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## **SING, SOOTHE AND SLEEP – TRANSITION AND TRANSMISSION OF LULLABIES**

### ***Abstract***

*Lullabies are defined as songs that are sung to assist an infant's sleeping process. Listening to soft rhythms brings a sense of calmness and security to the infant. Lullabies have long been an effective way to communicate with the child, and lyrics have played a massive role in delivering this communication. A lullaby also has the ability to transmit emotional information because of its smooth and soothing rendition. The opportunity for research on the role lyrics in a lullaby and how it plays in creating a well-being is vastly underutilized.*

*This paper is an exploration of the relationship between the moon and other subjects as a constant theme in the lyrics of a few lullabies collected from the various communities across the North-Eastern states. An attempt to understand its connection with the culture and tradition of the community along with analysis of all the songs and their lyrics will also be a part of the paper.*

**Keywords:** *Lullabies, Moon, Culture and Tradition.*

### **Introduction**

The term North-East was first used by the British colonizers as a political or administrative construct. But it stayed on to become the identity of the people and anything belonging to this region. North-east is the home of diverse cultural and linguistic communities and most of the communities can pride themselves for having a vivacious oral literature tradition. It is through this tradition of storytelling the cultural, spiritual and historical knowledge are transferred to posterity. A lullaby or cradle song, is a soothing song or piece of music that is usually played for (or sung to) children. In some societies they are used to pass down cultural knowledge or tradition. In addition, lullabies are often used for the developing of communication skills, indication of emotional intent, maintenance of infants' undivided attention, modulation of infants' arousal, and regulation of behaviour. Perhaps one of the most important uses of lullabies is as a sleep aid for infants. As a result, the music is often simple

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and repetitive. Lullabies can be found in many countries, and have existed since ancient times.

The world of folklore is full of lullabies which were transmitted orally generation after generation same like the 'theory of diffusion' where dissemination of content takes place inherently through a systematic process. This theory further highlights how dissemination of any physical element, idea, value, social practice, or attitude takes place between and through populations. The folk lullaby is also a part of the entire fabric of a community's lore. Franz Boas advocated diffusionism and believed that the cultural inventory of a people was basically the cumulative result of diffusion (Boas 1938:211). These simple songs charm us because of the fact that it expresses the feelings of the people concerned consisting of countless loose threads, about their origin, but which were woven together to fit into their new cultural context. Discrete elements become interrelated with it as time passes by (Hatch 1973:57-58). The lullaby-singer not only maintains the identity of an individual but also of a community member, so the lullaby reflects the thoughts and concerns of the individual along with the broader concerns of the culture, as these concerns are filtered through the singer's consciousness (Spitz 1979:6).

Lullabies singing is seen as "fostering an emotional closeness, and forming an association between music, comfort and security" (Brooks 2016:83). The mother while singing a lullaby usually holds the baby on her lap or sits beside the baby in the bed and sings to her child according to the rhythm of the lullaby. Across centuries and across cultures, mothers have used these cradle songs to calm children and to soothe them to sleep. Lullabies help the children to relax and gradually their body sinks into the somatic certainty of feeling safe and drift into sleep (Honig 2005:34). Another theory which would find a place in this study is the Cultivation Theory developed by George Gerber. In the process of singing and lulling their child to sleep, the mother also cultivates the ideas imbibed in these songs to the next generation without even realizing it.

**Need for the study** -Oral tradition is a continuous process and it carries with it a bulk of information related to the community's tradition and culture. In context of North-East India, oral tradition and literature becomes much more important because of its unmapped characteristics.

In context of the tribes of North-East we can find that almost all major systems of their social organizations depend on oral traditions ranging from birth rituals to death songs, marriage to inheritance, work songs to leisure activities etc. all of which need a serious documentation for the sake of its preservation. Lullabies, might be a small part of the huge plethora of the world of oral literature. But their importance cannot be ignored as it carries information on the tradition, culture and relation about people that is the basic component of a society. Another reason which makes this study significant

is folklore and folk literature is not 'individualistic' rather it focusses on 'community-centered culture'(Marak2013: 23). The preservation of such kind of oral literature contributes to the development of a national culture.

### **Aim of the study**

The aim of the study is to analyze the relationship between the moon and other subjects as a constant theme in the lyrics of a few lullabies collected from the various communities across the North-Eastern states and to see how lullabies have restructured itself as per the need and choice of the community concerned.

### **Framework and Methodology**

This study is cabled on the theory that oral literature can be a valuable material for historical interpretation. Knowing such things, gives an immense pleasure but this is only possible after a sufficient amount of lullabies, folktales, or folksongs have been collected from the area sought to be covered. Because of the non-availability of any written records, the firmness of the foundation of oral traditions of the concerned communities cannot be guaranteed.

The study employed ethnographic research design. Ethnographic techniques included in this study are direct, mostly first-hand observation of daily behaviour, including participant observation; conversation with the respondents of varying degrees, that helps maintain rapport; and interview with the community elders of varying ages along with focus group discussions.

### **Review of Literature**

Research has already proven that infants have tendencies towards music and mostly referred to as musical beings (Trehub 2001:69). Listening to the mother's voice while lying on the chest and feeling the heart-beat and smelling the scent of the mother's body affects the overall perception of a lullaby by the baby. There is a natural tendency in infants to entrain to the surrounding sounds. Doctors also suggest that infants are born with an innate musical preference because they beat perception beings in their fetal development.

The lullabies usually follow a common motif pattern where there is the 'guardian', which appears in many forms-the mother standing watch over the cradle, the stars, the moon, the entire universe, God (Baruch, Miri). The word 'lullaby' in English can be divided into two parts: 'lull' and 'aby'. Etymologically speaking, the word 'lulling', means to hush to sleep, presumably gets its name from same Swedish, German, Sanskrit, and Dutch words. The singing of Lullabies contains humming, muttering, and rocking often; consequently, the Dutch, Swedish, German, and Sanskrit word definitions properly combine to produce the English word 'lull'. The second half of 'lullaby'-

'aby' - may be derived from 'goodbye' or 'bye-bye', by way of the mother saying 'bye-bye' to her children at night before they fell asleep. (Harper 2013)

### **An Insight into the world of Lullabies**

Lullabies are an universal phenomenon and it existed since ancient times in almost every part of the world. Singing a lullaby is invariably accompanied by rhythmic movements such as dancing, shaking the baby, patting the child, or the repetitive actions of work. As expressed by Bascom (1954:333) a lullaby provides a medium for expressing positive and negative feelings in protected and unconstrained circumstances. Lullabies are generally accredited as songs for soothing and promoting sleep. But what is less clear is which component of a lullaby is the most defining feature - the text, the melody, the performance or all of these. The singers of a lullaby whosoever she may be - embellish her expression of love and concern for the infants through these songs. Depending upon situation and circumstances of the mother or caregiver, a lullaby can also be termed as a work song, love song, emotional outlet etc. In Assam the lullabies are known by a variety of names – 'NisukoniGeet', 'DhaiNaam', 'NindaliGeet' to just mention a few.

Many lullabies spread endearments by exploring the astrological world with sun and moon as the protagonist of these songs:

#### ◆ **Manipuri Lullaby**

*Gotoburkainaimetai*

*"OiOkhapurpwipwi*

*Nwngpwiwabwla*

*Talirtaisehor*

*Talirtaisehorabwla*

*Talirtainwi hor."*

*("Hey moon come come, If you don't come Give one banana, If you don't give one banana, Give one pair of bananas.")*

There are quite a few version of this lullaby present in Manipur. But for the study I have included the version available in YouTube. The lullaby thus sings the glory of how the Moon, Shining in solitude in the sky through Rows of stars glancing in sleepy-eyed, the silver clouds, Floating drowsily and the balmy wind, Inducing the plants to sleep in the cradle of the earth, puts humanity to sleep.

*Thathathabungton*

*Ngalicheknamamal ton*

*Thaiwaimechakparengna*

*Merungmerungyengliyei*  
*Thathathabung ton*

*Lupamapollaichilna*  
*Tumningtumningtaoreyei*  
*Kaidahungbamalamna*  
*Uhpalwhapalchinkharei*  
*Ahillnalshutampaltha*  
*Taibangjiibahuitharei*  
*Thathathabungton*

*Laichilshagolchingduna*  
*Thabaldulaltongduna*  
*Palmeshaitaduna*  
*Tumkhungtarolhaopiisha*  
*Reisham dong dolwangmada*  
*Chatlochatlomangleipakta*  
*Thathathabungton*

(O Moon, Shining in solitude in the sky; Rows of stars glancing sleepy-eyed,

The silver clouds, floating drowsily; the balmy wind, inducing the plants to sleep

In the cradle of the earth, Humanity sleeps, O Moon

Pulling the cloud horse, riding the moon palanquin, listening to mother's song

Sleep, sleep, O little one! Beyond the velvet sky, embark on dream land! O Moon, O Moon..)

◆ **Apatani Lullaby – Yoyo Gage**

*Oi yoyo Lo-oi-Babo lo-oi*  
*Mimilo-oi-Tamiloko*  
*BimanDakkaoi*

*AjieMunneumoiGeyumolape*

*OlloeArangeoi Menu Molape of*

(Oh, my sweet child sleeps in peace, On my back, without any disturbances)

As the story goes, *KoomangNaane* (the life designer Goddess) originated the Apatanilullaby. She first sung the lullaby when *Tani* (man) was born by *PedongNnanc*, by carrying the baby *Tarn* on her arms. In her lullaby *KoomangNaane* blessed Tani to become a perfect man and supersedes all other animals/spirits in his life. Lullaby/cradle song is a source of inspiration to children. It pays so much impact on the mentality of a child that even a crying child is lulled to sleep or makes the crying child happy within no time. (Ghosh, 2018)

◆ **Bengali Lullaby – *GhumparaniGaan / Chora***

*Aai Chand tere, bhaatdebobere*

*Shonarkopaalechand tip diyejaa...*

(Please hasten O Moon, my child is waiting for you, lunch is served with care for both of you, please come and bless my child with sleep)

*Shona ghumaloparajuraloborgiellodeshe,*

*bulbulitedhankheyeché, khajnadibokishe,*

*Kiser khajnakiserbaajna, kiserbrindabon,*

*Aajthekejanlam Shona asoldhan...*

(When my Prince sleeps, the entire locality sleeps, its time for the Angels of God to visit, The Bulbul bird has savored the entire harvest, how do I repay my loans. Forget the loans, forget the music and forget all pilgrimages, O! my Son you are my real wealth...)

◆ **Assamese Lullaby – *NisukoniGeet***

*ama.rèmoína, xubò,*

*baritebògòri, rubò;*

*barirebògòri, pòkixòribò,*

*amaremonaibutòlikhabo*

(Our angel will sleep, we will plant a Jujube sapling in our garden, when the fruits ripe and fall, our little angel would collect and relish them...)

*xaliekoreròtòutòu*

*bhathòlxakhòlxalikikòlòigòl?*

*eikhini.teasilegwborkhu.sòri*

*kwnw.bailòigòldingimusòri*

(Look at the common Indian Myna chirping, Rice cooked, dal cooked, where did the bird flew, saw it here near the cow dung, who has taken it by twisting its neck...?)

*òphul ò phulnup.hulokio?*

*Goru.ejeäg khaimoi.nwphulimkio?*

*ògòru ò gòruäghäwokio?*

*Gòrò.khiai je gòrunerakhemoid.nwnek.hamkio?*

*ògòròkhia ò gòròkhiagòrunerak.hokio?*

*rand.honi.ejebhatnerand.hemoid.nwrak.himkio?*

*òrand.honi ò rand.honibhatnerand.hokio?*

*khòri-kòtai je khorinekatemoid.nwrand.himkio?*

*òkhòri-kòtia ò khòri-kòtiakhòrinekatokio?*

*komare je da nogor.hemoid.nwkatimkio?*

*òkomar ò komar da nogor.hokio?*

*meg.he je bòròxun die moi.nwgor.himkio?*

*òmegh ò meghbòròxundiokio?*

*bhekulie je twr.twraimoid.nwnidimkio?*

*òbhekuli ò bhekulitwrtwraokio?*

*bwpakokarbrit.titwmoid.nwerimkio?*

( This lullaby is about a flower which refuses to bloom because the grazing animals feeds on them, the cow says the shepherd boy does not feed them so it feeds on the flowers. In this manner this lullaby is a series of accusation from one person to another and lastly nature also comes into the limelight.)

*Junbai ae, beji eta diya*

*Beji nu keloj Munaxiboloi*

*Muna nu keloj Dhonbhoraboloi*

*Dhon nu keloj Hatikiniboloi*

*Hati nu keloj, uthifhuriboloi..*

(Aae moon, give me a needle,What for the needle, To stitch a bag,

what for the bag, To keep the money, what for the money, To buy an elephant, what for the elephant, To ride around...)

*'Ou kumolia, khabole borhiya,  
Kotari agore lun ae, Bapa kumoliya,  
Oti ke dhuniya, Gaate jilike xunae...*

(Its soft and tender, tastes so great, seeing the knife it glows like gold)

*Rodaliae, rod de,  
Ali katijali dim  
Borpirapari dim,  
Tate bohi bohi rod de.  
Rodalirmakortinidalsuli  
Rodalipalegoibirinarguri.*

(Oh Sun, shine bright, the pedestal is set for you. Please sit and shine bright...)

As seen, most of the lullabies actually makes no sense but it does create an entertaining atmosphere for the child which thereby amuses them to sleep. The lyrics of the lullabies are mostly adapted from day to day life of the common folks mixed with essence and flavor of the soil. Nature plays a crucial part in inspiring the life of these indigenous people and so we can find nature occupying a distinct pattern for almost every creative urge and artistic endeavors, not only among tribal and other communities in India but throughout the world.

◆ **Deuri Lullaby**

*NekandeNekandeAmareMaina, MarenoMukholoiSuwa..  
MakoloiMadoliiMainaloiAadhoolii,DeutaloiTokiyaaSulaa.*

(O! my child don't you cry, look at thy mother's face, Look at the new dresses which we have for all three of us...)

*Cho nenaicho... Cho nenaicho..., Maaregoise mash mariboloi, nenaicho  
Machekoanibadhorikina nenaicho, baperegoisepohumariboloinenaicho,  
Pohukoanibadhorikina nenaicho...*

(Look O! my child look O! my child, mother has gone for fishing, will you also catch the fishes along with her.... Look O!my child look O!my child, father has gone for hunting, will you also go with him ...)

◆ **Hajong Lullaby –BujaniGahen**

*Aai o Junjuniaai, udiudiaai*



*Tarapatanihatdibo, Iccha Mach jholdibo,  
Sang tolnibahadibo, Ratihole sari dibo,  
Din holekhatithubo, Aai o junjuniaai...*

(Come come o glow-worm fly to me.. I shall feed you boiled rice at banana leaf and shall give you prawn curry... will let you sleep under the stilt, and shall release you at night and tie you during the day...)

◆ **Meghalaya Kongthong Lullaby- *Jingrwailawbei***

*Jingrwailawbei* of the Kongthong village of Meghalaya, is famous for its rareness. In this village every time a baby is born, the mother composes a lullaby that becomes a unique identity of the child for life. The most striking feature of this lullaby is that it has no words and is just a tune - a kind of hum that only the villagers are able to recognise and remember.

The pregnant mother thinks of a particular tune, sometimes a bird call, which becomes the name of the new-born. After the birth of the child, adults around it constantly hum that tune so that it identifies with the sound. This is an age-old tradition the origin of which is as distant as the region itself. Typically inspired by nature and natural sounds, each lullaby – or *jingrwailawbei* in the tribe's dialect – is anything from half-a-minute to a minute long. The mothers of the village use these melodious tunes to call out to their children, who learn to respond to them quickly. After it has been ensured that the whistled lullaby is distinct from all others, it becomes a permanent identity marker for the child.

Interestingly, it has been noted that the villagers never use their official names in their regular conversation rather they make use of this unique identity which has now become the USP of the region.

◆ **Nishi Lullaby**

*AmpungPisli Ngo RongoMekar Dena  
YardaJeryingsiRongoKakaar Dena  
AmteChiqlum Hum ChiqlacPaku Bo  
MiitePaqlumhumPaqlacPaku Bo...*

(An insect is in search for an paddy/millet field,  
*Flying above a highland looking for a field,  
In the hope Paddy might be sown,  
In the hope Millet might be sown.*)

◆ **Mizo Lullaby –**

*NuaAwihHla*

*Ka nu Ka pa, lo haw thuaithuai*

*Tlangahruahpui a sur e*

*Sakhilampengrawnzawh la*

*Lo zangphar der derangche.*

(Hasten home to me, Rain storm over mountains I see, Hasten home to me!)

◆ **Bodo Lullaby –**

*SilaSila,*

*Nonni Megan MojadaaLaabo,*

*Aamokhani Megan GajrillaLaang, U Fu*

*HeneSilaayaBirlaambay.*

(Kite Kite, Bring your good eyes, Take away bad eyes of my baby, See See my baby, the kite has flown with all bad eyes)

In its simplest form the mother sings the lullaby, hums and repeats these almost out of context lyrics until the child falls asleep. The tune and the rhythm create a rhythmic atmosphere in which the child loses itself into a different world (Goswami, 2019)

### **Characters found in the lullabies**

Critically analyzing the lullabies we can find that the characters are mostly from day-to-day life affairs of the rural folk, nature, the cosmic world, mythological and divine characters. Further classifications of the characters divide them into these three categories- calmers, assistants and harmers. The mother plays the role of the calmer who shares her warmth and love through her songs. The harmers are the character whom the child is scared of. It can be animals, birds, ghosts or any imaginary person. The assistants are the characters who help in creating the soothing environment for the child.

### **Functions of the lullabies**

1. Apart from the characters, we can also find the lullabies help us to escape in an imaginary world free from imposed restrictions and obstructions.
2. The lullabies also help the mothers to transmit cultural and traditional ethos starting from an early stage.
3. The lullabies also help in inculcating moral values of the society to the next generation.

4. Lullabies act as a communication device as the lullabies engage both the mother and the child in a communicative act where the recipient child express feelings of acceptance by the face and body gestures.
5. The lullabies also creates an emotional bonding between the mother and child as the mother takes pride in sharing what she has heard as a child from her mother and the tradition continues from generation to generation.

### Conclusion

The research confirms that most respondents have been practicing this tradition in their home, and they recalled their own experiences of being lulled by their aunts, mothers and grandmothers. Mostly the respondents started singing by listening to their mothers or mother-in-law or any other elderly person who became the carrier of the tradition.

With their extent and diversity, lullabies are no-where near becoming a forgotten tradition because as long as civilization exists these cradle songs will travel with the probable mothers to soothe their child to sleep. Though its usage now-a-days has entered a different level because of the dominance of digital media and the change in societal set up of the urban household. But what remains unchanged is the fact that the mother still dreams to see her child as a healthy, wealthy and wise person. With the coming of people to the contact of modernisation and other foreign cultures, these narratives are fading out. But what remains unshaken is we have inherited them, and we pass them along rhythmically.

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