



BARGEET: RAAGA BASED MARGA SANGEET OF ASSAM

Dibakar Das

Project Coordinator, Creative & Performing Arts, Art Education Unit, SCERT Haryana Gurugram

Abstract

Bargeets are the raaga based compositions written and composed by Saint Sankaradeva and his closest and beloved disciple saint Madhavadeva between late 15th and 16th century. These are the special type of devotional songs which were used by them for the purpose of teaching and propagation of Vaishnavism to public as a part of Bhakti movement in Assam. Bargeets were written in an artificial language known as 'Brajawali'. Bargeets have been recognized as the great songs because of their high statured contents focused on devotion to Lord Krishna, outstanding literarily designed texts as well as their raaga based melodious compositions. Although there are some similarities, which cannot be ruled out, with Hindustani Sangeet Padhhati but the Bargeets have their own distinctive features that are based on raagas and taalās and have a particular style of presentation, for which they can be demarcated as a distinctive school of music.

Key words: Bargeet, Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva, Sattrā, Neo-Vaishnavism, Marg Sangeet, Thul.

INTRODUCTION

Bargeets were written and composed between the late 15th and 16th century by the great scholar, philosopher, social and religious reformer, leader of neo-Vaishnavite movement and the great saint from Assam Mahapurush Shrimanta Sankaradeva and his closest and beloved disciple Mahapurush Shri Shri Madhav Dev. The word Bargeet is a conflation of two words of which, '**Bar**' means great or high in its stature (on spiritual aspect) as per Assamese language and the suffix 'Geet' means song. Bargeets can be simply defined as a kind of raaga based composition or hymn ornamented with very mellifluous and soulful lyrics which express high moral and deep philosophical thoughts and are very perfectly arranged in different prosody (chānd). Since their expression is based on the perception of Bhakti, Bargeets are often referred as **Marg Sangeet**. They had been used by Saint Sahnakardev and his disciples to promote **Neo-Vaishnavism**. As per the the Book Bargeet (of Mahapurush Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva) edited by Hari Narayan Dutta Barua (Sahitya Ratna), there are 217 Bargeets, out of which 35 Bargeets were written by Sankaradeva and 182 by his disciple Madhavadeva. However my **Adhyapak Dr. Bhabananda Barbayan** (a renowned Sattriya dance artist who belongs to the Uttar Kamalabari Sattrā, Majuli, Assam and an exponent of Sattriya Dance and Music) says that according to the

renowned Assamese scholar, Baap Chandra Mahanta, a total of 192 Bargeets are available in current times and are being practiced in Kamalabari Sattras. The nomenclature, “Bargeet” was not used by the Saint Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva themselves. They simply named them as Geet. However the term was given by their descendants or successors to express their gratitude towards the two maestros.

According to the author’s point of view, Bargeets have a lot of marked features which almost resemble to the features of Hindustani Classical music or Uttar Bharatiya Sangeet Paddhati, predominant in the northern part of India. If we go through the various distinctive features of Bargeets of Assam with minute observations such as, their origin, development and evolution, Raagas and Taalas used in their compositions, the inherent concept of Rasa and Bhava, use of various instruments for presentation, time theory and style of performance, there arises a greater possibility or scope to compare the Bargeets with the Hindustani classical music.

The word ‘Bargeet’ was first found in Katha Guru Charit. Various authors and litterateurs from Assam have suggested the definition of Bargeet in many different ways from time to time. Renowned writer Dr. Banikanta Kakoti has said that the songs which are based on high moral and spiritual thoughts are known as Bargeet. Dr. Maheswar Neog has described Bargeet as the Classical music of Assam which are based on Raagas and taalas. Kaliram Medhi has mentioned Bargeet as the great song or celestial songs. Dr. Satyendra Nath Sarma has said that the importance of the subject, the style of creation, the colour of classical music on which they are based on and the abstinence of thoughts in their lyrics separate the Bargeets from all other contemporary songs of Assam. Kirti Nath Sharma Bordoloi also said that Bargeet can be compared with the Dhrupad gayan of Hindustani classical music.

BIRTH OF BARGEET

The grandfather of Saint Sankaradeva had migrated to Assam from Kanauj. They were known as Baro-Bhuyans which means the land lord. My Adhyapak says that Chandibar, the grandfather of Sankaradeva was a musician and was awarded for his musical caliber by the king of that period. Child Sankaradeva studied under guru Mahendra Kandali in his sanskrit school which was locally called as ‘Tol’ in

Assam. He had learnt all the Vedas, Upanishadas, various Shatras etc. under his guidance. During that period of time, several 'Charyapadas' were written, composed and used for propagation of Bhuddhism by the Buddhist followers in Assam and its neighbouring regions. These Charyapadas were raaga based compositions. Sankaradeva was privileged to get the exposure to this musical form, which might have influenced him to a great extent.

Sankaradeva, along with his followers and Guru Mahendra Kandali, went for his first pilgrimage for almost 12 years to the Northern parts of India. He visited the places like Puri, Brindavan, Badarikashram etc., where he met many masters having their expertise in various fields. While in Badrikashram during that pilgrimage, Sankaradeva wrote his first Bargeet, '*Mana Meri Rama Charana Hi Lagu*' (Means the writer wants to rest his mind in the feet of lord Rama). He had visited Northern parts of India twice during his life time.

From the above facts it can be assumed that from the musical background of his family to learning at the 'Tol' under Guru Mahendra kandali, exposure to raaga based Charyapadas and his pilgrimages to various part of Northern India, all these events might have given him enough opportunity to get acquainted with musical knowledge and other spiritual learning that resulted in the most beautiful and heavenly creation known as 'Bargeet', that people still admire and contemplate even after almost 500 years.

THUL

The word 'Thul' can be referred to the word 'Gharana' as we have seen in Hindustani classical Music. After the death of Saint. Sankaradeva in 1569, three most prevalent Thul or Gharana have been developed in Assam which is given as under:

1. **BarpetaThul:** It was established by one of the disciples of Saint Madhavadeva namely 'Burha Aata' in Barpeta district of Assam.
2. **BarduwaThul:** It was established by the descendants of Saint Sankardev's family in Barduwa of Nagaon district of Assam.
3. **KamalabariThul:** It was established by another disciple of Saint Madhavadeva namely 'Badula Aata' in Kamalabari of Majuli district of Assam.

The author has got the opportunity to learn Bargeets from Adhyapak Dr. Bhabananda Barbayan who belongs to the Kamalabari thul. He says that although the raagas mentioned in the Bargeets are same in all Thuls but most of the time, the progression of notes, style of performance, rhythm or Taalas used in the compositions during the presentation of Bargeets are different from each other. This particular feature can be compared to the various Gharana styles of Hindustani classical Music e.g. Gwalior, Agra, Jaipur Atrauli, Kirana etc., where style of presentation of a particular Bandis or composition is different from each other although the composition is based on the same raaga. Currently Gunin Ojha is one of the most popular performers of Bargeet from the Barpetathul.

VAISHNAVA SATTRAS AND NAMGHARS AND PRACTICE OF BARGEET IN THE ASSAMESE SOCIETY

Sattras can be defined as monastery. Sattras are a kind of religious centre where the followers which are known as vaishnav Bhakat (monk) resides and devotes themselves to the practices of Vaishnavism and follow definite doctrines and customs. Simply we can say that they are the followers of Saint Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva or their descendants. The idea of establishing Sattras was conceptualized by the saint Sankaradeva and was first established in Barduwa of Nagaon district. Several Sattras were established by the disciples of Shankaradeva after his demise. Bargeets are sung in the Vaishnava sattras throughout the day in a designed schedule as a part of the ritual followed by the devotees. The day begins with the singing of a Bargeet and also ends with a Bargeet. Out of fourteen units which is known as chadhya prasanga practised in each Sattras, Bargeets are sung only in two units. It is accompanied by the instrument called Khol and Taal. It is a regular activity. During the birth or death anniversary of Shanakardev and Madhavadeva, Bargeets are sung elaborately by the bhakats at the Sattras. There are four types of Musicians in a Sattras which are given as under:

- Gayan
- Bargayan
- Bayan
- Barbayan

'Gayan' is a recognition given by the Sattrā to the monks (residing in the Sattrā) for their singing capabilities as per the rules set by the Sattrā itself. 'Bargayan' is another designation given to those Gayans who have qualified further set of rules in the field of singing capabilities designed by the Sattrā. The same conditions are applicable for Bayan (Khol player) and Barbayan as well.

Naamghar is another centre or institution created by Sankaradeva and his disciples. It is a prayer house which is seen almost everywhere in the villages or cities of Assam. It was established by Sankaradeva to spread Vaishnavism across the state. It is a kind of spiritual centre where the local communities assemble to pray. The prayer includes singing of Bhagavat Geeta, Kirtan Ghosha as well as Bargeet. Most of the village prayer houses or Naamghars is associated to a particular thul. Hence from the style of performances in Naamghar by the local communities, one could identify the thul to which the community belongs.

STRUCTURE OF A BARGEET

Each Bargeet written by Sankaradeva usually has six or sixteen lines. The first two lines are known as ***Dhrung*** and the rest of the lines are known as the ***Pada***. While singing, *Dhrung* is repeated after every two succeeding lines of the *Pada*. In most of the Bargeets, Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva conclude them by mentioning their own names in the last two lines. The singing of the Bargeet begins with Guru-ghaat, i.e, recital on khol. This is followed by alaap of the raaga, which the Bargeet is composed of. The words like Hari, Rama, Govinda, Tana, ne, ni etc. are used to sing the alaap. According to my Adhyapak, the alaaps in Bargeets are pre-composed and it cannot be changed. During the end part of the presentation of a Bargeet, the laya or tempo becomes fast till the completion its presentation. This is a very distinct feature of the presentation.

Now if we compare the alaap gayan of Bargeet with the alaap gayan of Hindustani Classical Music then we can observe some resemblances of the words used in Alaapgayan of Bargeet like Hari, Rama, Govinda, Tana, ne, ni etc. with the words Nom, Tom, Tana, Derena etc. used in Alaap Gayan of Hindustani Classical Music. These words come under "Tenak", one of the six parts of Pravandha, which means auspicious words used in the lyrics of Pravandha e.g, 'Om Tat Sat' and tatvamasi etc.

Whereas alaaps in Bargeets are pre-composed and cannot be changed but alaap gayan in Hindustani classical music is not pre-composed. Its progression is based on the thought of a performer to create various patterns of notes of a particular raaga on which the composition is performed. It can be assumed that either to express gratitude towards Bargeet composed by the two great saints, no changes were made by their successors or as no further exploration and enhancement have been made by them in the musical part of Bargeet, they remained same as they were composed.

RAAGAS IN BARGEET

The Bargeets were composed in raagas by Saint Sankaradeva and Saint Madhavadev by themselves. The name of the raaga is mentioned in a Bargeet before its pada or lyrics. This pattern can be matched with the khayal in Hindustani classical Music where the name of the raaga is also mentioned before the Bandish. No separate notation system has been developed either by both the saints or by their successors and therefore there is no availability of notation system in Bargeets of their own till today. However, Bhatkhande Swaralipi system has been used by various musical experts for teaching and learning as well as for demonstration process. My Adhyapak says that 36 raagas are found in the Bargeets of Shankaradeva and Madhavadeva. A few names of the raagas as mentioned by him are: Ashuwari, Mallar, Dhanashri, Gauri, Basant, Shri, Kedar, Mahur Dhanashri, TurBasant, Kalyan, Purvi, Bhupali, NatMallar, Shri Gandhar, Belowar, Mahur, Bhatiyali, Tur-Bhatiyali, Shri Gauri, Sindhura, Nat, Shyam, Kou, Ahir, Kanada, Sarang, Tur, Suhai etc. Here it is important to mention that out all these mentioned raagas, the raaga namely Kou is not seen in the North Indian as well as in the south Indian classical music.

The most interesting part in the raaga of a Bargeet is that a few note progressions found in Bargeets display certain similarities, although not apparent, with the raagas of Hindustani Classical Music. For example, a few note progressions of the raaga Ashuwari found in Bargeet seem to have a certain kind of similarities with the raaga Durga of Hindustani Classical Music. Similarly, a few note progressions of raaga Dhanashri found in Bargeet seems to have some similarities with the raagas of Kaafi Thaata like Bhimpalashi, Dhaani or Dhanashri of Hindustani classical Music.

RHYTHM OF BARGEET

My Adhyapak says that Saint Sankaradeva as well as Madhavadeva had not mentioned about taalas in Bargeet. The Ankiyageets which were also written and composed for the theatrical purpose by Saint Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva have taalas. However it can be assumed that their successors might have explored and started the incorporation of Rhythm in the performances of Bargeets. Various taalas have been used in the compositions of Bargeet. Bargeets were performed in two ways, one is known as Bandha-geet, i.e. performance of Bargeet accompanied with rhythm and the other one is known as Mela-geet, i.e. geet without rhythm. Taalas which are usually used in Bargeets are named as Ekataal, Parिताal, Kharman, Maanchok, Maanjyoti, Dharma-Yati, Bar-Yati, Bar-Bisham, Saru-Bisham, Rupak etc. The taala played in a Bargeet mainly comprises of three parts. The first part is **ga-man**, the second part is **ghaat** and the third part is called **chuk**. Ga-man is the main body of the taala and is repeated in most of the time while singing the Bargeet. The ghaat indicates the completion of the taala. Every taala has its bol with Sam, taali and khali. Hence the above mentioned taalas and their patterns can be compared with the various rhythm patterns available in Hindustani classical Music.

LANGUAGE USED IN BARGEET

The language which had been used to write Bargeet by the Saint Sankaradeva is known as Brajawali. Brajawali is a mixture of Maithali and Avahatta dialect. Sanskrit and Assamese as well as Hindi words are also seen in this dialect. For example, a Bargeet written in raaga Ashuwari have many words of Sanskrit language as given below:

“Jaya Jaya Jadava Jalanidhi jadhava dhata,
Shrutamatra Khilatrata, Smarane karaya Siddhi
Dindayalanidhi Bhakata Mukuti Padadata.”

The Brajawali language was developed by the Eastern bhakti poets i.e. the poets of Assam, Bengal and Orissa in the last part of the 15th and the early part of the 16th century. They composed songs, verses and dramas in this language but also retained the elements of their own region. There is a strong opinion among various authors that Sankaradeva was probably the first writer among the eastern bhakti poets who wrote his first song in Brajawali language.

RASA AND BHAVA IN BARGEET

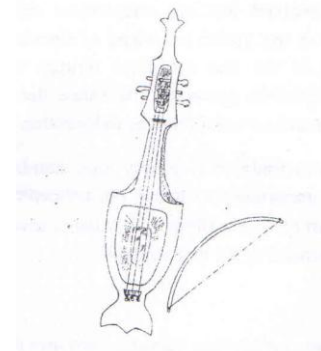
Bargeets show a very high moral and philosophical insight and its expression describes perception of devotion. However various scholars have further differentiated this perception of devotion into six sub categories. These include viraha, virakti, chorachaturi, leela and paramartha.

- Viraha: It implies separation. The concept of Viraha has been identified through the separation of Krishna from gopies or from his mother Yasodha when he left Brindavana.
- Virakti: It means disengagement from the mundane desires of worldly matters.
- Chora: This sentiment relates to stealing of butter (dairy products) by child Krishna in Vrindavana.
- Chaturi: This sentiment relates to cleverness of child Krishna. For example Krishna stole butter from the houses of Gopis and then convinced them with his innocence to escape from punishment.
- Leela: This sentiment can be seen through incarnation of lord Vishnu and his activities to support truthfulness.
- Paramartha: It implies understanding the spiritual wisdom of the divine power and to devote oneself to the supreme deity to get relief from the illusive worldly desires which lead to pain and suffering.

USE OF INSTRUMENTS

The tatabadya or string instrument which was earlier used to perform the Bargeets were '**Charangdar**' (Sarinda) and '**Rabab**'. There was a saying that, one of the disciples of Saint Sankaradeva namely '**Bhaskar Vipra**' was a skilled player of Rabab. Now a days Rabab player is not seen in performances of Bargeet anymore. However as per information received, my Adhyapak has used '**Charangdar**' (Sarinda) player during his Sattriya recital in Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Guwahati, Assam as well as in his performances in many foreign countries. Another most important instrument is '**Khol**', which is usually used to keep the rhythm of the Bargeet. It is interesting that the concept and design of khol was innovated by Saint Sankaradeva himself. Earlier khol was made of earth which was breakable but now a days it is made of wood. Another supporting

instrument is '**Bhurtaal**', a special type of a big size cymbal played by both hands during the performance of Bargeet. **Flute, Violin, Manjeera** are also used as accompaniments during the performances of Bargeet. Although no information has been found regarding the use of **Tanpura** in earlier period of time. Till date Tanpura has not been used in regular performances in Sattras or in the Naamghar, the prayer houses of villages and towns in Assam. However during stage performances **Tanpura** is used by performers now a days.



Performance of Bargeet by the followers of Kamalabari thul. An illustration of 'Sarinda' (from extreme left: Khol player, Bhurtaal player, Singer, Harmonium player, Manjeera player and khol player)

Photo credit: Manik Pathak

TIME OF SINGING THE BARGEET

According to the nature of the raaga, Bargeets are sung at different hour of the day. The raagas of the Bargeets are classified according to the time as given below:

- From dawn until noon, the raagas of Ahira, Kalyana, Kau, Gauri, Lalita, Shyam and Shyam-Gera are sung.
- From noon till sunset, the raagas of Kedera, Gandhara, Gauri, Turbasanta, Tur-Bhatiali, Dhanism, Payara, Varadi, Vasanta, Bhatiali, Mahur, Sri, Sri-Gandhara, Sri-Pyaraare are sung.
- In the evening, raagas like Ashuwari, Calengi, Parajari, Belowara, Sareng are sung.

- In the night, Kanada, Nata-mallara, Mallara, Sindhura, Suhai, Kamud, Bhupali, Madhyayati are sung.

A COMPARISON OF RAAGAS IN BARGEET WITH THE RAAGAS OF HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC

My Adhyapak taught me a Bargeet namely ‘Narayan Kahe Bhokoti Karun tera’ which is in the raaga Dhanashri (written by Saint Sankaradeva) and is practised in the Kamalabari Thul. The dhrung part is given below along with the notations:

Bol of Bargeet			Na	
Swaras in Bargeet			Şa	
Bol of Bargeet	Ra S S	Ya S N	Ka S SS	He S Bho
Swaras in Bargeet	<u>Ga</u> S Ma	Pa <u>Ni</u> Şa	<u>Ni</u> Şa <u>NiDha</u>	PaMa Ma Pa
Bol of Bargeet	Ko S Ti	Ka S Ru	TeS SS SSS	Ra S Na
Swaras in Bargeet	<u>Ga</u> S Ma <u>Ga</u>	Sa S Ma	<u>GaMa</u> <u>GaMa</u> <u>GaSa</u>	Sa S Sa

Now from the swaras or notes as given in the above mentioned table, it can be observed that the basic swaras in this Bargeets are ‘Sa, Re, Ga (Komal), Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni (Komal), Şa’. Hence we can compare these notes or swaras to the raagas of Kaafi Thaata like Bhimapalashi, Kafi, Dhani, Dhanshri etc. of Hindustani Classical music as per their progression. Above notation also shows presence of the swara, ‘komal Dha’ which can be defined as **Vivadi swara** of Hindustani Classical Music. The another crucial point is that Bargeets are traditionally practised in Sattras and as their knowledge have been passed down verbally from generation to generation, hence there is a possibility that changes in swaras of raagas might have happened over time.

Let’s take another Bargeet whose lyrics are as given below:

RAAG**DHANASHRI**

Dhrung

Sharangapani pahe pamaramati hami |

Niraya Nibaro; Aavori nahi heruha, Bine charana taju swami | |

Pada

Jara marana meri; nikata hi aaya; Kaya parata keti beri |

Karatahun papo; samapala aavi; Bhabi charana na teri | |

Dekhahu khina; dina dina; deha aadhi byadhi bighata |

Antakale goti meri kamalapati; Shankara karun pranipata | |

From above mentioned Bargeet we can see that the name of the raaga 'Dhanashri' is mentioned at the top of the song, which is also seen in the compositions like Khayal, Thumri etc. of Hindustani classical Music. The dhrung in a Bargeet can be compared with the 'Dhruv' of ancient 'Pravandha Gayan' or 'Sthayee of Dhrupad Gayan' or 'Sthayee of Khyal or Thumri' of modern classical music of North India. The pada part can be compared with the 'Abhog of Pravandha Gayan, 'Antra of Dhrupad Gayan' or 'Antra of a Khayal' of the modern classical music of North India. As my adhyapak says that during the presentation of last two lines, the laya or tempo becomes fast. This feature resembles with the 'Pravandha of Anandini Jaati' where Abhog was presented in drutalaya or tempo. Even this feature can be compared with Carnatic Sangeet system as well, where 'Drutalaya' or tempo has been used in the 'Charanam' part of some 'kriti's and 'Varnam'. Similarly the poet uses his name in the concluding line as 'Sankara karun pranipata' which means nodded with folded hands, Sankaradeva, the poet is praying. The use of the poet's name in Bargeet can be compared with 'Pravandhas' where the name of the writer, singer as well as the pravandhnayak were mentioned in its lyrics. However there is no use of Sargams and Taans in Bargeets. The Taala which is used in the Bargeets practised in Kamalabari thul is Ektaal which have 12 matras and it resembles the Dadra taala (6 matras) of Hindustani classical music.

Therefore it can be summarized that the most significant points which give Bargeets such big stature are:

- Bargeet is a kind of raaga based composition or hymn ornamented with very beautiful and in depth lyrics which expresses high moral and philosophical insights and is very perfectly arranged in different prosody (chhand).
- Bargeets had been used by Saint Sankaradeva and his disciples to promote Neo-Vaishnavism. Since their expression is based on perception of devotion, Bargeets can be defined as Marga Sangeet.
- The concept and sentiments (rasas) of Bargeets are based on the philosophy of the Vedas. Hence it is not wrong to establish a link of Bargeet with Classical musical forms of India.
- Use of Taalas of various matraas.
- Use of various instruments in their performance.
- Time theory of Bargeet presentation.

It is therefore emphasized that there is an immense scope in the research of 'Bargeets of Assam' with respect to its origin, development and evolution. The author has strong conviction that based on all of the above mentioned distinctive features like raagas, taal as and the aesthetics in their presentation, Bargeet can be demarcated as one of the special form of Indian Classical Music.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Neog M. (ed),(1958), Swararekhat Bargeet, Scientific Study of the Vaisnava Music of Assam, Sangeet Natak Academy, Shillong
- Lekharu U.C.(ed), (1952), Katha Guru Charita(2011, 6th Edition), Dutta Baruah Publishing Company. Pvt.
- Dutta H.N.(ed),(1950) Bargeet,(1995, 2nd Edition), Sri Jyotindra Narayan Dutta Baruah and Company, Guwahati.
- Dutta B.N.(ed), (1990)Traditional performing Arts of North-East India, Assam Academy for Cultural Relations, Guwahati
- Goswami P.(2001),Bargit: A Musicological Exploration, Author, Jorhat.
- Baruah B.K. and Jha T. K., (1977) Bargeet of Mahapurusha Shree Shree Sankaradeva,Dutta Baruah and co., Guwahati.
- Neog M. (2005), Sankaradeva, reprint, National Book Trust India, New Delhi, p. 10(translated byB.K.Kakati, Sankaradeva(1921).
- Goswami K.D.(ed),(1997), Bargit, Parampara aru Paribeshan Paddhati,LBS, Guwahati,
- Goswami P. (2001), Bargeet, A Musicological explorations, Author, Jorhat, Assam.
- Mahanta Bap Chandra, Bargeet, Jorhat, Assam.
- Sattriya Sanskriti Darpan (2018) by Assam Sattri Mahasabha, New Delhi.



- Vasant, SangeetVishaarad, Garg L.N.(ed.2015, 29th edition), SangeetKaryalayaHathras Uttar Pradesh.
- Pajanjape S.S. (reprint 2006), Bharatiya Sangeet ka Itihas by Chowkhamba Vidyabhawan, Varanasi.
- Singh L.K. (2014), Bharatiya Sangeet Grantha(Varnya-Vishay Vishleshan) , Kanishq publishers, distributors.
- Mittal A.(2003), Bharatiya Sabhyata, Sanskritia evam Sangeet, Kanishq publishers, distributors.
- Udiniya A.(2013) Hindustani Sashtriya raagon mei Sadaj Gandhaar bhaav ki Mahatta, Kanishq publishers, distributors.
- Pt. Bhatkhande V.N, Kramik Pustak Malika (Part 1-5), Garg L.N. (1999,9th edition), Sangeet Karyalaya Hathras Uttar Pradesh.