

Plant-Lore with Reference to Muslim Folksong in Association with Human Perception of Plants in Agricultural and Horticultural Practices

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Abstract

The Muslims in the Manipur valley are a Manipuri speaking community. The study of folksong texts of Muslims in Manipur is a parameter for exploring native plant resources which certainly help to take conservation steps by examining the way of the human perception of plants. Man-plant interaction in agricultural as well as horticultural practices unfolds human dependence on plants in their various functions leading to a comfortable living. Some plants are used directly by men without any process, while some are selectively avoided. Tapping off heritage of ethnobotanical lore has been practiced by Muslims, conserving *Pogostemon purpurascens* Dalz in many graveyard for its religious significance. It has been proved that some plants are prevalent in the human language (proverbs, folksong, similies etc.) to make sense of their expression.

Keywords: Manipur, Muslim, folksong, plants, agriculture, horticulture, human perception, conservation

Introduction

Having sung so many plants in their folksong, Muslims in Manipur are a part of “the oneness of culture in India that is an evidence of the oneness of our country” (Agrawal, 1997). Manipur belongs to the north eastern India which extends between 23°83’N and 25°68’N latitudes and between 93°03’E and 94°78’E longitudes. The Muslims in Manipur valley are Manipuri (a Tibeto-Burman language) speaking community. Hills and fold of mountains demarcate maximum of the state land area. From time immemorial the state has rivers, lakes, unique flora and fauna. These have added to the scenic beauty of the land. Muslim settlements are found in different parts of the Manipur valley along the river banks, rivulets and lakes. The sentiment of the people attached to these beautiful sites and the scenic beauty of the land, for that matter the folksongs of Muslims of around 8.8% of state population (Ahmed and Singh, 2007) are reflections of their deep feeling, commonsense, practical wisdom etc.

On the whole, proofs into folk-songs and associated plants by Indian ethnobotanists are not many. Joshi (1995) and Ahmed and Singh (2006) reported plants used in folksong and the spoken proverbs. The Muslim folksongs bear a number of plants hinting towards various human perceptions of plants.

Plants have been studied in different categories of song expression, reported for the first time in understanding

human perception, the diversity and utilities of the plants under study and the conservation of some rare plants was suggested (Devi, 1995, 1998; Ahmed and Singh, 2006; Singh, 1993).

Materials and Method

The present study has adopted the methods of Joshi (1995), Agrawal (1997), and Mohanty (2004). A folksong collection conducted through a literature survey (Rahman and Kayamuddin, 1986; Samarendra, 1998) was employed as parameter in this work. A field work was carried out during the study period (2004-2006) for public participation through oral contact, informal interviews, and database analyses. To conduct a conversation with Muslim women, the researcher had to contact their husbands, as well.

Different perceptions of plants in the folksong were recorded and categorized into different groups. Plants were identified by using the available literature: Singh (1991), Devi (1995), Sinha (1996), Devi (1998), and Benson (1970). In this regard, the source persons were consulted. Vernacular names identified in the folksongs are helpful in identifying the botanical identities.

Results and discussion

Folk songs, in their original form, from a colossal collection of literature survey are listed below with their free

1. The following lines include some plants identified as indicative of the occupation song of the investigated community

Kumshi *Kumna* tangle/
Kumphu lingba angangdu kanano?/
Kumphu lingba angangdu/
Sagolhidak mapan chinbani/
Kekru dolai tongbani

This year the produce of Assam indigo i.e. *Kumna* (*Strobilanthes flaccidifolius* Nees.; *Acanthaceae*), leaves are scanty/
Who is that child?/
Taking care of *Kumphu* (earthen pot)/
The child is/Who embellishes the flower of Jimson weed i.e. *Sagolhidak* (*Datura stramonium* Linn; *Solanaceae*)/
Riding palanquin made of Soapnut tree i.e. *Kekru* (*Datura stramonium* Linn; *Solanaceae*).

rendering in English language, scientific name of plants, family, vernacular names, explanation and discussion.

Leaves of Assam indigo are used for dyeing clothes. The plant is scanty in villages. The boys and the girls get the job of immersing leaves into the earthen pot. In particular years they spent their time in their imagination of embellishing flowers of Jimson weed and felt as if flying on a palanquin made from Soap nut tree. The effect of hallucination after eating the seeds of Jimson weed is known in Manipuri as *Sagolhidak ngaoba*. A man who eats such seeds is not in his control sense and starts demanding palanquin made from Soap nut tree which is a rare plant, found mostly in the deep hills. Assam indigo, Jimson weed and Soap nut tree are wild plants.

tain posts decorated with Mango leaves are erected at the main entrance of a host matrimonial house. Mango and Plantain are found in many a homestead as part of horticultural activity.

It is a genre of folk song sung by a lover, by enquiring the presence of firefly in the apartment of the lady whom he dearly loves. The lady replied that it was the lighted pine brought from Chakpikarong in the present Chandel district. The district is famous for its pine produce.

The song is sung as a riddle in between the lovers. Loktak Lake is a largest freshwater lake in the North-eastern India. There is rich produce of Water chestnut as an eatable item from this lake. It is equally popular to all the communities residing in the state, hence a part of folk

2. The marriage song below includes some plants which are used as decoration material

Nabnei shumai mathoubom/
Thelong mata phabada/
Laphu haroi yungledo/
Laphu haroi khudingda/
Taojing *Heinou* manana/
Changbi kuyomnakhare/
Urirei - O tanoubi/
Dolai chomang nungduda/
Thangatlage emana/
Ningol pokpi palem-O/
Urirei edom mangaire/
Namom aunnai shahouphabi/
Dolai nungdabu happikho.

In your fathers' courtyard/
That is well levelled/
Made the Plantain i.e. *Laphu* (*Musa paradisiaca* Linn; *Musaceae*), standing/
Over each Plantain i.e. *Changbi* (*Musa balbisiana* Colla; *Musaceae*)/
With the Mango i.e. *Heinou* (*Mangifera indica* Linn; *Anacardiaceae*) leaves/
Main pillar is decorated/
O my little urirei/
I wish to place you/
Into the palanquin/
O my beloved mother/
I am alone/
Please place the maid servant/
Who has already grown into the palanquin/
In the place of me.

3. 1. The following songs indicate the habitat and distribution of plants in the song

Thanga ningol kada/
Numidang Tandan pairiba, karino?/
"Chakpi *Uchan* meirani/
Numidang kangbi khonnoubi phabani".

What's that firefly?/
Flying in the room of my beloved/
It's the flame of Chakpi pine i.e. *Uchan* (*Pinus kbasya* Royle; *Pinaceae*) lighted/
To catch sweet-singing night mosquitoes.

The bride along with her friends, together with the mother of the bride sings this song by expressing inclusive of all plants, which are used as decoration materials. Muslims used in the past to tie the leaves of Mango around some Plantain post in a *mandap* (a place for public gathering) constructed for a special day of marriage. Two Plan-

sons. The people around the lake earn their living by selling chestnut.

A kind of Cotton plant that produces big bolt is found at Huining of Ukhrul district. It appears in the song because the man from the valley used to take it from his friends in the hill. To fulfil the requirements at home, Cot-

Loktak epom mathakta/
Mapan ngouna shariba, karino?/
Heikak kumnang tabini/
Kalengi thammei oinasu kumshatli.

ton is used in the making of blanket, stuffing of mattress, pillow etc.

A maiden knew her lover couldn't be trusted. He told her to wait for him with a garland of Cassie flower. The singer compares the maiden with a garland of Cassie flower also. The maiden thinks that in case he does not turn up, she should be perished in waiting for him to come back. Midwives who carry out ear lobbing for Muslim girls use spines from this plant. The plant is found wild and is conserved for its utility.

A girl friend is compared with the scent plant *P. purpurascens* which is as beautiful as gold. The song is a bold expression of a young man in love. He is ready to overcome any difficulty on his way to meet the girl. Leaves of *P. purpurascens* plant boiled with clean water gives a pleasing fragrance and it is used in the bathing of a dead body before burial. Use of fragrance is an act of *Sunnah* (following the prophet's life) to Muslims, for this purpose, muslims have been practicing an act of *P. purpurascens* conservation (Ahmed and Singh, 2007).

The fruit of *A. polystachya* is commonly sung in the folksongs in the comparison of the female breast. The whole plant is taken for a female (last daughter of a family) in the song, as well. She makes love in secret and she conceives. Now, the rumour of her secrecy spreads among her friends. Under such circumstances the position of a male is also expressed in the song. *A. polystachya* is a rare plant.

It is expressed more in an erotic way. The lover boy expects something, which seem to be most precious to the girl. The girl is in no way to give it, because she has given it to somebody. The fruits mentioned are produced mostly in the hills but also on the plains. The plants are found in the frontyard and sideyard of many a house in Muslim villages.

Naturally *H. lineata* grows around the foot of rice in the month of *langban* (September). Generally, the farmers pursue to uproot this plant, as it is grown unwanted

4. Love songs of the following kinds are sung with plants as a part of the songs which prove the deep feeling of singers, expressive of (1) dishonest lover; (2) bold lover; (3) secret relationship and (4) metaphorical statement

4.1. In the expression of a dishonest lover

Chigonglei pambi Yaimabi/
Nabangi kharai thonganda/
Chigonglei nachom paiduna leplammu/
Lepagidi marepke/
Pammui lamdang ahangba/
Torei tuthup yambana/
Chigonglei leiman challani

What is that white flower?/
With the waves of Loktak lake/
Water chestnut i.e. *Heikak* (*Trapa natans*
Linn; *Trapaceae*), that is black/
It gives flower near the end of summer.

along with rice. To this pitiable condition, the singer feels the voiceless cry of *H. lineata* and feels that it should have grown in the garden among the flowers. The leaves of this plant are cooked as a delicious local curry called *Uti*.

6. In the following song the scenic beauty of the land is described.

Leichilna pomai tuba lam/*Charotna* mondum saba lam/Pamubi.

(O my dear/It is the land of cushion made of Citronella grass i.e. *Charot* (*Cymbopogon nardus* L; *Poaceae*)/And fold of clouds in the sky).

The scenic beauty of the land is described in the song in the association of Citronella grass. There is a mention of this plant in the song and the ample of this plant is located in this land.

This song could be heard during harvesting time. They sing because they want to forget the tiresome work of harvesting. They continue to work by singing, while remembering the common local dishes as they usually cook Decan hemp with a kind of fish *Ngakichou*. And they put Red gourd in the curry of Sponges gourd. There are three most common horticultural vegetable plants mentioned in this song.

A number of plants in this song are compared with human organs. Strong physical and masculine power is compared with twelve kinds of threads from Mulberry and other plants. The man sets a net to trap a bird (a female in the comparison) near the field. Here a field is compared to the female private part that is situated just next to the place where *Hup* (*E. stagina*) i.e. pubic hairs for comparison of a female, grow. The female has accepted that she is weak and surrendered in the face of strong male's private parts i.e. in the comparison are *A. allugha*, *C. angustifolia* and *S. melongena*. Generally, tribals have started domestication of the plant such as *A. allugha* in the hills, otherwise found naturally. *C. angustifolia* is a wild plant and *S. melongena*

Yaimabi, the second daughter of a family who adores Cassie flower i.e. *Chigonglei* (*Acacia farnesiana* Willd; *Mimosaceae*)/
Stay standing with a garland of cassie flower!/
At your fathers' house gate/
I shall surely stay there/
But the way is long for my beloved to return/
Cassie flower might wither in vain.

4.2. In the expression of a bold lover

Sana *Shangbrei* makhongda/
Lindu charang leibani, shokkani/
Soklabasu soksanu/
Koujengda tenna panbara/
Linduna shou oina yubara/
Pamuba masung langgini/
Nungshiba mahak thak-kini/
Hanbatadi hallaroi.

In the foot of gold like *Pogostemon* i. e. *Shangbrei*
(*Pogostemon purpurascens* Dalz; *Lamiaceae*)/
There is rattlesnake, it will hurt you/
Let it hurt me/
Does an arrow hit a cricket/
Does a rattlesnake prick/It is all for my beloved/
All is for her love's sake.

4.3. In the expression of a secret relationship

Khoi-nou eta tabara/
Heirangkhoi heimei tabido/
Taojing mapan sahoure/
Lang-ol lang-ol channabi/
Pomlambi cha-na taojing mapanna/
Lon-shat-nana chindamba heimi tambana/
Khoimui tharak kangbani.

My friend, are you listening?/
That i.e. *Heirangkhoi* (*Aphanamixis polystachya* (wall)
Parker; *Meliaceae*) of end season/It bears a fruit/
That very often she was in love with (him)/
She was blooming but, now, she bears a fruit (meaning foetus)/
Because it was illicit love/
Thus the male (bee) is worried).

4.4. In the expression of metaphorical statement

Thongjaorokki pakhang-O/
Nangna ngarang haige-wa/
Hairam-mone pakhang-O!/
Eina ngarang haige-wa/
Egina nongbrou khudopto pibiro/
Nang-gi nongbrou khudopti/
Komla houbi changjouda/
Champra houbi hidenda/
Ho, laija eroi tambada tahoure.

O lad from Thongjaorok (Village)/
Yesterday you wanted to say something/
O lad speak your mind/
Yesterday what I wanted to say was/
Please return my finger ring that is glitter/
Your finger ring that is glitter/
Ho, it had fallen when I learn swimming/
To the surface of water where Orange i.e. *Komla*
(*Citrus aurantium* Risso; *Rutaceae*) grows/
To the (ship) dock where Lemon i.e. *Champra*
(*Citrus lemon* L; *Rutaceae*) grows).

5. In the following song a soundless desire or wish of a plant is expressed. That the plant naturally grows at a wrong place is usually compared to a maiden who thinks similarly that she was borne in a wrong family

Langban koukba nungshibi/
Phoukhong kada yetchabi/
Phukpirone heipal oina/
Thabirone leiranglakta/
Leiranglakta tharabadi/
Khoimu toina engani/
Khoimu toina ellabadi/
Eirang leika phangani.

O lovely *Koukba* (*Hedyotis lineata* Roxb; *Rubiaceae*)/
Always grow near the foot of the Rice i.e.
Phou (*Oryza sativa* Linn; *Poaceae*)/
Pluck me as a fruit/Grow me among the flowers/
If growing among the flowers/
Lest the bee visit very often/
If bee very often visits/
I will be pleased).

is commonly grown in the plain and involved for Muslim agricultural practice.

As in this research work, it is always the aim of the ethnobotanists that the collection of information regarding any community at village level should conform to the cultural diversity, differing in the various experiences of the diverse flora in a particular region. This notion shares the idea (Jain, 1999) that the example of human knowledge in

the Indian situation is very rich, both in plant and cultural diversity, which have influenced human preferences in the understanding of plant species. Studying folksong text of Muslims in Manipur is a parameter for exploring native plant resources, which will certainly help to take conservation steps by examining the human perception of plants. Some plants were found in association with agriculture and horticulture practices. Some plants as *C. angustifolia*,

7. The following song is sung during harvesting in the fields as a work song

Waida kouba haiganu/
Ngamedda kouba shonganu/
Ngasina koirou numitta/
Ha Hei Hei Hai/He Hei Hei Hai/
Shebot-ta Mairel tok-kummi/
Sougrid-a ngakichou thakkummi.

A. allugha are wild but potentially become agricultural plants by growing them in the field and house gardens.

8. There is a kind of love song, expresses in an erotic way. This expression is fulfilled by the plants in the song

Awangnabu lamdi lamnungshi/
Khamel-lokki lokmai/
Pullei houbina lokchap/
Yaipal houbibu lokmang.../
Haorougi khallei pheidomdi ashitpa.../
Hupchitki maranbu lanbada.../
Kabrang-gi langdi Kabrang lang/
Muki langdi Muka lang/
Langja langlam taranithoina.../
Pakhang-gi tengna langmaktabu thakpadi nungshiba.../
Pakhanggi tengna langnadi kanba hen/
Ningolgi samma pangalnadi sonbana/
Pakhang-gi tengna lang yeithatpabu/
Ngamdrene nungshiba.

In this very day/
Don't say one is tired/
That you are not able to do/Expression of encouragement (twice)/
It is like putting Red gourd i.e. *Mairel* (*Cucurbita maxima* Duch.; *Cucurbitaceae*), in the curry of Sponge gourd i.e. *Shebot* (*Luffa cylindrica* (Linn.) M. J. Roem; *Cucurbitaceae*), Adding *Ngakichou* (*Lepicephalus bardemorie*) in the curry of Deccan hemp i.e. *Sougrid* (*Hibiscus cannabinus* L.; *Malvaceae*).

15. *Luffa cylindrica* (L.) M.J. Roem, *Hibiscus cannabinus* L., *Cucurbita maxima* Duch., *Solanum melongena* L.

O lovely land in the North/
At the gorge where Brinjal i.e. *Khamel* (*Solanum melongena* L.; *Solanaceae*) grows/
In the rift valley where Shel ginger i.e. *Loklei* (*Alpinia galanga* (Linn) Willd; *Zingiberaceae*) grows/
In front of hill gorge where *East Indian arrowroot* i.e. *Yaipal* (*Curcuma angustifolia* Roxb; *Zingiberaceae*) grows/
Next to the place where *Hup* (*Echinocola stagina* Retz; *Poaceae*) grows/
O dear you build a trap/
Made from threads spin from Mulberry i.e. *Kabrang or Muka* (*Morus laevigata* Wall. ex Brandis; *Moraceae*)/
The trap that is made from twelve kinds of threads/
O dear I am trapped in the net that is strong/
But I am weak/
And I can't get rid off).

References of native plants in Muslim folksongs can also be summarized with their different perceptions as follows:

1. *Datura metel* L. - hallucinogenic
2. *Morus laevigata* Wall.- spinning thread
3. *Gossypium arboreum* L. - making pillows, mattresses and blanket
4. *Strobilanthes flaccidifolius* Nees - dye plant
5. *Citrus lemon* L., *Citrus aurantium* Risso., *Aphanamixis polystachya* (Wall.) Parker - fruit plants, comparing human females
6. *Echinocola stagina* Retz. - compares pubic hair
7. *Mangifera indica* L., *Musa paradisiaca* L., *Musa balbisiana* Colla - decoration materials for marriage
8. *Pinus khasya* - Royle-use as flamefire
9. *Sapindus trifoliatus* L.- fruit use as medicine
10. *Trapa natans* L. - leaves and fruits eatable, freshwater, pond plant
11. *Acacia farnesiana* Willd - spine use for nasal perforation
12. *Pogostemon purpurascens* Dalz. - scent plant, compares with maidens
13. *Alpinia allugha* (L.) Willd, *Curcuma angustifolia* Roxb. - wild edible vegetables
14. *Oryza sativa* L.- cereal, main food plant

- vegetables, kitchen garden and agricultural plants

16. *Morus laevigata* Wall ex Brandis, *Gossypium arboreum* L.- agricultural plant

17. *Citrus lemon* L., *Citrus aurantium* L., *Aphanamixis polystachya* (Wall) Parker, *Musa paradisiaca* L., *Mangifera indica* L., *Carthamus tinctorious* L.- horticultural plant

18. *S. flaccidifolius*, *A. polystachya*, *Acacia farnesiana*, *Pogostemon purpurascens*, *Alpinia allugha*, *Morus laevigata* - domesticated plants.

The result of the present investigation is an example representing plant diversity of this region. Man-plant interaction in agricultural and horticultural practices unfolds human dependence on plants in their various functions that lead to a comfortable living. Some plants are directly used by man without processing i.e. *G. arboreum*, *P. purpurascens*, *A. farnesiana* while some are selectively avoided i.e. *Datura stramonium*. Tapping of the heritage of the ethnobotanical lore (Schultes, 1960) has been practicing since time immemorial by Muslims. Muslims started conserving *shangbrei* (*Pogostemon purpurascens*), for example, in and around graveyards for its leaves, which are boiled with clean water to clean the dead body. The use of perfume is regarded as a *sunnah* (following the life of prophet and an act of extracting perfume is seen into this religious function called *asiba erujabiba* (bathing of corpse) (Ahmed and Singh, 2007).

Such a useful plant i. e. *P. purpurascens* is inherited in the Muslim folksong texts. *Strobilanthes flaccidifolius* is overexploited for its dye extract. Control use of this plant and its conservation is highly recommended. Fruits of *Sapindus trifoliatus* are a good remedy to curb high body temperature in children. There is a need for further experiment to measure the medicinal values of this highly useful plant. *P. purpurascens*, *Strobilanthes flaccidifolius* and *Sapindus trifoliatus* are rare plants.

It is true that some plants are prevalent in the human language (proverbs, folksong, similies etc.) to make sense of their expression. In a different manner, songs were tested for positive growth effect of plants (Klymasz, 1978). Naturally men are shy to talk of their private parts, which they express in metaphorical statements by using plants i.e. citrus plants in the present context.

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