

The First World War as reflected in a Bengali folk song of Barak Valley

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The rich treasury of the folk literature of Barak Valley is full of immense diversities. Matters like social reformation movement, the development of city life, the sepoy mutiny, the Burmese attack and many other topics are subject matter of the folk songs of this valley. Certain folk songs were composed about the first world war too. In those songs we get a clear picture of the thoughts and ideas of the common people about first world war. The present song about the first world war was collected from an old manuscript which belongs to Smti Ketaki Bala Goswami, the mid-wife of Baitakhal Tea garden, under the jurisdiction of Patherkandi Police station of Karimganj dist. in 1978. The composer of the song is one Joy Nath, whose whereabouts could not be collected inspite of an extensive survey.

The first world war broke out in 1914 A.D. Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand, prince of Austria and his wife were murdered in a bomb explosion in Serajevo, capital of Bosnia, on 28th June, 1914. Two Austrian citizens who were of Serbian origin made this explosion. This murder is the direct cause of the first world war. Austria attacked Serbia on the 28th July, 1914. Germany supported the attack. On the 4th August, 1914 Britain joined this war and in this way the world war began. After six years on 28th June, 1919 this war ended.

Barak valley was also greatly affected by the first world war. The price of the commodities increased and the public life was so much affected that the Silchar (Dist. head Quarter of Cachar Dist.) Municipal Board was to convene an emergent meeting. An unanimous resolution was adopted in the meeting held on 15th August, 1914, that the following announcement should be made throughout

the town by beat of drum that - "there is no genuine reason to increase the price of commodities due to war". The original resolution is as follows:

The meeting of the commissioners and members of the ward committees was held on the 15th August, 1914 to discuss the present situation about the rise of the prices in the market.

Present :-

The Chairman.

The Vice-chairman

Babu Durga Sankar Dutt.

Babu Mohim Chandra Biswas.

Babu Nagendra Nath Dutt.

Babu Brojo Nath Shome.

Babu Upendra Nath Ghose.

Dr. Abdul Gaffur.

Munshi Habib Ulla.

Rai Shaib Behari Lal Dhar.

Babu Mukunda Mohan De.

Babu Baikunta Chandra Dutt.

Babu Krishna Kumar Dutt.

Babu Sarat Chandra De.

Babu Padma Luchan Sen.

Babu Abhaya Charan Das.

Babu Aghar Nath Adhikari.

Mathura Nath Choudhury representing the "Surma" was also present.

Resolved after considerable discussion that in addition to the commissioners and members of ward committee using moral persuasion and advice to shop keepers not to enhance price and the following opinion be published by beat of drum throughout the town :-

"Yuddher hetute kono jinisher dam barhaibar sangoto kono karan nai".

It was further resolved that the commissioners be requested to inquire into the condition of market on Thursday and report.

Kamini Kumar Chanda (Chairman)

The "Surma", which was published as a weekly under the editorship of Pandit Chandradoy Vidyavinod from the Aryan press of Silchar since 1911 A.D., was converted into a daily newspaper with a view to keeping the people well informed about the first world war.

"In 1914, the paper (Surma) was converted into a daily and it kept the people informed about the development of world war I".

The first world war also greatly affected the economy of this region. In that very song it is narrated that jute export was stopped and as a result the farmers fell in a miserable condition. This is also mentioned in the autobiography of Late Brojendra Naryan Choudhury, a zamindar of Sylhet and renowned freedom fighter.

"Though the German war of 1914 didnot reach India, yet it affected the economic life of the people of India The government didnot control the price of jute so jute mill owners purchased jute at a rate of three rupees per maund from the farmers and sold it to war nations at a high price. The mill owners by selling the jute bags meant for trench war to the war nations made so much profit that the market price at the shares of the jute mills of Kamarhati rose ten times. Kamarhati was than the barometer of share market.

"On the other side the farmers were dying. Though the price of paddy rose to four or five rupees per maund from two or three rupees. The price of the cloth too, increased. The mill made cloth which was available at two rupees per piece rose to seven rupees. At that time clothes were looted in many markets of Sylhet districts".²

The song conveys the prayer for protecting the British imperial power. It may be mentioned here that the public opinion in general did not

go against the British power, although the latter was suspicious of a section of peoples loyalty to the British Raj. It is evident from the reference to seizure of guns from some persons of this region. At that time some sections of the common folk felt proud to identify themselves as a loyal subject of the British government.

A free translation of the original song is cited below:

Naughty and mischievous Servian murdered
the prince couple of Austria

As a result all the prominent powers of
the world

Giving up their ethics were engaged in blood
shed.

It was a bloody war '

Whole world looked with wonder and fear
At this great war in land, water and air.

Oh 'mother goddess Durga,

Jute export was banned

And the farmers became peniless.

There was wailing day and night every where.

There was cry for money.

Land, water and air trembled by terrific
war

All creatures moving in the air

Were trembling in fear.

Save us oh ten handed Goddess,

Daughter of the Himalaya

Oh Goddess Durg_a'

Protect our royal British army from this
danger,

The great German war.

Our king, for the shake of justice

Plunged into the great German war

We are trembling here in fear

We are always afraid of the German canon
and zeplin

Knowing Kaiser's desire of conquiring the
entire world

Russia, France and the British lion roared
in anger.

The desire of wicked is never fulfilled.

Ravana was killed for his excessive pride,

The Kauravas were destroyed for excess egotism
King Boli had to go to 'patal' for his excess
gift.

So, excess of anything is bad.

Oh 'Mother Goddess Durga

The German king, mad with pride

And disobeyed the gospels of Jesus christ,

Engaged themselves in war unnecessarily

And were killing the christians.

The wicked, when become too much powerful, tor-
ture other people,

And take away others wealth and life by
hook or crook.

At last the wicked fall down.

Oh ' Mother Goddess Durga,

Great heroes of Belgium faught bravely

But were totally destroyed for saving their
native land.

To protect their independence

The Belgeuns, both men & women faught unitedly.

It is heart rendering to hear

That the golden Belgium was turned into
a grave

And the queen became poor.

Oh ' Mother Goddess'

How great is your illusion

Who can realise it'

It seems that in 1321 B.E. you will destroy
this creation.

The christians, being mad in this great
war of Europe

Kill lakhs and lakhs of people indiscrimi-
nately.

What an injustice it is.

They are killing lakhs and lakhs of kinsmen

Like Kauravas and Pandavas'

Europe, being the centre of science, knowledge
and civilisation

And rich in wealth

Now becomes the place of bloody war fare.

Crores of people

Leaving their valuable homes are becoming
refugees

They are wailing
 Innumerable fathers, sons husbands and brother
 are being killed
 Happy peaceful families are destroyed.
 All the wicked kings,
 Who try to become the emperor of the world
 Are burning the world and are doing tyrannies
 Ultimately these wicked kings are killed
 And are totally destroyed with their kith
 and kins.
 Our kings, snatched away our guns falsely
 suspecting us.
 How can we protect us, we have no power
 Otherwise the British king would have got
 Crores of Indian soldiers.
 Oh 'Mother Goddess
 Protect the king with his allies in this
 great war
 They are fighting for the good of the world
 Oh mother Goddess Durga'
 Riding the British lion kill the new Mahisasura
 Oh mother ' taking any form as you like,
 Sprinkling the holy water of the Jordan
 river
 Bring peace to the world.
 Otherwise your golden earth will go to hell.
 Joy Nath, mad with worldly riches
 Has forgotten your colourful feet and loosing
 peace and wealth is crying.
 It is his humble prayer to you
 That you would kindly grant him shelter
 under your feet
 While he breaths his last'

The original text of the song

Chitan

duṣṭa serba pāmar hatyā kare austriyār se
 yubaraj dāmpati
 Krodhe sab sakati bhuliye nīti bhāsāy rakta
 gangāy ei basumati

bhīsaṅ yudhha jagat stabdha euruper māhayudha
Jale sthale antarikse
judhha jale jāhāj hala bandha
mā mā ga durge
pāt raptānī bandha hala phurālo cāṣār sambal
hā raptani bandha hala phuralo casar sambal
ha hutās dibāniṣi tākā tākā kaire sabe ksubdha
e mahākāl bhisan samar kāpe jal sthal bhudhar
bhaye kāpe khecar
tumi raksā kara dasabhuje himālaya nandinī

dhuya

durge e durgame germen mahārane
rākha moder britis rāj bāhini
moder rājā dharmer tare jhāp dilen jārmān
samare
amrā kāpi bhaye
germān krop kāmān jepliner bhay sāda hay
antare
jene kaisārer e abhilās prithibi karibe
grās
rose ruṣ pharāsi britiṣ siṅha garjila takhani

khad

dusta janer maner bañchā kakhan pruna hay n ā
ati darpe hata rābaṅ abhimāne kaurabgan
ati dāne balīr pātāl gaman
ati atyanta kulakṣaṅ
mā mā go durge
mada matta jermen rājan abahela jiṣur bacan
kaire akāran mahāran mā go naṣiche khristāngan
ati bali hale durjan kare sadā para piṛan
chale bale hare parer dhanjan
ṣeṣe hay go dusteṛ patan
mā mā go durge
bira ṣreṣṭha belgiyāngan kariye gorotar raṅ
tārā dhane prāṇe hala nidhan
mā go svadeṣ raksār kāran
tārā stri puruṣe mile laṛe svādhinatā
raksār tare

ṣunle hrid bidare
hāyre sunār belgiyān hala ṣmaṣān
Kāṅgāl rājrāni

jhumur

mā go tar māyā ki bisam māyā
e māyā bujhbār sādhyā kār
bujhī ei teraṣata ekuṣ sane karibe tui
sristi saṃhār
europer mahārane matta hay khristan gane
jāti dharma nāhi māne eki abicār
tārā lākhe lākhe māre ṅjāti kuru pāndaber
ākār
ṅjān biṅjāner khani sabhyatār ṣiramani
dhane ratne ati dhani e mahi yāhār
haloāj kena hāy europe nara soniter kārbār
koti koti naranāri chāri sunār ghar bāri
hachhe sadā deṣāntari mukhe hāhākār
mare pati putra pitā bhrātā sunār saṃsār
kaila chārkhār
yata duṣṭa narapati hate cāy prithibipati
puṛe jvele ei kṣhiti kare atyācār
seṣe naṣṭa hay sei duṣṭa sabamṣete haye
saṃhār
moder rājā sandeha kari bandukṭi nilen kāri
kise ātmarakshā kari nāi puruṣākār
naile ei bhāratei haita koti koti sainya
rājār
raksa ma bhisan rane rājā saha mitragane
tārājagat nita karane laṛe
tui mā britiṣ siṃhe caṛe naba mahisāsūr
kar mā saṃhār
mā tumi ki rup dhari āniya jardaner bāri
santidhārā barsān kari juṛāo e saṃsār
naile tumār sunār dhara rasātale yābe ebār
matta joynāth bisay made bhuliye tumār rāṅgā
pade
hārāiye sānti sampad kare hāhākār
tui dis mā tor rāṅgā caraṅ antimete tāre
ebār

Notes & References

1. J.B.Bhattacharjee, **Cachar Under British Rule in North East India**, New Delhi, 1977,p.241.
2. B.N.Choudhry, **Smriti O Pratiti**, Calcutta, 1982, p. 207.