Analysis of “Papiñ-Pame Biisi”—A Love Ballad of the Apatanis, Arunachal Pradesh

Narang Rija1, Mihir Kumar Shome1, Simon John2, Tamo Mibang2

1Department of Humanities and Management, National Institute of Technology, Yupia, India
2Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University, Doimukh, India
Email: narangrija@yahoo.co.in, prof.mihir.shome@gmail.com, simonjohn19@gmail.com, vc@rgu.ac.in

Received 8 May 2016; accepted 27 June 2016; published 30 June 2016

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Abstract

Ballads have evolved a long way since the beginning of story-telling among humans. Love-themed ballads were not confined to the romantic poets of England alone but were composed and narrated in hidden hamlets in every corner of the world. The “Papiñ-Pame Biisi” is one such ballad popular in the Ziro valley, Arunachal Pradesh, India. In this paper, the epitome of love, the rites of passage and the general life and culture of the Apatani society during the early time are analyzed.

Keywords

Apatani, Arunachal Pradesh, Ballads, Folk Songs, Papiñ-Pame Biisi

1. Introduction

The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have rich oral folk tradition, among which folk songs play an important role in manifesting tribal culture. Verrier Elwin had written in his book “A Philosophy for NEFA”, “We still have a good many folk-songs and dances when we go to the villages, because modern civilization has more or less left them untouched. The progress of modern civilization in India involves both good things and bad. One of the things we have lost is the spirit of song and dance and the capacity for enjoyment and this is what the tribal people so abundantly have” (Elwin, 1957). Folk songs often acted as a medium for the tribal people to express their emotions. In fact, “The tribal people sing their songs not for its tune but to record their own moods and emotions. They give expression to their thoughts in their songs, as a result their songs become a perennial expression of thought, action and sentiments of human interest. Songs are the part and parcel of their lives like their own tools and equipment which they need for their daily living” (Choudhury, 1984). Apart from songs, there are narratives like tales, fables, ballads, proverbs, myths and legends etc. which are passed down from generation to generation. The beautiful verses in the ancient folk songs prove that the tribal people of Arunachal
Pradesh “have a deep vein of poetic imagination...” (Elwin, 1958). Folk songs depict the lives of the tribal people, their surroundings, social set-up, customs, traditions and festivals. Nature is a constant source of inspiration for their songs. These folk songs serve the purpose of spreading knowledge and awareness apart from providing entertainment. They play an important role in the rites of passage. Folk songs are usually sung in group and seldom solo. During festivals, they are often sung in accompaniment of musical instruments and dance.

Specifically, the Apatanis have a rich oral tradition that includes myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, priestly chanting, songs, etc. It is through these narratives that the young ones are taught the way of life. Folk songs were mostly sung during important junctures of life such as birth, death, marriage and during rituals and celebrations. They were also sung to relieve themselves after a hard day’s work. This way singing became a light-hearted recreational activity.

Papiñ-Pame Biisi is the first popular love ballad that is sung and passed down through generations among the Apatanis of Ziro valley. This ballad about the love story of Loder-Byai (twin brothers) and Puming-Pubyang (twin sisters) shares some similar features with English epics and ballads. It is great in length and is usually narrated in grandiose style. This romantic ballad is one of the oldest oral narratives of the Apatanis. As Romeo and Juliet is to the world, so is Loder-Byai and Puming-Pubyang to the Apatanis.

2. Methodology

The methodology of this study is mostly empirical in nature. The primary sources (ballads) have been collected from All India Radio, Arunachal Pradesh. The interpretation of these ballads has been done through informal interviews with the singers and some elderly persons well versed in Apatani folk narratives. A digital recorder has been used to record the narrative data, ballads and interviews.

The secondary sources include books, articles, journals and internet references on relevant topics. The books were referred from the libraries and state museum of Arunachal Pradesh. The field study was carried out in the villages of Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

A Brief Summary of the Narrative Papiñ-Pame Biisi

Miido Loder and Miido Byai were said to be the sons of Miido Tilying and Nyime Yaye. They were born in a beautiful village called Miido Lemba or Senyi-Sapi Ganda. They had two sisters and enough land and animals. Loder and Byai married and divorced several wives since none of them knew the art and technique of weaving. However, they had a son each named Chada and Chama from their last wives supuñ يوني and yoyi sansanr respectively. One day Loder and Byai were setting out for Bulyang to a distant village with their mithuns (a sacred animal of Arunachal Pradesh). Their sisters Dumi and Yami weaved clothes for them before they set out. When the two brothers reach a village called Papiñ-Pame, they are enchanted by the beauty of two sisters Puming and Pubyang living in that village. They enamoured Loder and Byai with their beauty and grace causing the two men to fall in love with them; Loder with Puming and Byai with Pubyang. Loder and Byai were so captivated by them that they had completely forgotten about their wives and sons. The love affairs began and Loder and Byai could not help but to start living with the two women respectively. Puming and Pubyang with their beauteous charm kept them mesmerized and spellbound with their art of graciousness. Loder and Byai settled with them, providing for them like husbands do for wives. Years passed by without Loder and Byai remembering their family back at home.

Loder and Byai one day decides to visit their own forest (Miido landre morey) after many years. When they reach Miido landre morey, they find two young boys setting traps for animals there. This angers Loder and Byai since it was their forest and no one had the right to trespass. They scold the boys for trespassing and ask them their names and whose sons they were. The two boys tell them that the forest was their fathers and that they were Miido Chada and Miido Chama, sons of Miido Loder and Miido Byai respectively. Their answer leaves Loder and Byai dumbstruck as they realize that they had left their wives and babies at home. They also realize that it has been years since they left home and their sons have grown up now. They go back to Puming and Pubyang and tell them about what had happened in Miido landre morey. They ask the two women for divorce and tell them that their wives might be thinking of themselves as widows and their sons might be thinking that they are orphans and so they should go back to their wives and sons. Puming and Pubyang, who were deeply in love with the two men, did not have the heart to let them go. However, after some discussion they finally let them go while cursing them in their hearts. Their curses take effect when Loder and Byai are on the way. They encounter

1Narrated by informants Tilling Pui and Michi Yasing.
2A council or arbitrator.
bad weather and thick fog and are unable to carry on their journey. They decide to return to Puming and Pu-byang and scold them for not letting them go whole-heartedly. Loder and Byai set out again taking back their mithuns. This time again, bad weather cause them to return. They ask Puming and Pubyang to sacrifice a hen and perform a ritual on Tulo Putu\(^3\). Inspite of the sacrifice and ritual, they are faced with obstruction on their way. They return to Puming and Pubyang again and ask them to hand over their ornaments (hutu gakhe\(^4\) and uyang kobyang\(^5\)) as blessings. Puming and Pubyang give them their ornaments and squirt milk from their breasts on the two men’s palms as blessing and make them go. Finally, Loder and Byai are able to go without any obstruction on the way. Once they reach their own village, the people look down on them with disgust. As they look for a place to keep their mithuns, none of the villagers accept the offer as they believed that Loder and Byai had desecrated the mithuns by their infidelity. Having no place to keep their mithuns, Loder and Byai perform Supung\(^6\) with sand instead of rice powder and butcher the mithuns. Then they go on to live with their wives and sons forever. Given below are some excerpts from Papiñ-Pame Biisi.

**Papiñ-Pame Biisi\(^7\)**

Oder ka aya miido aayi ka papiñ pumiñ nyika pame pubyañ nyika cho-cho du aiyi uni riso mi oder punchañ so buke biniñi si aiyi punchañ so buke biniñi si aayi punchañ so ubyañ riso mi buke tinii lyandiñ tinda ka padu torbo byo, lyanko tinda ka aju yame byo dolyi tiinni du lyiko tinii du doh tinii du heko tinii du cho-cho du oder-aayi nyi papiñ lemba so bulañ milii pa lyika talyi ka aiyi pame lemba so yalañ siikho pa khoka talyi ka uni-ubyañ nyi oder-aayi aiyi papiñ lemba ho mu akre pa kartu siibii do, sah akre pa kartu siibii do oder-aayi nyi unu nello mi oder nello pa armyañ biido cho myanga biido cho aiyi nello pa ubyañ nello mi armyañ biido cho myanga biido cho cho lu cho du aya-aya ha uni-ubyañ nyimi nentu tubi do riingo porbi do sandu giibi do sah pyabi do cho-cho du aiyi-ayii du miido landre morey so morey lyika incha lyika ah oder-aayi nyika miihi miiniñ si oho miiniñi si miij niipa du hensu doyu ke oder-aayi nyi papiñ lemba so duka duka la ho pame lemba so dusu duka la miido landre morey so morey incha tola cho aya miido chada nyi miido chama nyi mi oho bułyi ho pili bo barnye dutey la du hoka papiñ lemba ka bulya milii ni yalañ siikho pa mu akre pa sah akre pa kartu koto la ho turo pabi do hiruñ labi do miido chada-chama nyi oder-aayi nyim kan pa kaye lo toku la landre morey so morey incha tola lo huka nyibo kachi na mito kao na oder-aayi nyika dachi pyako so pyadonii du dala heko so heya donii du hiika kele lo ngo miido lodar ka aiyi aba lodar ka chada cho du do miido byai ka aba byai ka chama cho du do hiika kele lo cho lu cho du aiyi ho landre morey so morey ho dala du oder-aayi nyi tubo jinga pa ngaiko yu ke lyabo jinga pa ngaiko yu ke aiyi-ayii du uni-ubyañ nyika agiñ jaso du ho abii kula cho ngiika miihi miiniñi si miij niipa du hendo kudo ya oho miiniñi si miij niipa du aiyi hendo kudo ya uni-ubyañ nyi aya siirañ moyañ sa ka tala lo ho siirañ tiyu ke myoyañ da yu ke cho-cho du aya-aya du

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\(^3\) A hill often referred to in Apatani folk tales and songs.

\(^4\) A type of traditional bangle.

\(^5\) Also a type of bangle.

\(^6\) A ritual performed by smearing rice powder on the head of a mithun and later butchering it.

\(^7\) By Late Doging Yapyang, taken from AIR, Ziro on 22\(^{nd}\) August, 2011. Courtesy: All India Radio, Arunachal Pradesh.
The speaker begins by saying that it was through the wind that the news of Puming and Pubyang had reached the ears of Loder and Byai. As the two brothers set out on the journey as Bulyang, they reach Papiñ-Pame vil-

lage where they see the two beautiful sisters Puming and Pubyang. The speaker then tells that the two brothers start living with Puming and Pubyang. In these lines, “oder-aayi nyi umi nello mi oder nello pa armyañ biido cho myangka biido cho/aayi nello pa ubyañ nello mi armyañ biido cho myangka biido cho” the speaker tells that Puming’s house is now named as Loder’s house and Pubyang’s house as Byai’s. The two men start doing all the work for them and feeding them. They make things out of bamboos and woods for the two women and go to the forest to hunt and bring them meat. They settled in the village serving Puming and Pubyang for a long time. The speaker then tells about the meeting of Loder and Byai with their sons Chada and Chama in Landre morey and the realization that strikes them like a lightning. It is only after seeing their sons that they had come to their senses and realized that they had their wife and child at home. Loder and Byai immediately divorce Puming and Pubyang and leave for their village only to return because of thick fog hindering their journey. After attempting to go and returning for a few times, finally after getting Puming and Pubyang’s ornaments and blessings, they reach their village safely.

3. Results and Discussions

This stanza is about the beginning of the love affair between Loder and Puming and between Byai and Pubyang till the time they decide to go back to their respective wives. It is said that Loder and Byai had all the des-

irable attributes of a man. They were wealthy and known in the society which qualified them to be in the Bu-

lyang. Their only error was to fall for the two sisters in Papiñ-Pame village leaving their wives and sons at home. It is a rather complicated love story since it deals with infidelity or extra-marital affair, which is not acceptable in a conservative society like the Apatanis’. However, the theme of this biisi is true of every society and of hu-

man nature. Infidelity or extra-marital affairs do exist and have been existent since human beings first ex-

perienced love with the opposite sex. It is indeed interesting how Puming and Pubyang charmed the two brothers into staying with them for a number of years. Critically the two sisters represent the femme fatales of modern era. Beautiful women did exist since time immemorial that could lure and destroy men. They knew the art of feminine grace by which they attracted men and had dominion over them.

Papiñ-Pame Biisi

Ayii-ayii du cho-cho du ayii-ayii du
miido tilyiñ ka lyinkuñ cho ayi he ka nyime he cho
loder antii si duliñ biitti nii byai aba si duliñ biitti nii
oder ganda si senyi ganda cho aayi ganda si sapi ganda cho
sango saliñ ka saliñ barmii mi mihi lake le hago haliñ ka
haliñ barmii mi mihi lake le oder pingañ so tiili mado ta
ayi pingañ so tiilo mado ta beppo mado ta
dotu nii nii mi mihi lake le penji nii nii mi mihi lake le
biilyi bubi mi mihi lake le bita bube mi mihi lake le
oder pingañ so tiili mado ya beppo mado ya ayi pingañ so
tiilo mado ya yopo mado ya ayii-ayii du

*Explained by informants Michi Yasing, Hage Kori and Duyu Otung.
*By Tilling Pui, taken from AIR, Ziro on 22nd August, 2011. Courtesy: All India Radio, Arunachal Pradesh.
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ganda tata ka biinii aru mi mihi lake le siigañ tata ka
siibo roro mi mihi lake le oder pingañ so tiili mado ya
aayi pingañ so tiilo mado ya beppo mado ya
aayi-ayii du cho-cho du ayii-ayii du
siiro dogi mi mihi lake le sango sambyii mi mihi lake le
abi pikhañ mi tarii ngokhañ mi lagii nii da ku cho-cho ayii-ayii du
diily gechi mi mihi lake le diige gema mi mihi lake le
abi ratta ya chipi datta ya tarii ratta ya chopo dota ya cho-cho du ayii-ayii du
lakko tarii pa lappi lima do cho-cho du ai-aiyi du ayii-ayii du
supu yonii ka yoyi sansañ mi mihi lake le ayii-ayii du
oder pingañ so tiili mado ya beppo mado ya aayi pingañ so
tiilo mado ya yopo mado ya ayii-ayii
nii supuñ yunii ka ami yunii ka yuyi sansañ lu
oder jitti mi jike kele lo aayi jiro me hekke kele lo
sango pulye pa luru pada la hago pulye pa kopii pulu la
oder tingañ so tiili mado ta beppo mado ta aayi tingañ so
tiilo mado ta lyoppo mado ta ayii-ayii du
supuñ goppii so hupper tala la kenyi papu ka kenda piila la
huqiita tola lo dabii dayi ke ayii-ayii du
ami dumii ka dumii tudu lo ami yami ka yami yalo lo
ngamu ate lu sango innañ la piidiñ chuçu la dassu da ku ya
bulañ tatañ pa lianyu puchu ma liyañyañ tamañ pa nyago balye hema
ka dalii ke ayii-ayii du cho-cho du
iiian siilyañ ka siilyañ siigañ so ayii-ayii du
chinyu riipii si pipyo kapa do payi sangya si gyapyo kapa do
miido riigiñ elañ la miido riiñ mi riiñ elañ la
miido dokho mi riiñho elañ la riiñho elañ la
yubo meli mi menga tiicho du ayii-ayii du
yubo artu mi tika kele lo kauka nii si taluñ chamii pa kabiñ dota yu
takho chamii pa pyatta chamii pa kabii dota yu
siichañ pakhañ ka khambu myogañ mi laliiñ lala la myodi parañ ka
ranbu yogayañ mi laliiñ lala la ayii-ayii du
ayii bimi ka bimiñ biye mi palo lala la uyi samii ka samii sadiiñ mi tiilo lala la
dingyañ lala la ponyo lala la apiñ lala la chenyo lala la ayii-ayii du
pudu ilyo mi laliiñ lala la pudu yahii mi laliiñ lala la
lyodu ilyo mi laliiñ lala la pabu pake mi paka techo du
ayii-ayii du cho-cho du ayii-ayii du
nukañ anii ka dintii dikkuñ mi laliiñ lala la uyi piichañ pa
nukañ anii ka kotii kolo mi laliiñ lala la yumo sampya pa
mobu gachi mi laliiñ lala la paye garo mi laliiñ lala la
ayii-ayii du cho-cho du ayii-ayii du
nupu yobii so payup khiila la niikhiñ yabii so pyakhe khela la
niiliiñ yobii so pyalanñ khiila la ayii-ayii du
yani duttiñ mi laliiñ lala la yana lyekho mi laliiñ lala la
ami dumii ka dumii tudu lu ayii-ayii du
hinti himii ka khiibo khiimid mi laliiñ lala la pintii hiruñ ka
khiibo khiiri mi laliiñ lala la ayii-ayii du
ami dumii ka dumii tudu lu ayii-ayii du
ngunu ate pa sango pulye mi hago pulye mi jitiñ taliiy la
tika taliiy la yira taliiy la hekka taliiy la hitka tala la ayii-ayii du
yompiñ landiiñ so potiñ lala la tiicha lala la hachañ ranko so
chingyañ lala la ralo lala la jitiñ toke le tiika toke le
jiro toke le hekk a toke le ayii-ayii du
The speaker says Loder and Byai’s parents Miido Tilying and Nyime Yaye are looking for brides for them in their land called Senyi-Sapi Ganda. They first get married to salin barmii and halin barmii respectively but those girls do not know how to dress. Then they get married to dotu nii and penji nii nii but they are not fit to be their wives. They get married to bilyi bubi and bita bube but they have no knowledge about weaving. They marry binii aru and siibo roro but they are not fit to be their wives. Then they get married to siiro dogi and san go sambii but they have no sense of dressing. They get married to diilyi gechi and diige gema and they too have no sense of dressing or grooming. Finally they get married to supuñ yonii and yoyi sansañ. They weave clothes for Loder and Byai but they do not do it well, so Loder and Byai throw those clothes and asks a bird named kenyi papu to take them and fly away. The sisters of Loder and Byai, Dumi and Yami feel disappointed for their brothers that none of the prospective wives can weave clothes for the m. They know that their brothers are enthusiastic and determined about going on journeys to faraway lands but none of their wives are capable of making them clothes to take with them on the journey. Dumi and Yami decide to weave clothes for their brothers. They wish to make the best designs for their brothers so they start looking around for things to draw inspiration from. They first go to a place near the river and keeps a giri (bird trap), hoping to trap beautiful birds. A bird named “Yubo” gets trapped and the two sisters cut open its stomach and finds seeds that look like cotton seeds in it. They also collect pumpkin and melon seeds. They go to the forest and collect all sorts of things they can to create beautiful designs. Then they start making sticks for weaving by cutting down trees with an “ilyo\(^{10}\)”. They also take out old broken things from the old people, like vessels and baskets. Now they start dyeing the thread in red colour. Now that they have collected everything for the design, they start looking at the melon seeds and other things. The speaker then tells that they are going to draw the thread from north to south and start weaving . As they start weaving , a squirrel (Yompiñ takhii) disturbs them and drops the weaving stick . A bird (Hachañ piita) also disturbs them. Suddenly they see a peacock and try to catch it. They spend around five years trying to get hold of the peacock to copy its feather design. Finally when they catch the peacock, they are able to get hold

\(^{10}\)Sword or machete.
of only one feather. They are left confused about the design on the single feather. They try to figure out how to copy it until they are in tears. Then they go to Ato Charuñ’s house and bring things they find beautiful and copy the design. They successfully make beautiful designs on the clothes and those are also perfect fit for their brothers. Loder and Byai wear them and go on the journey with other Bulyang leaders. The speaker then ends by saying that the Bulyang group had stopped at Puming and Pubyang’s houses for refreshment and entertainment. There is dance and merry-making as Loder goes to Puming’s house and Byai goes to Pubyang’s house.

4. Results and Discussions

These lines describe how the clothes of Loder and Byai were made ready before they set out on the journey as Bulyang. It seems Loder and Byai married many women but left them soon since they did not possess the qualities of an ideal wife in terms of grooming and weaving. Some of them did not know how to weave or to dress well and others did not weave properly or some of them were simply not fit to be their wives. The knowledge of weaving was a desirable quality in women during those days, and they had to be perfect in it. The talent gained them better chances to be chosen as the bride. The search for designs by Dumi and Yami shows the origin of designs on traditional Apatani clothes. Each and every detail of the design is thus inspired from nature as the two sisters collect whatever they can from the forest. It takes great effort to create the design as Dumi and Yami spend years in search of peacocks to copy the designs on its feather. The time and effort taken by Dumi and Yami to create the designs reveal the creativity and excellent craftsmanship behind the simple yet colourful and authentic designs on Apatani traditional dresses. Like every other folk songs, this too reflects the life and culture of the Apatanis during the early times.

5. Conclusion

The complete ballad has intricate details of the romance of the two couples which has inspired people to compose love ballads to express their feelings of love and longing. The ballad begins from the time Loder and Byai are born with details about their parents and family as a whole. Each and every ritual performed in Loder and Byai’s lives are described in detail. In a way the ballad signifies not only the epitome of love but also the rites of passage in the Apatani society. It is through such ballads and other narratives that the history of the Apatanis can be traced. These oral narratives depict the life and culture of the Apatanis.

References


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11Priestly ancestor of Apatanis.
12Explained by informants Michi Yasing and Hage Kori.
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