

The Elephants in Goalparia Folk Songs

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ABSTRACT

Goalparia Folk songs have created a culture around elephants in undivided Goalpara in Assam, India. Most of these folk songs portray a picture of a mahout driving elephants for hunting and other economic activities. These mahouts as presented in Goalparia songs come from different castes; however, on assuming the charge of the mahout under the Zamindar, they structure themselves into a class and shed their caste position. The class so fashioned lives predominantly on the patronage of the Zamindar. But with the abolition of the Zamindari system in India, these mahouts had to lead a miserable life. They later looked for other works and got themselves engaged. However, their knowledge on elephants could not be preserved and therefore, it is lost forever. These folk songs portray the sorrows and happiness of these mahouts amidst the din and bustle of their work. The mahouts lament of having to leave their loved ones back at home in order to serve their master. These folk songs also narrate stories surrounding these mahouts and young damsels of the *Jagir*. So the recurrent uses of elephants in the songs do reveal the existence and engagement of elephants in the everyday world of Zamindar. These folk songs thus document the socio economic culture of the *Jagir* and contribute to growth of people's perception regarding the elephant as a socially useful animal. Thus, in Goaparia culture, it is believed that anything related even distantly to elephant has a panacea.

Keywords: *Folk songs, Mahout, Zamindar, Jagir, Class*

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