other important point from woman's point of view is that it is only the *Reena* song which emerges as a distinguished literary genre which revolves around women only and is completely devoid of male interference. Further, it probably happens for the first time in the history of any literature in the world which has a separate and distinguished genre which is practiced by and dealt with women only.

Like *Reena* song, *Suwa* song is another distinctive literary genre which is practiced by women only. It is very interesting that Baiga women sing *suwa* (Parrot) songs and share their experiences, feelings, sentiments etc. to a parrot. Like *Reena* song, in *suwa* song too there is no male interference. In this form of song women assume that they do not have any person who could be able to understand their feelings and sentiments so to give an outlet to their feelings and sentiments, they keep a parrot (*suwa*) and talk to it while

singing. The most common themes of suwa songs are teasing each other and description of their ornaments.

**Religious Songs.** Religious song is basically of four kinds: a) *Nacha Geet*, b) *Bar Geet* c) *Dhol Geet* and d) *Paitharu Geet*. *Nacha Geet* is sung while dancing. *Nacha* means dance. In this form of song dance is more prominent mode of worship. *Dhol* song is sung with a musical instrument called *dhol* (*drum*) to please gods and goddesses. In *Bar Geet* both the parties sing and dance together. This song is often sung by elderly persons. *Paitharu Geet* is sung to control local gods (*Deeh Baba*) and goddesses through their hymns and to invoke them by chanting *mantras*.

It is significant to notice that though the critics of the Baiga take names of many gods and goddess which the Baiga trust in and worship but in these names the names of “Sarasoti”, “Nabada” and “Saarad” do not appear. And it is also remarkable that their religious songs only are only sung in praise of the three deities. It could be said that this tradition of praising saarsoti or any other goddess before any performance or ritual is a recent development and has not been a customary practice. Whenever they are invoking some supreme power is always the goddesses they have faith in. Here it is significant to notice from a woman’s viewpoint that Baigas keep women in high esteem.

**Danda Geet.** This is a song sung by both boys and girls. This is like shaila songs. It’s dance is different from other songs and dances. This song is sung at the time of khichadee (Poos Ki Poornima). This song is sung throughout Poos and will end on Poornima. Hence, the song is sung throughout the month.

**Baiga Faag.** “Baiga Faag” is sung on the occasion of Holi. In the month of Falgun, they sing “Faag” throughout the month with full vigour and zeal. Everyday evening, they sit in the verandah and throw colours on each other and sing *Faag* late at night or throughout night. All the persons from Baiga community, elderly persons as well as young, participate in singing *Faag*. “Faag” again is a form of Hindi literature; it could be said to have a recent origin due to assimilation of their culture with adjoining mainstream cultures.

**Kissa (Folktales).** Kissas are stories prevalent amongst the Baigas which are communicated orally to the younger generations and are generally bearing details of their lifestyle, religious faith, morals, encounter with animals *etc.* Most of Baiga folktales are beast fables.

**Mythak (Myths).** Myths are their prevalent beliefs detailing about their origin, origin of their gods, holi shrines, and about the origin of rivers *etc.*

**Dhandha (Riddles).** Dhandhas are the brain teasers generally about some fruits, beasts or insect, or about human nature or follies *etc.* They are generally in a poetic form. Their *Dhandhas* show their minute observation of their surrounding, about human nature and reflect their wisdom.

**Aahanran (Proverbs).** Aahanran are the prevalent sayings. They may be said as an expression of Baiga’s practical wisdom and power to observe. Sometimes their proverbs help them to assess the things happen in their life and world; and it helps them to convey their experiences and ideas to their coming generations, in a nut shell.

**Literary terms and Devices:**

**Thek** in Baiga literary terminology actually are words or sounds used just for the sake of maintaining rhythm and enhancing the aesthetic affect and are having no meaning of their own. For example, "Haa rey", "Haijar Maayaa", "Kaabangaiga", "Ree-ree-reenaa", "Daihaa Sahich" etc.

**Moor.** The beginning two lines of their songs are called "moor". They are repeated (Incremental Repetition) after every stanza to emphasize the poetic effect they are repeated with *thek*. In Hindi literature *moor* is called "*mukhada*".

**Padd.** The rest of the body of the songs excluding the first two lines is called "Padd". In Hindi literature *padd* is called "*antara*". Every padd will be followed by the moor again in Baiga songs.

In Baiga songs, incremental repetition, imagery, symbols, and various figures of speech like similes, onomatopoeic sounds, alliteration, and metaphors have frequent occurrences.

**Works cited**

Verrier Elwin. *The Baiga*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1939.