

THE MOTIVES OF INDIAN SPEECHES AND SONGS

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(Continued)

Of the innumerable songs of tribal interests, space permits the mention of but one more series: the "begging dance" songs, also arising from the community spirit of frolic and play.

"A begging dance could be started at any time, a leader and a small company going from one wigwam to another, dancing and singing. If the occupants of the wigwam were asleep the dancers entered and danced around their fire. The people then arose and gave them food, for those who danced the begging dance were never refused. If the people had no cooked food, the visitors took such provisions as they had, placing them in a birch bark bag which an old woman carried for the purpose."³⁷ These, like many other Indian songs, hardly reveal their true nature, unless one knows the occasion for which they were sung.

"Here
I come again
Howling as I come
O you warriors."³⁸
"Maple sugar
Is the only thing
That satisfies me."³⁹

Turning to the utterances of individuals, we are faced with a much larger and more bewildering number of songs, each one of which represents a separate motive, an individual idea. The *speeches*, however, which have been recorded as representing truly individual emotions are so few as hardly to justify anything but

³⁷ Densmore, "Chippewa Music," II, pp. 228-229.

See also Chapter VI, p. 66 *ante*, for statement on the communal life of the tribe, and its effects on individual initiative.

³⁸ Densmore, *op. cit.*, p. 230. "Those who take part in the begging dance represent themselves as dogs, using the term (*ogitcidadog*) which dogs are supposed to use toward their masters."

³⁹ Densmore, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

the briefest of generalizations concerning them. The following brief mention of oratory will preface a longer discussion of the songs.

The famous harangue of Logan, while perhaps not deserving the exaggerated praise given it for literary merit, is nevertheless valuable evidence of the psychology of the warrior. Like a lightning flash in a stormy woods it reveals the dark and gloomy depths of the Indian mind. These few brief and passionate sentences express a turmoil of emotions: fierce and arrogant pride, loyalty to family and race, a fury of grief, the rankling sense of injustice, desperate hate, exultation over violent and bloody revenge, an appalling loneliness. It is as though a tiger had suddenly found words. In a sense the speech of Logan is the expression of the beast that lies concealed deep within all of us, even the most civilized. For who is there, who has not felt within his breast—even though but for a moment—these same wild passions, the common heritage from our four-footed ancestors?

Different in tone, yet indicative of but another aspect of the fierce, proud, and loyal spirit of the red-skin, is the speech of Pine-Leaf, a Crow woman. This young amazon possessed some of the qualities of Joan of Arc; for early in life she forsook the womanly duties of the lodge to go on the war-path with the men. Her mission was to kill one hundred braves of enemy tribes, in revenge for the death of her brother. This she accomplished, and much more, exhibiting in all conflicts the daring and ferocity of the most experienced warriors. In spite of these formidable characteristics, she was wooed and finally won by the war chief and leading councilor of the tribe, one James Beckworth, a renegade white man. The eternal feminine is also prominently revealed in Pine Leaf's reference to the "war-path secret". She was a woman and they would not tell it to her! Beckworth, who was long known to be a man of reliability and of some education, reports the valedictory harangue of Pine Leaf and personally vouches for its accuracy:

"'Warriors!' she said, 'I am now about to make a great sacrifice for my people. For many winters I have been on the war-path with you; I shall tread that path no more; you have now to fight the enemy without me. When I laid down my needle and my beads, and took up the battle-axe and the lance, my arm was weak; but few winters had passed over my head. My brother had

been killed by the enemy, and was gone to the hunting-ground of the Great Spirit. I saw him in my dreams. He would beckon to his sister to come to him. It was my heart's desire to go to him, but I wished first to become a warrior, that I might avenge his death upon his foes before I went away.

'I said I would kill one hundred foes before I married any living man. I have more than kept my word, as our great chief and medicine men can tell you. As my arm increased in strength, the enemy learned to fear me. I have accomplished the task I set before me; henceforward I leave the war-paths of my people; I have fought my last battle, and hurled my last lance! I am a warrior no more.

'Today the Medicine Calf [Beckworth himself] has returned. He has returned angry at the follies of his people, and they fear that he will leave them again. They believe that he loves me, and that my devotion to him will attach him to the nation. I therefore bestow myself upon him; perhaps he will be contented with me, and will leave us no more. Warriors, farewell!

She then entered the fort, and said, 'Sparrowhawks, one who has followed you for many winters is about to leave your war-path forever. . . . Do not turn your heads, but listen. You have seen that a woman could keep her word. During the many winters that I have followed you faithfully in the war-path, you have refused to let me into the war-path secret, although you tell it to striplings on their second excursion. It was unfair that I could not know it; that I must be sent away with the women and children, when the secret was made known to those one-battle braves. If you had seen fit to tell it to me, it would have been secret until my death. But let it go; I care no farther for it.

'I am about to sacrifice what I have always chosen to preserve—my liberty. The back of my steed has been my lodge and my home. On his back, armed with my lance and battle-axe, I knew no fear. The medicine chief, when fighting by my side, has displayed a noble courage and a lofty spirit, and he won from my heart, what no other warrior has ever won, the promise to marry him when my vow was fulfilled. He has done much for our people; he has fought their enemies, and spilled his blood for them. When I shall become his wife, I shall be fond and faithful to him. My heart feels pure before the Great Spirit and the sun. When I shall be no more on the war-path, obey the voice of the

Medicine Calf, and you will grow stronger and stronger; we shall continue a great and a happy people, and he will leave us no more. I have done.'"⁴⁰

In dealing with the *songs* of the individuals the problem is quite different. Here, the examples are so numerous that it is impossible to find exact classifications for them all. For years a number of expert investigators have collected thousands of specimens of Indian music from many tribes.⁴¹

In all such basic matters as worship of the supernatural, fear, defiance for other human beings, and hunger, the songs of the individual reflect the sentiments of the group. The individual songs are, of course, much shorter and less elaborate than most of the chants and ceremonials, but the spirit is the same. It must be explained that Indian songs are regarded by their composers as private property. No one may sing another's song unless he has purchased or inherited it. Songs which are adopted by another tribe are usually ascribed with care to the original author, or at least to the tribe whence they came. The feeling which prevails in this regard is similar to that among us for songs belonging, for instance, to the ritual of some particular secret society or fraternity.⁴² These songs are transmitted unchanged from one generation to another, often until the original language is so archaic as to be almost meaningless. Even the meaningless vocables, inserted to fill out the measure, are retained in their original form and order. For this reason the older Indian songs are valuable as

⁴⁰ James P. Beckworth, "An Indian Amazon, The Story of Pine Leaf," *The Golden Book Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2. Feb., 1925, pp. 303-4.

⁴¹ The songs which are referred to in the present work are guaranteed as authentic. The investigators often obtained conditions of accuracy which equal those of a psychological laboratory. Of her own work Miss Densmore remarks: "Songs were recorded by means of a phonograph. . . . An effort was made to employ only the best singers. In selecting the principal singers as well as informants, the writer ascertained a man's general reputation at the agency office, and in some cases at the trader's store, as well as among his own people. In some cases material which appeared to be interesting has been discarded because the informant was found to be unreliable."—"Teton Sioux Music," pp. 5-6.

See also F. G. Speck, *Ceremonial Songs of the Creek and Yachi Indians*, p. 159; and

Alex. T. Cringan, *Pagan Dance Songs of the Iroquois*, p. 168, etc.

⁴² See Fletcher-La Flesche, "The Omaha Tribe," p. 373.

Densmore, "Mandan and Hidatsa Music," p. 12.

Natalie Curtis, *The Indians' Book*, p. 54, etc.

representing the ideas of the people before they were radically altered by contact with white civilization.⁴³

The variety of individual songs is indicated in the following quotation: ". . . music is no mere diversion from the Indian point of view; it is not separated from ordinary experience by being classed as an art, but is a feature of daily, homely use and necessity. The Indian has a song for everything—his gods, his friends, and his enemies, the animals he hunts, the maiden he wooes, the forest that sighs around him and the lake that glistens before him, the fire in his tepee, the whiskey that excites him, the babe in the cradle, his garments, from picturesque head-gear to shabby moccasins—every conceivable thing in which he has an interest becomes the subject of a song".⁴⁴

All these various types of songs can be divided, roughly, into two classes: those with magical properties, or "sacred songs"; and those without such mystic significance, *i. e.*, "secular songs". In the former class are found most of the songs appealing to the gods for help in war, hunting, vengeance, and the other universal needs referred to above as being common to the group. These magical songs are often composed or thought of in dreams, especially during periods of fasting or self-torture. In such dream songs an animal "totem", or personal tutelary deity, appears and sings a song to the sleeper.⁴⁵ The buffalo and fox are among the animals thus celebrated in the songs of the Teton Sioux:

"The buffalo,
As they stand in a circle,
I join with them."

"They face each other,
Two foxes,
I will sit between them."⁴⁶

At other times an individual has a thought, or more often an experience which he wishes to commemorate; and so, seeking in-

⁴³ Fletcher-La Flesche, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*
Densmore, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁴ Frederic R. Burton, *American Primitive Music*, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁵ See Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music," p. 59 ff.
And also discussion of animal totems, *ante* pp. 32-34.
Burton, *op. cit.*, p. 235, etc.

⁴⁶ Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music," p. 203 and p. 268.

spiration, he composes a song about it.⁴⁷ Such songs as these are still being composed; but the use of songs for ceremonies, war, and the hunt is passing away, as the old life of the Indians is forgotten.⁴⁸

The following group of songs, of magic significance,⁴⁹ represent the individual's craving for the great primal necessities:

Medicine Songs of the Hunt

"My war club
Resounds through the sky
To summon the animals to my call."

"Like a star
I shine
The animal, gazing, is fascinated by my light."

"From all parts of the earth
I make my appearance
Clothed with the skin of the marten."⁵⁰

Song for securing a Good Supply of Maple Sugar.

"From the trees
The Sap is freely flowing."

"The words furnish an example of the affirmation which strongly characterizes the Mide songs. There is no request; the song simply asserts that the sap is flowing freely, thus presenting to the mind a vivid picture of the conditions which would produce the desired supply of maple sugar."⁵¹

⁴⁷ I have read the theories of Professors Gummere and Mackenzie, regarding the famous "communal theory" of composition. Fortunately this controversy lies outside the present work. Among the Indians there is but one instance of any such extraordinary feat of ballad making as Professors Gummere and Mackenzie postulate for the primitive Europeans. Miss Densmore remarks one song of a Siouan tribe which was different from every other Indian song on record, in that it was the collective effort of several men. These, however, had deliberately set themselves to the task—See Densmore, "Northern Ute Music," *Bulletin 75 B. A. E.*, p. 26.

For a statement on communal composition and refutation of this theory by instances in Indian literature see:

Louis Pound, "The Beginnings of Poetry." *Pub. Mod. Lang. Assn. of America*, Vol. XXXII, N. S. Vol. XXV., and *Poetic Origins and the Ballad*, New York, 1921.

⁴⁸ Densmore, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁴⁹ *i. e.* The song when sung gave aid to the singer, or brought to his assistance the help of his animal "totem."

⁵⁰ Densmore, "Chippewa Music" I, pp. 84, 85, 86.

The marten skin referred to in the third song "has power to drive together the animals from all parts of the earth." *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp. 87-88.

Medicine Songs of War

"The first song of the group has reference to the war charm worn by the warrior, the song being sung shortly before a fight to make the charm more effective. . . . The word 'balls' was said to refer to the heads of the enemy which the warrior could cut off and toss about. . . . The charm usually worn by the Chippewa warrior consisted of the skin of a bird, dried and filled with a medicine known only to the wearer, probably an herb or other substance suggested to him in a dream."⁵²

"It is wafted upward
My bird plumage
They will be flying
My balls."⁵³

Dream Song of a Warrior

This song was composed by the warrior "after he had endured a vigil of ten days, during which time he took only enough food to sustain life. The words are obscure, a feature characteristic of dream songs, the purpose being to conceal the exact nature of the dream".

"The heavens
Go with me."⁵⁴

"Flying all around the sky
The loons are singing."

"This is an old song, which was sung before starting on the war-path. The words refer to the Loon clan or totem, which, according to William Warren, was very powerful among the Chippewa. . . ."⁵⁵

Love Charm Songs

"The love charm is a very popular form of magic among the Chippewa. . . ."

"What are you saying to me?
I am arrayed like the roses
And beautiful as they."

"I can charm the man
He is completely fascinated by me."⁵⁶

⁵² Densmore, "Chippewa Music," II, p. 77.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵⁶ Densmore, "Chippewa Music," I, pp. 88-90.

Healing Songs (to cure the sick)

There is a grimly humorous frankness in this song chanted by a medicine man as he performed his various unwholesome practices on the unfortunate patient.

“You are a spirit
I am making you a spirit
In the place where I sit
I am making you a spirit.”⁵⁷

“By night I go on my way unseen
Then am I holy,
Then have I power to heal men.”⁵⁸

Songs for Power on various occasions

“It was not unusual for a warrior to sink exhausted during a fight. . . . Niskigwun [a Chippewa warrior] stated that on one occasion Odjibwe [his friend] went into a fight without his ‘medicine’. The fight had scarcely begun when Odjibwe appeared to be almost paralyzed. He was not able to strike a blow in his own defense and would have fallen an easy prey to the Sioux had not Niskigwun rushed to him and given him medicine from his own bag, mixing it with water. . . . This revived him and enabled him to rise. . . . Niskigwun stated that he sang the following song when he applied the medicine.

Song of Help in the Fight

The prairie
land
whence I rise.”⁵⁹

Song of a War Charm

“In what
Is my trust?
My bird-skin charm
is my trust.”⁶⁰

“Brave Buffalo said that the following song was given him in the lodge filled with buffalo [in his dream], and that by it he received power to engage in the practice of medicine:”

⁵⁷ Densmore, “Chippewa Music,” I, p. 96.

⁵⁸ Curtis, *Indians' Book*, p. 160.

⁵⁹ Densmore, “Chippewa Music”, II, p. 112.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 107.

"I will appear
Behold me
a buffalo
said to me." ⁶¹
"The heavens
I use."

"The words imply that the heavens are secured as a defense by the singer." ⁶²

There are also a vast number of Indian songs with no religious significance. These illustrate not only the great primal motives seen in the preceding medicine songs, but also the multitude of moods, interests, and memories peculiar to each individual. For the individual sings, it will be remembered, not so much to please an audience as to please himself. ⁶³

Some of the types of personal songs of war and love have already been instanced. There are, of course, hundreds of others on these two most interesting topics (fascinating as well to the civilized man as to the savage). In her book on Teton Sioux Music Miss Densmore quotes thirty songs of a typical war expedition. ⁶⁴ Some of these are songs "which were sung in societies or other gatherings before the departure of a war party". Others reflect the desire of the warriors to be as brave as wolves, their intention to steal the horses of the enemy, their love of adventures.

Such songs would, of course, more properly fall into the class of group utterances. The general sentiments and structure of the songs are, in fact, exactly similar to the group songs. It is quite probable that the songs sung by the group are simply individual songs which became popular, and were acquired from their original composers. The following songs are typical both of group and individual sentiments.

⁶¹ Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music," p. 174.

⁶² Densmore, "Chippewa Music," II, p. 109.

⁶³ Miss Densmore, however, reports that this attitude of the Indian toward his music is changing somewhat. Among the Teton Sioux many of the tribesmen own phonographs, and make records of their own songs and those of their neighbors. "Some even make these records for sale among their people." The songs are usually recorded by several singers, while others at the same time give sharp yells or short exclamatory sentences. While such records are not adapted for the study of individual songs, they are an evidence of the Indian's continued pleasure in his music, and of his readiness to adapt the means of civilization to an end which is purely native."—"Teton Sioux Music," p. 22.

⁶⁴ *Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 61*, pp. 334-378.

“Lone wolf
I am
In different places
I roam
But
there
I am tired out.”

“Crow Indian
You must watch your horses
A horse thief
often
am I.”⁶⁵

The individual warrior, we find, also thought much of his war paint, of the effect of his bravery on the enemy, of his horse, the hardships of life in general, of the women folk at home, the joy of his victorious return, the sad death of comrades in past expeditions. The following songs reflect some of these ideas.

“Now at this time
a voice
I sent forth
All
tremble
O tribe (of the enemy)
in a sacred manner
sitting
All tremble.”

“The old men
say
the earth
only
endures
You spoke
truly
You are right.”

(meaning that all else, including the singer, must pass away.)

Song by a young man disappointed in love, who went to war hoping to be killed.

“When you reach home
tell her [his faithless sweetheart]
long before then
I will have finished.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Densmore, “Teton Sioux Music,” p. 337.

⁶⁶ One is glad to note that the Indian was not often so Victorian in his sentiments. D.

Song concerning the death of Sitting Crow, a brave warrior.

“Friends
Sitting Crow
friends
returned not.”

Song concerning war paint.

“This
earth
I had used as paint
causes
the tribe (of the enemy)
much excitement.”

Song concerning victorious return of the warriors with captives.

“friend
do you hear?
Captives
also
I am bringing home.”

The women had their own ideas about war. Mostly they encouraged the braves to fight, and offered their love in reward for heroic exploits.

“You may
go on the war path
When
you return
I will marry you.”

The warriors also thought of their sweethearts; and delighted to give them the spoils of victory, which were chiefly scalps and horses.

“Older sister (a name applied to women in the tribe; it did not necessarily indicate blood relationship)

Come out
Horses
I bring.
One of them
you may have.”

“Friends
the attacking party will return;
friend
whenever you said this,
friend,
that woman
stands there smiling.”

Such sentiments though crudely phrased are extremely chivalric.

Nevertheless the Indian ladies occasionally felt a pang of loneliness and apprehension as the warriors stalked silently out of the village on their way to battle. Women of all times and places have thought, even if they did not, like the Indian maiden, sing the words:

“As the young men go by
I was looking for him.
It surprises me anew
that he has gone;
(it is something
to which I cannot be reconciled.”

Occasionally these fears (or perhaps the extra duties which devolved upon the lady of the wigwam when her master was away) gave rise to sentiments almost pacifistic:

“Going on the war-path
you should give up
and
(to) settle
down
you should desire
and stop
for good.”

And when a warrior failed to return, the grief of the women, though expressed in the same crude, bare phrases, is none the less moving and sincere:

“Bobtail Bear (man’s name)
said this
and
went away, never to return—
(the) Crow Indians
I will seek,
he said
and went away, never to return. . . .”
“Boys of the Hunkapapa band
whenever you pursue anything
Long Buffalo (man’s name)
is foremost
you said.
He lies over there.”⁶⁷

There are equally large numbers of love songs of the type already seen. Most of these, it will be recalled, are sad, in a curiously romantic style vaguely reminiscent of the Victorian era:

⁶⁷ For the above selections and many others relating to war, see Densmore, “Teton Sioux Music,” p. 324.

"I sit here thinking of her
I am sad as I think of her."

"I might grieve
I am sad
that he is gone
my lover."

And some are even more curiously materialistic, with a perfectly matter of fact appeal to the adored one.

"When I go
I will give you
surely
what you will wear
if you will go with me." ⁶⁸

The third great motive of Indian group composition, as we have seen, was food. The following is one of a group of individual songs sung by Mandan women as they worked in their gardens:

"My best friend
What do you like?
You said
the corn
is my pleasure."

With due regard for limitations of space, it is possible to illustrate only in the most imperfect style the miscellaneous interests and motives of the Indian individual. The ensuing group of songs, chosen more or less at random from the works of Miss Densmore and Natalie Curtis are merely samples. For more complete study the reader is recommended to read these works for himself.

Song of thanks for a gift

"I am very grateful
For what he is doing for me." ⁶⁹

"I am as Brave as Other Men"

"Men who are brave and heroic
As you esteem them to be
Like them

I also
Consider myself to be." ⁷⁰

Song of a Domestic Episode

"Elk Woman [woman's name]

the kettle is burning

(free translation) you said 'I am afraid!'" ⁷¹

⁶⁸ Densmore, "Chippewa Music," II, pp. 216-220.

⁶⁹ Densmore, "Chippewa Music," I, p. 201.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 162.

⁷¹ Densmore, "Mandan and Hidatsa Music," p. 176.

Song in Praise of Generosity

"Him, White Feather,
that man's
property
he never (keeps)
it is true." ⁷²

Song of Insomnia (Free translation)

"I think if I only could lie down and sleep,
but I cannot sleep." ⁷³

Song of a Disgusted Wife

"I
a man (have)
as it is
who is bad (or unkind)
I myself
did it. It is my own fault." ⁷⁴

Song of a Ghost [supposed to have been sung by the Ghost]

"Finally
I weep;
weeping
I roam.
(Among) young men
courting
(I was) most enthusiastic of all.
Weeping
I roam." ⁷⁵

Songs of a Charitable Tribesman

"Two White Buffalo (man's name),
watch;
the poor
are many.
Whenever this is said
horses
I donated."

"Whenever the tribe is gathered together
those without resources
obtain my horses.
Two White Buffalo
has said this.
Hence
they come." ⁷⁶

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 157.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 131.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 132.

⁷⁵ Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music," p. 497.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 507-8.

Song for Children

There are a number of these: lullabies, songs with stories to amuse the children, and songs sung by children in their games.

Hopi Owl Song

("A 'Stop-crying song for naughty children is supposed to be sung by the Owl-Kalzina, a mythological being represented in Hopi ceremonials by a masked dancer.")

"Owls, Owls, big owls and little,
 Staring, glaring, eyeing each other;
 Children from you're boards [i. e., cradle boards], Oh see!
 Now the owls are looking at you, looking at you;
 Saying, Any crying child, Yellow-eyes will eat him up.
 Saying, Any naughty child, Yellow-eyes will eat him up.
 Sleep, do not cry, sleep, do not cry.
 O children, look, Then we will pass you by
 But if you cry, but if you cry,
 O children, look, We'll eat you bye and bye." ⁷⁷

Song of Little Girls' Play

". . . the little girls sat in a circle and each girl, putting one hand over the hand of the girl who sat next to her lightly pinched the hand near the wrist. The tickling sensation could be endured only a few seconds before the little girls all fell over in a state of helpless laughter. Almost immediately the play was resumed, and the song sung again, to be interrupted before it was half finished. It seems a foolish little play, yet war and ceremony were not all the life of the Indian; there were still the children, to whom life had not yet become serious."

Words (free translation)

"I catch but can not hold you." ⁷⁸

Song of the Famine

"The old men
 now
 (are) so few that they are not worth counting.
 I myself (am)
 the last
 living.
 Therefore
 a hard time
 I am having." ⁷⁹

Thus sang the Indian. Soon he will sing no more; and in the reservation school his mixed-blood descendants will learn only the words of the white man.

⁷⁷ Natalie Curtis, *The Indians' Book*, p. 572.

⁷⁸ Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music," pp. 492-3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 518.