

# Benget Napam

## Eyes came across

(The story behind the song)

by Boro Baski

It was during the summer time and the season of Santal marriage as well. Bariatko, the companions of the bridegroom have arrived in the bustling village of Paharpur. Today is the third day of the marriage and Gidi-chumara, the bride and bride-groom are seated in front of the Mandwa dare, the marriage-tree. Villagers are coming one by one to bless the couple with gifts as token of expression for their happiness. Two drummers are continuously playing the big marriage drums and two fellows with supportive music hands are sitting at the corner of the courtyard. Singing and dancing are also going on simultaneously in the backyard of the marriage house. Like many other villagers I too have gone there for Dogn soggoe (marriage dance) with three of my friends from our village. After singing and dancing for about an hour, my friend Suno said, "Let us go to visit one of my distant kaki (aunt,), who lives at the end of this village." We got excited after hearing the suggestion as we have become exhausted and perspiring after dancing in this heat. Moreover, visiting a relative on a festive day also means getting rice wine in the family. Taking our tirio (bamboo flute) and banam (fiddle) with us, we went to the relative's house. But, seeing the empty house our enthusiasm vanished immediately. We should have met them at the marriage house and should have informed them about our visit. As we were about to leave the house we heard a lady calling us from behind, saying, "Henda bapu cedak pe ruq kana? Durup pe (hey, sons why are you returning? Sit down)." A middle aged lady entered with a bucket of water. She is our friend Suno's kaki. We sat down on the bedstead. She brought us water and we did the doboj-johar, the traditional greetings to each other. After enquiring about the general news of the families, she said, "when I saw Suno in the marriage house, I assumed you might come to visit us, that's why I returned home early to prepare rice wine for you. I am so happy that you have come." We spent about an hour drinking and talking with Kaki in the verandah of their thatch house. As usual after drinking for so long we started singing and playing flutes.

Suddenly, I realized that Kaki was no longer sitting with us. I thought she might have gone to bring water from the well, but when she did not return even after half an hour, I asked Suno to look out for her. Suno returned and said that Kaki was sitting alone with her head resting on the knees on the pond side at the back of the house. I thought it would be rude to leave the house without informing her. So, I went slowly towards her to thank her and say good bye. As I went closer, I saw her sobbing and I immediately turned back to go. Kaki understood that I had noticed her crying. She got up quickly wiping her tears.

After coming back to us, she looked normal and requested us to have one more glass of drink and she too took one glass for herself. Seeing her drinking made it a little easier and I tried to find out the reason for her crying. I asked, "You must be working very hard to run the family, what do your children do Kaki?" She understood my reason for asking her this question and said, "I was sitting alone under the bamboo grove leaving you alone here. To be honest I could not sit with you listening your song and flute any more here."

"Why Kaki?" I asked her anxiously.

Taking a long breath she said, "I have a brother, named Lal Soren. He is about the same age as you and the only brother of us two sisters. He is three years younger to me. Lal was a very good musician and singer and because of his attractive personality my mother always wanted to get him married fearing that he would bring a widow girl from Chata-pata, the local village fairs. My elder sister and I were so proud of him and used to discuss among ourselves about selecting a beautiful, good-hearted girl for our brother. But, things do not always happen as we wish. Once my brother went to a marriage ceremony in a village as you came here today, he took liking to a girl singing and dancing with her friends under the 'Chamda latar' (wedding arbor). He fell in love with her at the first sight. Later he insisted our parents to get him married with that girl otherwise he would never marry any girl. Everybody in our family was puzzled at his decision. We had no choice but to give in to his decision as we loved our brother so much.

"The girl was beautiful and well behaved, yet since we did not get the chance of selecting a bride for our brother, we were dissatisfied for no reason. But, when their first child was born within a year, we forgot our false ego and started accepting her. Things went on happily for a few years until their son developed paralysis. Both husband and wife ran around for his treatment but they could not cure him. Unable to bear the mental pressure and the suffering of their child, his wife broke down. She developed epilepsy and gradually became insane.

Until my mother was alive, she looked after her grandson and daughter-in-law. His wife too died suddenly and both of us sisters got married. Consequently, my brother became very lonely.

“It is five years now since my brother’s wife died and he is still struggling with his sick son. Everybody in the village suggested him to marry again for the sake of his paralyzed son and old father but he refused. He always says, “Why should I marry a woman only to carry my family's burden. It would shatter her dream of a happy life. My wife's memory is still fresh in my mind as I first saw her under the marriage arbor.””

After giving a pause and looking at our face Kaki continued, “When I heard your song and music today, it reminded me of my brother, who neither sings nor plays flute anymore. Every time I think of my brother, tears roll down onto my cheeks.”

I dedicate this song to Lal Soren for his passionate love for his wife.

Link of the video song-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-OsBMStQ90&t=53s>

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