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**A Formalist Analysis of Poetic and Cultural Expression in the
Shina Folk Song Tavau Gai (wedding song) Practiced in Gilgit
Baltistan**



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Abstract

This study aims to identify formal elements of *Tavau Gai*, the renowned cultural Shina folk song through formalism described by Jakobson and Shklovsky. This study analyzes the formal elements like poetics, form, devices, literariness, foregrounding, and defamiliarization as have been suggested by the above stated theorists. By employing the formalist analytical approach, the study scrutinized the formal elements through textual analysis. The study found that *Tavau Gai* possessed rich poetical elements such as repetition, alliteration, consonance, and assonance to create a rich auditory experience. Additionally, the form of the folksongs structured of lines and stanzas which enhanced the memorability and performativity. The analysis further uncovered the role of literary devices in conveying deeper themes, such as norms and values, religion and cultural identity that highlighted the significance of Shina folk songs within the oral tradition. Finally, this research contributed to the understanding of how formal elements in folk song facilitate cultural expression and preservation in the Shina-speaking communities.

Key Words: Formalism, Formalistic Elements, Tavau Gai, Folksong,

Introduction

Folk songs play an important role in identity construction and cultural expression of particular community. According to Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (2001) folk song is a song of unknown authorship that has been passed on, preserved, and adapted generation to generation through oral tradition and words of mouth. Eslit (2013) folk song is one of the types of oral literature and a fine art which is transferred from one generation to another generation orally. Additionally folk songs have been an important part of Shina culture specially wedding songs, Shaap, Talanay Gai and other songs are not mere folk music rather they are rituals that traces back centuries of Shina civilization.

Wedding song is sung across the Shina speaking territory of Gigit Baltistan. Shina literature is mainly composed of oral literature including folk song, folk lore and folk tale. Folk songs are rich source of Shina literature that has been transformed from generation to generation through words of mouth. They are the only source

through which Shina civilization can be traced. Shina folk songs are mainly composed of optative sentences that carry prayers, blessings, tribute, admiration and talk's philosophy of life and perspective. Shina folk songs are sum of life style of shina people, every folk song narrates its related area of interest as Tavau Gai describes wedding ceremony. Tavau Gai (wedding song) is one of melodic song which symbolizes the beginning of wedding ceremony. There are some rituals celebrated with this song as it signifies the importance of marriage system in Shina culture and a number of customs are attached with this song. The process of ceremony begins with the ceremony of Tavuo at night, just after the wedding feast (dinner) to the inviters. The Tavuo ceremony, in ancient period it was arranged in the rako (main living room), begins with the lit of fire and put the griddle on traditional hearth. A maiden, below teenage, makes at least two breads (Phapaye). Most important is the process of putting the griddle on the hearth. A person or notable having excellent character (powo sumolo) among the villagers is being selected to put the griddle on the hearth during which the Tavau Gai (the wedding song) is being sung by the group of people present at the occasion. The griddle putter puts it three times and the song is sung each time the following song (Gai).

Tavau Gai

Wo tongi tao bye shal duda ka

Tongi tao je chanu na doun

Tongi tao aki chanu

Wo tongi tao azarbugara

Tongi tao je chanu na dun

Tongi tao aki chanu

Wo tongi tao nelu bata je

Tongi tao je chanu na dun

Tongi tao aki chanu

Wo tongi tao sho dazak aalo

Tongi tao je chanu na dun

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Tongi tao aki chanu

Wo tongi tao sho daday rakaru

Tongi tao je chanu na dun

Tongi tao aki chanu

Wo tongi tao kashir shamera

Tongi tao je chanu na dun

Tongi tao aki chanu

Wo tongi tao pala makpona

Tongi tao je chanu na dun

Tongi tao aki chanu

Wo tongi tao gilit malika

Tongi tao je chanu na dun

Tongi tao aki chanu

Wo tongi tao nagir mugalota

Tongi tao je chanu na dun

Tongi tao aki chanu

Wo tongi tao hunzay girgisa

Tongi tao je chanu na dun

Tongi tao aki chanu

Wo tongi tao puya burusha

Tongi tao je chanu na dun

Tongi tao aki chanu

Wo tongi tao chachal katura

Tongi tao je chanu na dun

Tongi tao aki chanu

Literature Review

This section reviews the scholarly scholarship about folk songs from different cultures. A number of researches have been conducted on folk songs using formalistic approach.

A study conducted by Maake (1905) viewed as a cornerstone for understanding how formalism can be applied to oral traditions. His analysis shows that by isolating technical features like rhyme schemes, meter, and repetitive patterns, scholars can uncover the artistic complexity of oral poetry, free from external influences.

Lomax (1959) conducted a research on Folk Song Style, and supported the idea of analyzing folk music through its formal elements. He emphasized that while folk music was deeply rooted in culture, its artistic form could be better understood through a formalist approach that focuses on rhythm, melody, and form. Lomax suggests that by studying these elements in isolation, one can appreciate the aesthetic complexity of folk music.

In a broader theoretical context, Merrill (2012) worked on Russian formalism in folklore offers an important perspective on the use of formalist methods in oral traditions. Merrill shows how this methods especially those used by scholars like Vladimir Propp, focus on breaking down the narrative structures of folklore into their basic elements, making it easier to analyze their formal properties.

Another study conducted by Bohlman (1988) on The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World further supports the formalist approach, emphasizing that folk music often contains recognizable, recurring patterns and structures that offer themselves well to formal analysis. He argues that these patterns are essential to understanding the unity and creativity of folk music, making it possible to analyze the music independently of its cultural and social background.

Likewise folk music in Pakistan is an important cultural and artistic expression, representing a variety of local traditions. Researchers have explored different aspects of folk music extending from its thematic significance to its role in identity formation and cultural representation. Kazmi, Ali, and Issa (2024) conducted a thematic analysis of Balti folk songs identifying key themes such as culture, religion and politics. Their

research highlights how these elements contribute to a pleasant life within Balti society and provide individuals with a sense of identity and stability. On the other hand, the study also identifies the possible conflict and tension when blames interrupt social harmony. This research used Johnny Saldana's code-to-theory model and applying a systematic approach to analyze folk song lyrics.

Hemani (2011) conducted a study on representation of Pakistan through folk music, focusing on how folk rituals are used to construct national identity. Folk traditions in Pakistan are seen as contestation, on the basis of which different ethnic group privilege of ownership of their folk traditions to declare their cultural importance within broader perspectives. This study highlights the complexities involved in folk literature both as cultural asset and political tools.

Additionally Khan and Naz (2012) conducted a qualitative research on linguistic analysis of Pakhtun folk songs focusing on how language play role in gender identity formation within Pakhtun society. This research reveals that how folk songs are not only artistic expressions rather also cultural tools that challenges gender identities.

Furthermore Taj and Ameen (2024) conducted a research on cultural reflections in Pakistani rap music specially analyzed The Sibbi song and Karachi Chal through comparative study of multimodal discourse analysis. Although they focused on modern music but the study parallels with folk traditions, as both rap and folk songs reflect societal norms and values.

Amir (2019) also conducted a research on Sindhi folk music, specially analyzed the symbolic meaning in Sheik Ayaz's Tiri Pawanda. This song is examined for its deep cultural and poetic symbolism allocation as a means of expressing fundamental social and political messages.

Additionally Karim (2020) conducted a historical study of South Asian folk music focusing on social and religious perspectives. The research by Karim explored both ancient folk traditions and modern folk traditions emphasizing their growing role in society. This research also contributed to the understanding of how folk songs link communities across time and space through cultural and religious experiences.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted in a village Bagrote, District Gilgit (Gilgit Baltistan). The

village is 45 minutes far from main city Gilgit. Bagrote is considered as core area of Shina culture, only Shina ethnic group is living there. It is the area of Gilgit Baltistan, regardless of of globalization and digital era, all traditions and rituals of shina culture are celebrated enthusiastically.

This study has used qualitative research method in order to achieve its research goals. In-depth interviews are conducted from notables having cultural knowledge. The ages of interviewees were above 60 and questionnaire was constructed for interviews. The questionnaire included the questions about narration of Tavau Gai, meaning and significance of the song in their culture. The song was collected through interviews of more than twenty contestants. The interviews were conducted in Shina language. Furthermore among twenty participants thirteen participants narrate the song same while seven participants narrates with slight changes. Additionally five participants having good knowledge of Shina language provided meanings of word by word.

After collection of data the song is converted to written form in Shina language, then employed the formalist analytical approach and the study scrutinized the formal elements through textual analysis.

The study employed formalistic lenses to analyze the formal elements of wedding song keeping the point in view that this lens provide a comprehensive framework for analysis of folk songs by emphasizing on the formal aspect such as forms, poetics, literary devices, literariness, defamiliarization and foregrounding,

Results and Analysis

The study's result is based on formalistic analysis. The song has been analyzed through formalist lens propounded by Roman Jakobson and Shklovsky. A formalist analysis of Tavau Gai found the following formal elements.

Poetics in Tavau Gai

Repetition in Tavau Gai

The phrase "Tongi tao" is repeated consistently throughout the song, which creates a rhythmic effect. Repetition is a common technique in folk songs to strengthen rhythm, making it easier to recall and sing along. The lines "Tongi tao je chanu na dun" and "Tongi tao aki chanu" are also repeated in whole song to create effect of musicality and rhythm in the song.

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Alliteration in Tavau Gai

Alliteration appears where consecutive words begin with the same consonant sound, such as “sho dazak” and “sho daday” in different stanzas. This contributes to the musical flow of the song and enhances its auditory appeal.

Consonance in Tavau Gai

Tongi Tao" The repeated “t” and “g” sounds in both words create consonance.”Wo tongi tao sho dazak aalo” The “d” sound in “dazak” and “aalo” reflects consonance. “Tongi tao je chanu na dun” The “n” sound is repeated multiple times within this line “chanu” “na” “dun” also consonance.

“Tongi tao aki chanu” The repetition of the “k” and “n” sounds in “aki” and “chanu”

Assonance in Tavau Gai

There is a frequent use of vowel sounds, especially in the recurring "Tongi tao" and “chanu na dun” which creates a pleasant-sounding and melodious effect. The repetition of the “a” and “o” sounds in particular adds to the overall smoothness of the song when sung or recited.

Rhythms in Tavau Gai

The repetitive structure and uniformity of syllables in the lines create a steady rhythm. For example “Tongi tao” “Tongi tao je chanu na down”, “Tongi tao aki chanu,” offers a rhythmic effect in whole song.

Forms in Tavau Gai

Organization of Lines in Form of Tavau Gai

The lines in each stanza follow a repetitive, prescribed arrangement. Every stanza begins with “Wo tongi tao” followed by a new element such as nelu bata je, and the next two lines are repeated.”Wo tongi tao...

“Tongi tao je chanu na dun”

“Tongi tao aki chanu”

The arrangement creates a foreseeable structure, making it easier for the audience to understand.

Stanzas in Tavau Gai

The song is divided into stanzas. Each stanza contains three lines and follows the same formula. The first line introduces a new element such bye shal duda ka, nelu bat je while the second and third lines remain constant throughout all the stanzas. The

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structure of stanzas is uniform, giving the song a rhythmic flow. The use of short stanzas also enhances the song's memorability, making it easier to pick up and repeat.

Rhyme Scheme in Tavau Gai

The song does not follow a traditional rhyme scheme in the sense of perfect rhyme at the end of lines. In its place, it uses repetition and sound patterns e.g., consonance and assonance to create a musical quality.

The repeated phrases “Tongi tao je chanu na dun” and “Tongi tao aki chanu” contribute to a sense of rhythm and harmony, even though they do not follow a strict rhyme scheme.

Literary Devices in Tavau Gai

Allusion in Tavau Gai

Allusion is a literary device which refers to historical person, place and event. The song contains following allusions; bye shal Dudaka, Azarbugara, Nelu bat, Kashir Shamera, Pala Makpona, Gilit Malika, Nagar Muglota, Hunza Girgisa, Puya Burusha, Chachal Katura. These allusions refer to history, cultural expression and identity of Shina speaking communities.

Bye shal Dudaka refers a person; historically Dudaka was a person possessed twelve hundred goats who had given milk and butter to a warrior troop.

Azarbugara; Azar was son of Bugar, former archduke of Gilgit who killed king Shire Badat.

Nelu Bat (green stone); Nelu Bat was considered as a powerful deity in Shina civilization. In ancient time people swear of its glory and it was a sign of justices that is preserved in old library of Gilgit.

Kashir Shamera ; Kashir is used for Kashmir in Shina and Shamera is a duke family in Kashmir.

Pala Makpona; Pala refers to Baltistan and Makpon is a king family similarly Gilit Malika, Nagar Muglota, Hunza Girgisa, Puya Burusha, Chachal Katura refer to different states of Gilgit Baltistan and king's families which was recognized as symbol of glorification.

Enjambment in Tavau Gai

The song used enjambment, where lines do not end with punctuation but continue in to the next line with continuous thought by creating a sense of flow and continuity. It

is found in the whole song for example

wo tongi tao bye shal dudaka

Tongi tao je chanu na doun

Tongi tao aki chanu

Personification in Tavau Gai

Personification is a literary device which deals with giving human qualities to non-human. In the song tongi tao is personified as “Tongi tao aki chanu”. Here tongi tao is given a living quality of doing work by its own. This personification is used in several times.

Symbolism in Tavau Gai

The song used “tongi tao” as symbolism, it symbolizes blessing, happiness, love, commitment and compliments for newly couples. Similarly Dudaka, Azarbugara, Nelu bat, Kashir Shamera, Pala Makpona, Gilit Malika, Nagar Muglota, Hunza Girgisa, Puya Burusha, Chachal Katura are also used as symbolism.

Literariness in Tavau Gai

The use of literariness enhances the aesthetic beauty of the song such as defamiliarization and foregrounding used in the song differentiate song from ordinary speech.

Foregrounding

“Wo tongi tao tongi tao tongi tao” uses of such words foreground itself shouting, look at me; I am special; I am unique. Such types of words give peculiarity to the song.

Defamiliarization

The song has used familiar words in a strange manner that differentiate it from ordinary speech such as “tongi tao bye shal dudaka” “Tongi tao azarbugara” “Tongi tao kashir shamera” “Tongi tao Nelu bata je”

The combination of phrases in a unique style increases aesthetic quality of song and differentiate literary text from non-literary text.

Conclusion

Shina folk song Tavau Gai enriched with formal elements such as poetic devices, forms, literariness, foreground of literary text, defamiliarization, all of them mutually contributed to its musical flow and aesthetic quality of folksongs as Maake (1905)

said by isolating technical features like rhyme schemes, meter, and repetitive patterns, etc. scholars can uncover the artistic complexity of oral poetry, free from external influences.

In net shell poetics, form, literariness and literary devices enhance poetic features like coherence, musical and aesthetical qualities while the uses of foregrounding and defamiliarization in Tavau Gai differentiates songs from ordinary speech. Additionally, the study identified various literary devices, including allusion, enjambment, personification, and symbolism, which enrich the song's meaning and connect it to historical and cultural narratives. The use of foregrounding and defamiliarization further distinguishes Tavau Gai as a unique literary artifact, reinforcing its literariness.

Ultimately, this research highlights how formal elements in Tavau Gai serve both aesthetic and cultural functions, preserving Shina identity and oral traditions. By analyzing the song's structure and literary devices, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how folk songs act as vessels of cultural expression and continuity in Shina-speaking communities.

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