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Pages from the Old Records

Dhirendra Nath Majumdar: Biographical Notes

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Professor Dhirendra Nath Majumdar (1903-1960) was born as the eldest son of Kusum Kumari and Rebati Mohan Majumdar in Patna on 3 June 1903. He graduated from Calcutta University and received his M.A. degree from the same university in 1924. In 1928, he joined Lucknow University as a lecturer in the Department of Economics and Sociology and remained there till his untimely death in 1960. He went to England in 1933 to work for his doctorate at Cambridge, and he was awarded his degree in 1935. Prof. Majumdar was also the Visiting Professor, Cornell University, USA and Visiting Lecturer, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. In 1951, he persuaded Lucknow University to start an independent Department of Anthropology of which he was appointed as the Head. At the time of his death, he was Professor of Anthropology and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Lucknow. A few among his countless outstanding contributions to the academics was the establishment of the Ethnographic and Folk-Culture Society (U.P.) in 1945 to collect ethnographic data on the folk culture of U.P. and founding a quarterly journal called *The Eastern Anthropologist* of which he remained life-long editor.

Prof. Majumdar had a great reputation as a field ethnographer. He carried out extensive field investigations among the Adivasis of Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. His method of study was to spread out long years in the area of study, interspersed by long and short trips. He laid stress on the learning of local Adivasi languages and gave precedence to the study of a whole culture over the study of a particular problem. His ethnography thus studies a wide range of human activities and institutions such as economy, religion, kinship, birth and death. In 1924, he undertook fieldwork among the Hos of Kolhan in the present West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand in the company of the great Indian scholar and ethnographer Sarat Chandra Roy. Both Roy and Bronislaw Malinowski deeply influenced him. His painstaking fieldwork in Kolhan in 1924 resulted in the production of four research articles which were published simultaneously in the *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, New Series, Volume XX, 1924 (Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1925). These articles appeared in the journal as Article No. 16: 'Physical characteristics of the Hos of Kolhan', 171- 179; Article No. 17: 'Some of the Characteristics of Kolarian Songs', 181-192; Article No. 18: 'The Traditional Origin of the Hos; together with a brief description of the chief Bongas (or gods) of the Hos', 193-197; and Article No. 19: 'On the Terminology of Relationship of the Hos of Kolhan' 199-204. These early articles of Prof. Majumdar provide rich data which supplement his later full scale works on the Hos of Kolhan, *A Tribe in Transition*, Longmans Green & Co. Ltd, London & New York, 1937 and *The Affairs of a Tribe*, Universal Publishers Ltd., Lucknow, 1950.

Of these four articles, Article No. 17: 'Some of the Characteristics of Kolarian Songs' is being reproduced here in full for reading and reference.

Some of the characteristics of Kolarian Songs.

By D. N. MAJUMDAR, M.A.

The songs of the Hos or Kols, may be grouped under four well defined heads :—

1. General songs, depicting general ideas, the economic conditions of the people, the principles of living, etc.
2. Love songs.
3. Moral songs, through which the poet wishes to impart moral instructions to the people. Moral songs may be subdivided into two groups—
 - (a) those addressed to young men,
 - (b) those addressed to young women.
4. Miscellaneous songs, which mostly relate to domestic affairs, articles of food, etc.

There are a few songs which may be taken as commemorating some fights in early times all of which refer to 'Bundu' and 'Tamara.' These two places are in the Ranchi district, but definite historical evidence about fights is lacking. Usually reference is made to these two places in Ba and Jadur songs. This may be due to the fact that Ba and Jadur dances and songs are imported from 'Bundu' and 'Tamara.' They do not originally belong to Singbhum. Ba and Jadur songs also contain words or sentences of 'Bundu' and 'Tamar' people. The following song may be quoted as an example :

(1)

noko kore go ko thupunz, tana
 bunduko topo do rara rurua
 chema kore go ko mapa, tana
 sare kapi do jilab jolob
 bundu pirire ko thupunz, tana,
 bunduko topo do rara rurua,
 tamara badi reko mapa tana,
 sare kapi do jilab jolob.

English translation :

Where are the people shooting one another ?
 The guns and cannons are roaring.
 Where are the people striking one another ?
 The arrows and axes are glittering.
 People are shooting one another in the Bundu field.
 There the guns and cannons are thundering.

People are striking one another in the Tamara field.
There the arrows and axes are glittering.

1. *General songs.*

The Hos are a happy-go-lucky people. The following song reflects to a great extent their mentality.

(2)

Maghe.

rasikana ba somdi,
nen jibon mena reba rasikana kong
nen jibon mena reba rasikana kong
kabu nameya samdi,
nelekan rasika do kabu nameya kong
nelekan rasika do kabu nameya kong
kabu tarina somdi,
nole hasa leka do kabu tarina kong
buru daru leka do kabu sagouoh kong

English translation :

Let us be merry my dear.
Be merry as long as this life lasts.
We shall not find,
We shall not find such joy.
We shall not live for ever, my dear,
Like the earth we shall not be lasting.
Like trees we do not shoot out into new leaves.

This song gives a true picture of Ho life. Outside engagements may require a Ho to toil hard from morning till evening but he must turn up punctually at the village akhara after his evening meal, and he must take part in the village dance every night. Cares and anxieties he seems to have none. Usually he does not think about the future, but improvident as he is, he has little to safeguard from pilfering or theft. He is intensely attached to his own village and loves to live amongst his people and to die in the village to be buried in the family burial place. Age has little experience to transmit, for he forgets easily. He lacks initiative. With a smiling face, smoking his 'ficca' he will approach his employer and do as he is bid and after the day's toil will retire with a smiling countenance. As long as the parents are alive, he has no cares, he does not even worry about his own bread, for, it must come.

(3)

negang napung taikena
sodom jom go gome keshari chetanerenha
negang napung bangay jana
sodom jom go gome keshari nosorejana.

English translation :

While your parents lived
 You were on soft 'keshari.'
 When your parents are dead
 The soft fodder withers away.

'Keshari' (*Lathyrus sativa*) is a kind of pulse. It is a luxury with the Hos and so soft keshari stands for a luxurious dish. As long as the parents live, the Hos get that luxurious dish, i.e. they have not to struggle for their bread but with the death of the parents, especially the father, they are put to difficulties. Besides, as long as they remain bachelors, they are comparatively free from worldly cares.

(4)

dinda thaname jarma thaname supered
 othe thopre pinda dom thega thega ya
 othe thopre pinda dom thega thega ya
 andi, hanam korandi hanam supered,
 othe thopre pinda tham mukui chethane ya
 othe thopre pinda tham mukui chethane ya
 honanam hoponanam supered,
 hone jirim jipida stri konre,
 hone jirim jipida stri konre,

English :

Oh youth, when you were a bachelor, you kicked at your
 dhoti which reached the ground,
 Now when you were married oh youth,
 The ground-kissing dhoti rose up to the knees.
 Again, when you get children
 It is a troublesome burden to you.

(5)

kora non nem janom lena,
 bir jantu leka ge disumen nonora
 " " " " " "
 nam nam lagedethe
 negam napum ko ji ko nakaring than
 " " " " "
 chanabredo badredo
 kalijug kuri rem chaka dejana.

English translation :

Being born a male child
 You are roaming about the country like a wild animal,

After searching for you
 Your parents have lost their hearts
 And you at last
 Are enticed by a woman of 'kalijug.'

A woman of 'kalijug' implies a woman of easy virtue.¹ The young men, so long as their parents alive, have no cares and anxieties, they seldom remain at home and roam from place to place, indulging in dances and romances. The parents are very affectionate, they do not stand in their way but provide them with food and shelter ungrudgingly. It is only when the young people get married that they settle down and live a family life.

2. Love Songs.

The principal motive which induces a Ho to take to matrimony seems, at first sight, to be an economic one. The woman cooks his food, does all his household work, helps him in his field work, takes care of his children, fetches water from the river or the neighbouring 'bandh' and is a valuable asset to the domestic life. The Ho men are weak in health, lazy and incapable of doing much work. This is probably due to excessive drinking of rice-beer or 'handia.' But the economic motive is not the only one in matrimony; the element of love enters very largely, for the principle of mutual selection reigns supreme. Even where the bride and the bridegroom are passive and take no active part and the parents of both settle the marriage, the final choice rests with the bride and the bridegroom. Before a host of relatives and villagers, male and female, the bride and the bridegroom have to interchange looks and if they agree to the marriage, they have to distribute handia to all the relatives on either side. First the bridegroom offers handia to the bride who, if she approves of the former, distributes the liquor to all her relatives, male and female. The bride then has to repeat the process and when both have agreed, the marriage is settled. The refusal to take the liquor on either side breaks off the proposed union.

Further the existence of intrusion marriage amongst them, goes to show that the element of love plays a great part in matrimony. The custom of purchasing the bride is prevalent among the Hos and the bride-price is getting so high that the number of regular marriages is decreasing day by day. And yet we often find that a girl would intrude into the house of her lover, to stay with his people as a drudge, eking out her living by the sweat of her brow. The harsh treatment which

¹ "Kalijuga" is the fourth and most recent "Yuga" (pronounced 'juga' in Bengali) in the orthodox Hindu chronology. It is full of vice and represents the lowest level of moral life. This term has evidently been borrowed from the Hindus.

she receives at the hands of her would-be mother-in-law, sometimes proves too much for her patience and she leaves the house. But this is rare, for, the girl comes prepared for all sorts of ill treatment. Such sacrifice on the part of a girl may come about in two ways. If a young man and a young girl fall in love, and if circumstances stand in the way of effecting their union and the former stands aside, the girl, if her affection for the boy is strong enough, intrudes into the house of her lover, and if she can, by her service, render herself useful to the household; she is allowed to remain in the house of her lover. Or sometimes if a young woman admires a young man secretly, the only way open to her is to intrude into the house of her idol. In some cases, a young man is taken by surprise. The following song expresses the feelings of a young man on such an occasion.

(6)

baring doya doyathe
 sikinisir sonanapanum nothong helena kong
 namdom boroy than baring "
 kadal sakom lir lipir nam dom boroy than,
 kalang boroy baring kalang boroy
 diri jol bangala ¹ re naieng thenguna.

English translation :

After my brother followed a fair young girl with a necklace of silver coins.
 My brother, you are afraid,
 You are trembling like the leaves of a banana tree,
 We do not fear,
 We stand on stone bungalows.

A young girl has intruded into the house of a young man and the latter has been trembling with fear. The brother of the young man has passed to manhood so he is safe, the young women will not follow him, he is as it were, in a stone bungalow.

A reference to the following songs will explain the importance of mutual attachment in matrimony.

(7)

nedar buru jolare
 bapalechi baletan sengel juletan
 kana napui bapal, kana napui sengel
 baring hecha jiri batan.

¹ This is the ordinary Anglo-Indian word '*Bungalow*'—usually a tiled house.

English translation :

There on the slope of yonder forest,
Is it 'bapal' blazing or fire burning ?
It is not 'bapal,' it is not fire,
But the heart of my brother.

'Bapal' is a small triangular area covered with grass, located on the junction of two or more village paths.

This is a love song. The allusion is to a love intrigue between a young man and a young woman which resulted in an union of the two hearts. A youth was in love with a young girl and his heart was burning with the flame of love. The couple eloped, but the brothers of the girl followed them to force her to come back and this gave an occasion for the woman to make a sarcastic reference to the action of the brothers, for they have no cause of grievance as she eloped of her own accord with her lover.

(8)

Maghe.

tondung beter sumudi nidimega sanangi dinda sumudi,
jirim kusi janredo suped reyabara nangebaratan
jetilolom meneredo nando chatomeing sabeya namdo
gugulo.

bari meko sangitana nirjabeta langeko dinda sumudi,
nirja beta langeko biri lidi lidi relang chakadatukua.

English translation :

Oh maid of the forest region, I wish to have you as my partner.

If you sincerely love me, deck me with the flower in your lock of hair ;

If you feel the heat of the sun, I will hold the umbrella over your head.

Brothers you have many, who may follow us and find us, oh maid,

They may find us, but we will throw dust into their eyes, hiding in dense bushes.

Whenever a girl elopes or is carried away by some young man, the brothers of the girl with all relatives and friends follow the pair and offer fight to the friends of the young man. So love songs are often sung with a touch of apprehension.

(9)

chethane pukuri rila mala, lathare pukuri rila mala,
salukad bara juring putawakana kong.

imen sundar barakana
 bara nela thege juring jido hayayan
 dahado golegole, dahado mile mile,
 enereo ja juring godebapade.

English translation :

Water in the tank (from the surface) is clear and transparent to the bottom,
 And the water-lily has blossomed ;
 Though the water is spread to a distance, appearing deep green,
 I must try my best to pluck the flower.

The girl is here compared to a water-lily. The lover knows the risk of forcibly carrying off the girl, but he is determined to take the risk of plucking the flower. The water in the tank is compared to the relatives and co-villagers of the girl, for they will offer resistance in case the girl is carried away from their midst. The comparison of young woman to a mali-flower is very common. The following song gives an example :

(10)

banda nari mali bara
 nanhe chetepara led nanhem asia
 napung gecha para led,
 napung nasi me
 negang gecha rowa led,
 negang nasi me.

English translation :

The Mali-flower on the embankment of the tank
 Was not grown by me, why do you ask me for it.
 My father has grown it,
 So ask it of him.
 My mother has planted it,
 So ask it of her.

A young man is enamoured of a young girl and approaches the brother of the girl for her hand. The brother says that he has no power to do so and advises him to approach her parents who may consent to his proposal. The parents have brought her up and so it is only they who have the right to give her away in marriage.

(11)

jurim tagid malibora
 golam tadam napanum jigeshukia
 golam tadam malibora
 jigeshuku lelotana maliboratan
 goshotana malibora
 jorimdare napanum karenofua.

English translation :

Oh maiden, you have wreathed a heart-charming garland
of mali-flowers for your friend.

You have wreathed a garland of mali-flowers which is
heart-charming,

The mali flowers are withering, your friend will not come ;
If you love me, deck me with it, it looks so beautiful.

The lover is away and the young woman is waiting to see
him again. She has wreathed a beautiful garland of mali-
flowers for her lover. The lover fails to return on the ap-
pointed day, but the woman sits and waits for him. The
flowers begin to wither and still the lover does not come. A
young man approaches the woman and seeks her hand. He
says that her lover will not come, so what is the good of letting
the garland wither. He is ready to take her and if she likes
may offer the garland to him as a token of her approval.

3. *Moral Songs.*

(a) Next to love songs, moral songs play a great part during
festivals. Youth is reckless and the Ho bard warns youth
not to be led astray by impulses.

(12)

bariage pompelhonking hendepundi tanaking pompel
honking
supededo diasingal nala raja pompelhonben sutigajena.

English translation :

Only two butterflies, black and white.

A lock of hair, the light of a lamp.

Butterflies do not offer yourselves to die.

Butterflies are ever restless, so are the eyes of a youth.
The Ho bard warns the eyes not to be enamoured of the lock
of hair of a maid, for it may lure him to destruction. A charm-
ing exterior is not the only thing to be desired.

(13)

naben doya bale baring,
nicha jata jamarjata jiri ben suker jana
nera ben nangunan bareng
lungam ken chopra nera ben nangunan
sutam chirem boria badim nadia kong.

English translation :

You my young brother,

You have selected a girl whose mind resembles
the brushwood of Nicha.

You have brought a bride.
 Who is like an empty cocoon.
 Would you draw it into a thread or cut it into a
 bundle ?

Nicha is a wild shrub having small red flowers with sweet juice. (Children are very fond of sucking its flower.)

When a branch of the bush is cut, it dries and changes into brushwood, the leaves dropping off. This skeleton (Jata) is used in training vegetable creepers. The bride is compared to a mere skeleton of a Nicha shrub. As Nicha jata is dry and devoid of leaves and sweet flowers, so the bride is a mere skeleton devoid of any merit. 'Lungam ken chopra' chopra is the empty cocoon with no living worm within. The bride is compared to such an empty shell. She possesses no inner mental qualities.

(b) While warning the young generation to be particularly cautious in their selection of a bride, the poet is aware of the fact that young people very often abuse their power and dupe young women ; so he advises young girls to be discreet and not to place blind confidence in young people who may entice them.

(14)

nindar buru jolare, thuyu china karamuha bandulekana
 jhuyu china karamecha bandulekana.
 kana napui thuyu kana napui karamecha
 kuri chakade kora chana bandu lekana
 kuri chakade kora chana bandulekana.

English translation :

Does a fox or jackal jump on the peak of yonder
 mountain ?

No, that is not a fox nor a jackal,
 But a young man who is an enticer of young
 women.

The poet compares enticers of young women, i.e. false and selfish lovers with the fox or jackal. The fox is described in Ho folktales as a very cunning animal, as in the fairy tales of many other countries.

Ho society freely permits divorces, but cases of divorce are very rare. The reason may be sought in the high rate of the 'gonom' or bride price which precludes a Ho from breaking off the pact from his side. A man would appeal to his community with regard to the faithlessness of his bride, asking the help of the community to bring her back. He would try to carry his bride home twice or thrice, appeal to her, mentioning the high bride price he has paid to her parents, and in the end admitting his own faults and helplessness, and even promising her some ornaments.

(15)

sonareha thalu gagara do,
 rupa reha thalu karasado
 borogoy daha bui nalom nagu
 bahu daha ko kako nuh nu

English translation :

Our vessel is made of gold.
 Our vessel is made of silver.
 Oh Bui! do not fetch muddy water,
 For your brothers will not drink it.

“Bui” is a term of endearment and addressed respectfully to girls. Muddy water stands for immorality.

4. *Miscellaneous Songs.*

(16)

Maghe.

buru bithar maghe bera bethar maghe
 chikathere danrachumnahumeleda kong
 rutu chenho chenho thege danrachum nahumeleda
 banam renho renho thege danrachum chinabeleda
 nokoreha thanr danrachu thore rutu do kong
 nokoreha thanr danrachu
 koyong banamdo kong.

English translation :

How have you heard of the Maghe festival.
 Oh danrachu (bird) of the interior forest region,
 You must have heard of it by the sound of the flute.
 You must have known it by the music of the ‘sarangi.’

The Hos have no fixed date on which festivals are to be celebrated, the ceremonies depending upon the economic condition of the villages. Each village celebrates the festival according to the leisure of the villages and the festival extends over a month or more in Kolhan. The young people go from village to village to enjoy dancing. The sound of the flute and the music of the ‘sarangi’ played by the boys, indicate the approach of the festival in the village. Young men are compared to danrachu which is a kind of bird supposed to be very active. Young men are flocking together to the village from all parts of the country to take part in the dance.

(17)

Maghe.

maghe setera bareng,
 chethane lathare disume the maghe setera

bai jomme bareng
 dama dumang ruthu banam baijomme
 nimir gapa bai thare
 maghe setere tenere esu ransāā
 ena mentheng kajiam thana
 nimir gapa kore lareng baijomme.

English translation :

Dear brother, maghe will come in its annual course,
 Be prepared with your drum, band, pipe and guitar,
 It is a pleasure to get ready with the instruments
 beforehand.
 Therefore, I tell you brother, get ready with all these.

Formerly the Hos were very generous, and hospitable. Strangers were comfortably lodged in their homes and they were all attention to them. Visitors to their fields were cordially received and were allowed to partake of the produce of the field for immediate use. In the following song the poet depicts the beauty of the healthy plants of tobacco and brinjal on the alluvial soil on the river bank.

(18)

Ba.

nepa paromere thamaku thamasathada ko thamaku
 therepa paromere berenga bengangangi jolena berenga
 pekaye joka nidi me thamaku themasa thadako thama-
 ku,
 nuthui joka godeme berenga bengangangi jo lena
 berenga.

English translation :

On the bank of the river there, the tobacco is grown.
 On this bank of the river, the brinjal is grown.
 You may take the tobacco as much as you require for a
 'ficca.'
 You may pluck the brinjals as much as you require for
 cooking.

(19)

Ba.

maranggara gitile dipare, kharbuja nutuputu
 nuringgara kochakudure bengamai senegone
 jomege sananginha, kharbuja nutuputu
 nuhuge sananginha ho, kochakudure bengasenegone
 dakharbuja jetelolore, nesusibila
 kocha kudur bengasenegone, sardinutire, nesunogoda.

English translation :

On the sandy bank of the big river water melon is grown abundantly.

In the field on the small river brinjal is grown luxuriantly.

Oh, how I long to eat of the abundant water melon.

Oh, how I long to cook the brinjal of the field.

The watermelon is very savoury when eaten in the hot summer.

The brinjal is very sweet when cooked in the winter.