



## Elements of Ethno-Medical Importance in Garhwali Maangal Songs

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**Abstract:** Maangal comes from the word, *mangal* means 'auspicious'. Maangal are the songs which are sung by a group of people, especially women, on a happy occasion in Uttarakhand. These merry-making songs are also sung in other part of the world but in this paper focus will be on the ethno-medical wisdom that these songs contain. This paper is an attempt to look into the richness of the nuptial songs of Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. People often ignore the knowledge and are only focused to the melody of those songs. For this paper, one nuptial song, the celebrated maangal is taken from the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, a Himalayan state. The song has been transferred from one generation to another through oral tradition. It has been present in the Garhwali community since ever. The Gadhratna of Uttarakhand, Narendra Singh Negi is accredited for the collection of many of these songs and to present them properly. However, for this study the song is picked from the recently released 'Maangal' album of Pandavaas. Major ingredients which are mentioned in the song is discussed with photos. In order to understand the song better, the transcription of the song is added. Also, the reference section contains the link of the songs.

**Keyword:** Songs • Culture • Ecology • Marriage • Ethnicity

### Introduction

Humans are social beings. They need land to live on. This land or geography has become the most important part of their lives. The type of land and the climate determine so many things which eventually constitute the culture of that community. There is nothing wrong with saying that the type of soil and temperature are the basics to form the material culture of a particular place. Be it the architecture, culinary practices, or the couture, everything will be related to the place one lives in. Every society has its own set of songs and tales. They indirectly archive almost every detail of a community. These songs, proverbs and tales are actually part of non-material culture, but help in preserving the material culture. They not only preserve the data but also record the various changes that a

community undergoes. Hence they are the best medium to trace the history of a community. Another great thing about these songs is that they contain plenty of wisdom in them. Songs aren't merely some words attached together to form a melody but, they are a source from where multiple things can be extracted if studied carefully and properly. One may find ecological wisdom, medicinal suggestions, ideas of food culture, information regarding wildlife etc. A person who has the capability of reading between the lines will do justice with such works.

In this paper the focus is on nuptial songs. Marriage is an important institution in human society. Humans used to live together without marrying, but soon they realized that it is difficult to go on like this. They felt the need to



draw boundaries. Society became better when the family system came into existence. For family, one needed to assert and declare their relationship with a particular person. With wedding came the security and clarity of two people staying with each other in every even and odd. This union was celebrated also because it is the basic step towards procreation. Every species wants to pass on their legacy to their children. Marriage was seen as a pass to enter into what is called 'Grahasth aashram' in Hindu religion. Therefore, marriage became a happy occasion\_a celebration and with celebration came the songs. It is said that one compose songs in happiness and write poetry in sorrow. These songs are full of blessings and good wishes for the couple. They are often full of advices to lead a happy married life. For this paper, two nuptial songs are taken from the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, a Himalayan state. The songs have been transferred from one generation to another through oral tradition. They have been present in the Garhwali community since ever but for this study the songs are picked from the recently released 'Maangal' album of Pandavaas. The album consists of five songs dedicated to five important proceedings of a marriage function in bride side. Maangal comes from *mangal* meaning 'auspicious'. Maangal are sung by women on auspicious occasions and the women are known as 'Mangler'. Back then, the manglers used to be elderly women of the village, but over time, the younger ones have also chosen it as a career choice. Singing in weddings or other events has become a source of earning. These new groups of professional Mangler present these songs with a touch of modernity and are equally successful in the market. They can be booked to sing songs not just in weddings but at other functions as well. Haldi is regarded as the most important function in a Garhwali wedding. Maangal are sung during haldi only. The specific term which is used is

'baan' or 'baane' so the function is actually known as 'haldi baane'. Baan they say comes from '*banaana*' meaning 'to make'. Baan is 'to make the person presentable' for the wedding. The preparation here is related to the outer physical beauty. It has something to do with the glow of face and arms! There are functions which are only performed at the groom's place and some only at bride's , but this Baane is done in both sides. The reason being obvious, because both of them should look good on their wedding day. This paper is on how the song, Maangal brings us the ethno-medical knowledge of our ancestors. These songs have been transferred from old ones to new ones but without deciphering the hidden knowledge. Ethnomedical as we know it, is the traditional knowledge which is a part of culture but contain scientific facts and in some form are passed from one generation to other through songs, tales and practices. Baane and Maangal make one such pair that can be studied to know the culture better. Next part of this paper will explain the song and see what ethno-medical elements are there:

#### **Haldi Baan**

De dyawa de dyawa mera brahma ji: O Brahmin  
bless me

De dyawa haldi ka baana hey: Bless me along  
with turmeric

Jiyan rainyaa mera brahma ji: Long live that  
Brahmin!

Jaundini ni haldi ka baana hey: One who has  
given blessings along with turmeric

De dyawa de dyawa meri maaji hey: O dear  
mother bless me

De dyawa haldi ka baana hey: Bless me along  
with turmeric

Jiyan rainyaa meri badi ji: Long live that elder  
aunt

Jaundini ni dae-doodha ka baana hey: Who has  
given blessings along with milk and curd



De dyawa de dyawa meri chachi ji: O younger aunt bless me  
De dyawa ghyu-tel ka baana hey: Bless me along with ghee-oil  
Jiyan rainya meri fufu ji: Long live that paternal aunt  
Jaundini hey chandan ka baana hey: Who has given blessings along with sandalwood  
De dyawa de dyawa meri Bhabhi ji: Bless me dear brother's wife  
De dyawa Samoya ka baana hey: Bless me along with Indian Valerian  
De dyawa de dyawa meri didi ji: Bless me my dear sister  
De dyawa Kachoor ka baana hey: Bless me along with zedoary

So the ritual basically begins with Brahma ji. Brahma, in this context, is the priest who commences the function. Although the function contain other proceedings but this paper will be limited to the ethnobotanical usage of the ingredients used in Baane. So there is two small broom kind of thing which are made up of doob (scotch grass). Then there is a large plate in which several bowls are kept (figure1 and 2). These bowls are filled with various elements. All of these elements are natural and can be obtained from nearby fields. They are crushed so that the juice of each element may come out. This crushing and smashing is done by little girls who for this ritual are offered some money or gifts accordingly by the bride's family. Because this is the core function of a Garhwali wedding so the number of people are relatively high. All the women are summoned to apply Haldi to the bride. Haldi or turmeric is just one element which somehow represents all of the elements. In other states and communities, maybe it is just turmeric, but in a Garhwali wedding, other elements are equally important and without them Baane cannot begin at all. So now let's dissect the song and talk about each of

the element to understand their significance in this particular ritual.



Figure 1. Ingredients used in Haldi Baane



Figure 2. Haldi ka baana

So it begins with 'Brahma ji' who gives "haldi ka baana". Haldi or Turmeric (*Curcuma Longa*) has been used as a spice in many Asian countries. It is also due to the coloring property that it remained an important part of Indian salty dishes for ages. It has been a part of traditional systems of medicine such as Aayurveda, Yunani, and Siddha. Turmeric comes from the ginger family (*Zingiberaceae*) and grows as an



underground rhizome. The finger-like rhizomes (**figure 3**) are taken out, washed, dried and crushed to form a fine powder. Powder is good to use for edible purposes, but when it comes to injuries, it is suggested to crush the rhizomes directly to extract some amount of juice out of it and the juice is applied on the affected area. Turmeric has a beautiful pink colored flower (**figure 4**) but it is mainly known for its skin-related properties. Curcumin (diferuloylmethane) is the element responsible for its yellow color. There are scientific researches which proves that turmeric has antibacterial, antiviral, antifungal, antioxidant and anticancer elements in it. So the turmeric has multiple benefits, be it for the internal part of body or for the outer layer which is the skin. Coming to marriage it is very clear that there is no gastro-related benefit is considered instead the application is entirely for the skin-related remedies. For few years Haldi has been celebrated as a glowing agent and that's the reason that we have several soaps and facewashes. These facewashes and body soaps sell their products by focusing on cleaning agents like turmeric and others in it. These things which are coming back with digitalization were always present in the oral culture of India. The baane primarily starts with haldi because it will cleanse the skin of bride and will give her the much needed glow for her big day. Nowadays people out of their inability to find all element fill all the bowls with Haldi which shouldn't be supported and promoted. After haldi the next element is **Dae-doodh ka baana** which means baane with milk-curd. There is a bowl which contains mostly these two dairy products together (**figure 5**).

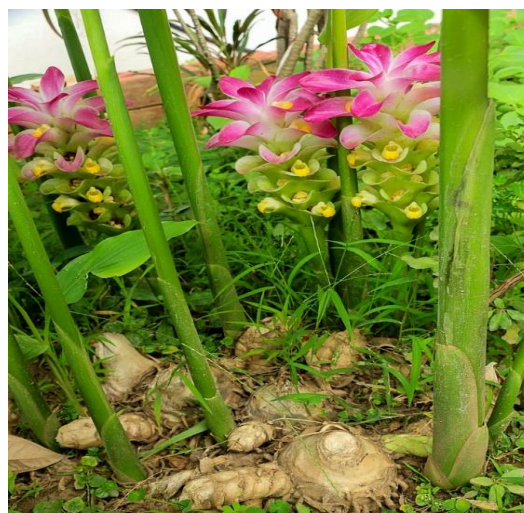


Figure 3 (Turmeric: rhizome)



Figure 4 (Turmeric flower)

We have heard the stories of queens especially Cleopetra who used to wash their body with raw milk. Even today the scrubbing is suggested to be done with raw milk. In the Garhwali marriage cow's fresh and raw milk is used in every ritual. Back then dairy was one of those things which was easily available in the countryside so it is also added in that list which should be applied to the bride's face and body. Milk contains vitamin A, D and lactic acid. Also, it helps with the hydration of skin. Milk has not just the cleansing properties but it also works as a moisturizer. The



curd is again something which has been used on skin and hair for centuries. It is mainly known for healing sunburns and to lighten the spots and dark circles. It is a great moisturizing agent which soothes the skin and helps in giving an even tone to the skin which it is applied upon. The life of hills isn't an easy one. Girls especially have to fetch woods, grass and water from faraway places. They usually don't have enough time to wash it properly. Wedding is obviously an important occasion in someone's life so they deserve to have a proper wash on this day and that's the reason for adding Dae-doodh in one of those bowls.



Figure 5 Milk Curd



Figure 6 Ghee and oil

After Dae Doodh comes the **Ghyu-tel ka baana** which literally means baane with **Ghee and oil**. Ghee (**fig. 5**) is another dairy product but of a greater value. Old people used to have good number of cows and there used to be plenty of ghee. Creams and lotions weren't produced on a large scale and also people weren't rich enough to afford them so Ghee used to be the solution of all their miseries. They used to apply it on their skin to brighten it up and on the lips to protect them from harsh climatic factor. For oil which is mustard in this case is well known for its moisturizing properties. Even today when market is full of several varieties of oil mothers prefer to massage their children's skin with *sarso ka tel* (Mustard oil). The geography of *pahaad* (hills) is suitable for the production of mustard and sesame oil. Extraction of mustard was easier than sesame therefore it was easily available in Garhwali households. Lately its nutritional and other benefits have been explored by top oil companies so that they may make good profit by selling mustard oil. It is said to have anti-ageing properties, contain vitamin A, B, E and other that helps in hydration. But the women of Uttarakhand have been using it for many decades and on both skin as well as hair and that's the reason for adding it in the bride's makeover too. This combination will provide that suppleness to the bride's skin.

After this comes another element which is **Chandan ka baana** (**fig. 7**) i.e., baane with **Sandalwood (Santalum Album)**. Sandalwood is usually rubbed on a rougher surface such as stone to get its paste to be used on face or forehead (**fig. 6**). This is a weird addition in this list because sandalwood isn't found in hills and nearby places. The smallest amount which is visible in the locale will be in the temples. Girls purchase it from the market for sure to apply it on their faces as a face-pack but mentioning it in the traditional songs surprises us. Nevertheless, sandalwood has its reference in Indian



mythology, scriptures and holy books. Not just the powder, but also the essential oil is very demanding in the market. Also, the wood is considered pious in Hindu religion. Nowadays, due to high value and less production, a small amount is added to the pier just for the symbolic purpose. So the significance of adding this into baane must be due to its cooling properties. It is said to have nourishing qualities and improves the elasticity of skin cells. Some of the studies also show that it can be good on wrinkles, rashes and insect bites. Garhwali culture takes a lot from Hindu religion, so there is possibility of borrowing sandalwood from Hindu text such as Mahabharata and Ramayana.



Figure 7 Chandan ka baana

Another element which is a part of that big plate is **Samoya (fig. 8)** commonly known as **Indian Valerian**. It is native to India, Nepal, Pakistan and China. Only a mature person is sent to take Samoya due to its sedative properties. People mostly identify it through its bright, lovely flowers (**fig. 9**). The plant Samoya has cooling properties and the oil extracted works greatly for fine lines and wrinkles but in Garhwali weddings, it is said to keep the negative things (spirits) away. Locals believe that the fragrance of samoya can protect the bride from negative energy. The amount to be added with other ingredients should be very carefully checked. As it is already mentioned that the plant contains some sedative properties and the consumption may make one feel intoxicated, therefore it should be added with great care. It is effective in case of psoriasis and herpes labialis and the juice extracted from the root can also help with the pain due to wounds and infection. So there are several benefits, but it seems that the prime cause is to cast away the evils of marriage and the girl. There is a shloka:

त्गरं शीतलं तिक्तं दृष्टिदोषविनाशम्

विषातिशामनम् पथ्यम् भूतोन्मादभयापहम्

- Raj Nighantu/ Karveeradi Varga

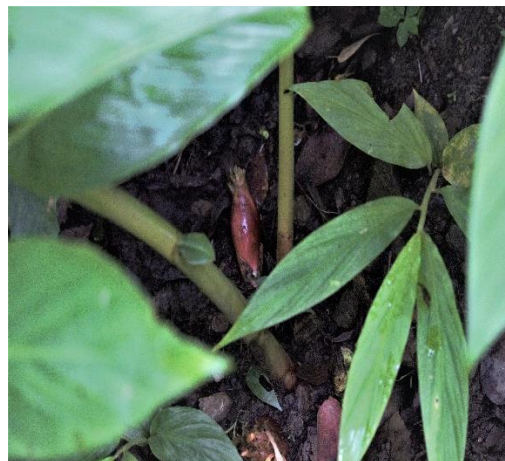


Figure 8 (Samoya leaves)



**Figure 9 (Samoya flower)**

The final couplet of this song mentions **Kachoor** also known as **Zedoary (Curcuma Zedoaria)**. It is also known as wild turmeric in hills, but Zedoary, unlike turmeric, is white in color (**fig. 10**) so people also call it white turmeric. The leaves are somewhat similar but the flower is not as pretty as turmeric's. (**Fig. 11**) Earlier this was also used as a spice just like turmeric, but these days it is just used for flavoring curry and liquors. Several researches confirm zedoary to have powerful antioxidants. It also possesses strong anticancer and anti-inflammatory properties. Traditionally it has been added to bath powder for its fragrance and skin related properties. It is said to have anti-allergic properties. It helps with healing the wounds and prevents acne. In some areas the white turmeric bath is also used for babies to remove the unwanted hair quickly (it's not proven though). White turmeric due to its anti-microbial properties also believed to treat skin-related problems really well.



**Figure 10 (Kachoor rhizome)**



**Figure 11 (Kachoor flower)**

These are mostly the main ingredients used for baane. The mixture of all these components are believed to give that glow and finesse to bride. Bride is made to sit on a stool and the plate is kept in the front having a big tub of warm water nearby. Now those two little brooms are dipped in the mixture and touched on feet (**fig. 12**), knees, hands (**fig. 13**), shoulders and head one by one. This used to be done by women earlier but now a few males participate in baane. Widows are asked to stay away but due to the photo demand they can simply come and get a picture with the bride. They obviously don't touch the haldi or apply it. Meanwhile a holi



kind of thing is played between devar-bhaabhi and jeeja-sali. When everyone is done with baane women apply the remaining mixture on almost exposed part of bride and kind of scrub it. The tub is brought closer and the bride's mangal-snaan begins. All the women surrounds bride and make a ghera and do the basic bathing and then bride is sent to the washroom with her friends, sisters or sister-in-law.



Figure 11 Brooms are dipped in the mixture and touched on feet



Figure 12 brooms are dipped in the mixture and touched on hand

### Conclusion

In present scenario people are running behind big fat weddings but some rituals remains as important as they were before and haldi is one such function. Urbanization has affected the

pahaadi(related to hills) weddings still you will find a person there trying to find Kachoor and Samoya for this particular function, baane. New generation should understand that the old people and customs weren't made without logic. Youth must try to explore the ethnic knowledge from a scientific frame of mind. Traditions and rituals shouldn't be followed blindly but they also shouldn't be removed without a proper check. Society is in a flux and every year we are leaving something behind to chase something new but one must replace things after a deep contemplation, a proper study. This paper is one such try! It is to see how thoughtful our ancestors were and how little are we doing to preserve this rich tradition of Pahaad even after knowing the richness of it!

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