

THE JOURNEY OF MUSIC FROM THE CREATOR TO THE HEART OF THE AUDIENCE THROUGH THE PERFORMANCE OF BHAONA

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Abstract

The history of Assamese drama is quite old. Sankaradeva wrote the first Assamese plays. These plays were called Ankiya Nat. The performance of Ankiya Nat is called Ankiya Bhaona. Music plays an important role in the success of a play as well as in the success of a Bhaona. The visionary playwright Sankaradeva added music to Bhaona based on Indian music. There is a brilliant expression of music from the beginning to the end of the Bhaona. In Bhaona, music plays a role from introducing the characters to entering the minds of the audience throughout the events of the play. The playwright has used music in the Bhaona to achieve many purposes of the play. Our paper attempts to shed light on these aspects of music used in Bhaonas. Specifically, the paper attempts to cover various aspects of musical elements, i.e., songs, instruments and dances. The paper has been prepared using analytical methods. Various books and journals have been used to prepare the paper.

Keywords: Ankiya, Nat, Music, Bhaona, Sankardev, Instruments

INTRODUCTION

Sankardeva was the father of Assamese drama. The history of Assamese drama began in the fifteenth century AD. At that time, only some folk dramatic acts such as puppet dance and Ojapali were prevalent in Assam. Sankardeva travelled to various parts of India and gained experience and later wrote a series of complete plays with the help of Sanskrit drama, elements of all-India folk drama and his own unique talent. These plays are called Ankiya Nat. The acting of the Ankiya Nat is called Aniya Bhaona. However, in the Charit Puthis¹ Bhaona was called 'Bhavana'. The word Bhaona literally means the act of pretending. When the actor himself expresses the emotions of others (anger, fear, shame, apprehension etc. or Bhavana or Bhaona is the ability to evoke similar perceptions or feelings in the hearts of the audience.² Based on these views, it can be said that Bhaona is the performance of plays written in the style of Sankardeva's drama. The acting or performance of Nat written by Sankardeva is called Ankiya Bhaona and the acting of plays written later on the model of Ankiya Bhaona is called only 'Bhaona'.

Music is the combination of song, dance and instruments. This also applies to the music of Bhaona. The music of the Bhaona has its own characteristics. During the time of Sankaradeva, the writing of plays and the application of various elements of plays were based on *Natyashastra*. Sankaradeva was no exception but the specialty of Sankardeva is that although music was applied on the basis of *Natyashastra*, the combination of his extraordinary talent in this application was like a golden fragrance. These wonderful songs,

1. Biographical works of Sankardeva, Madhavdeva and other religious Gurus written in the medieval periods of Assam.

2. Goswami, N, 1984, p. 566

dances and instruments enhanced the spiritual qualities and aesthetic beauty of the Bhaona. The audience was fascinated by the beauty of the Bhaona. Therefore, the heritage and richness of Indian classical music is beautifully reflected in the music of Bhaona.

SONGS IN BHAONA

There are five types of Dhruva songs mentioned in the *Natyashastra*. All these types of 'Dhruva' songs are used in Ankiya Bhaona. Through these songs, the theme of the play takes on a certain shape from beginning to end. There are five types of movements or states in Ankiya Bhaona, without which the Bhaona is incomplete.¹ In Bhaona, these movements or states are expressed through songs. These songs are: - *Pravesiki*, *Naiskramiki*, *Aksepiki*, *Prasadiki* and *Antariki*.

Praveshiki Geet (entrance song) is sung when the characters of the play enter the stage. Most of the main characters of the Bhaona have an introductory song. Such songs are performed by Dohars (singers and musicians of Bhaona). The characters of the play enter the stage in time to the rhythm of the song. These songs are called Praveshiki Geet. Examples include the entrance songs in the Ramvijay Nat – 'Veli Parvesh Paramesh Raghunathe' (the entrance song of Rama and Lakshmana), 'Awe Janaksutha Koy Parvesh' (the entrance song of Sita), 'Awe Dasaratha Prithivi Nath' (the entrance song of Dasaratha), 'Avat Kautuke Kaushik Chand' (the song of the entry of Vishvamitra), 'Awe Nripasav Dhari Shar Chap' (the song of the kings who came to Sita's Swayambara) etc.² In the entry songs, Sankardeva does not only talk about the entry of the character. Instead, it describes all aspects of the character's physical beauty, manner of entry, and attitude of the character in a very interesting way. This makes it easier for the audience to become involved with the character of the play and become attracted to the play. For example, this song by *Parijat Haran* –

He enters, mounted on the mighty bird Garuda.

A mere shard of his beauty eclipses that of the Love God.

His dark body glistens, his yellow robe shines,
he wears a gem-studded crown above his jewel-like face.

Bracelets dangle on his arms

and anklets jingle on his feet.

His splendid figure puts a hundred million Cupids to shame.

The radiance of his body fills all the directions.

1 Goswami, N, 1993, p. 42
2 Sharma, 2013, pp. 83-100.

With him are Rukmini and Satyabhama, the best of women.

So says Sankara, the slave of the slave of Hari.¹

Naishkramiki Geet is the songs sung when the characters leave the stage at the end of a scene. These details of the character's departure through the song make the audience interested in the character. The description of such songs also makes the audience anxious about the next scene, i.e. arouses theatrical excitement. The song 'Chali Narad Hari Gun Gai' in the play *Parijat Haran* is an excellent example of this. Such as-

Narada left, singing the praises of Hari,
And wandered to Dvaraka and gazed on its magnificence with awe.
All of Hari's houses were encrusted with jewels
Making them resemble celestial mansions.
Then the sage spied a fabulous dwelling
Within which Satyabhama sat,
Her face gleaming like the moon waxed full.
Narada greeted her with a smile
And when the lady saw the sage,
She bowed down before him
And said Narada, "May you live a long life!"²

This song describes how Narada left. The playwright has tried to fulfill the main purpose of the play, which is to create a religious or spiritual atmosphere in the minds of the audience, with this song. The playwright is also trying to fulfill the goal. The song also quotes the next scene of the play. It is rare even in modern drama to achieve such versatile goals in a single song.

Prasadiki songs are songs in which the characters express joy and happiness. Such songs express mental cheerfulness when the characters achieve the desired results. For example, In Sankaradeva's *Rukmini Haran Nat*, when Rukmini learns from her friend that her father Bhishma has decided to marry her to Krishna, she expresses her joy in this song like this-

O Sakhi, our good days have come,
They dance in joy as Gauri with her friend
The Supreme Being became our beloved husband

1 W L. Smith (2007).The Translation of Shankaradeva's Parijata Harana Nata. pp. 168-169

2 W L. Smith (2007)The Translation of Shankaradeva's Parijata Harana Nata. p. 171

Our birth has just been successful

There is no one else as fortunate as I am

The servant of Krishna tells of Rukmini's joy.¹

Aksepiki is a song sung by the characters themselves in the context of death, separation or failure of care or a song sung in conjunction with the feelings of the characters. They are songs that express emotions such as heartfelt warfare, sadness, fatigue, sadness, and the anger of the cast. All these songs are used in Bhaona. Bhaona is performed to the beat of songs. In fact, the same thing is expressed in three ways in Bhaona. With dialogues of the Sutradhar and the characters, with Sanskrit verses and with the help of songs. Sankardeva was a very visionary playwright. He created Ankiya Nat-Bhaona for the enjoyment and education of all sections of the society. There was a lot of interest in the Bhaona from the intelligent audience to the general public. Of course, most of the audience at the time was simple. Sankardeva created plays and made the first plays available to people who had never seen plays before. Therefore, everything in the play needed to be explained in detail. The most effective element in this regard was the songs Bhaona. The audience had the opportunity to watch the activities of the characters with their eyes as well as listen with their ears to immerse themselves in the story of the play.

There was a lot of interest in the *Aksepiki* (lamentations) in the Bhaona. The characters were able to attract the attention of the audience with their lamentations. Therefore, the playwrights of the later period of Sankardeva paid great attention to incorporating such scenes in the Bhaona. Sometimes it reached the point where the king's character fell to the ground and cried. We can take this song of *Parijat Haran* as a lament or a song of sorrow. In this song of the play, Satyabhama, another wife of Krishna, laments that Krishna has given Rukmini a parijata flower:

Tears poured from the lotus-like eyes of the lovely lady
as her body grew exhausted from sobbing.
All seemed to be darkness to her.
Her heart burned because of the success of her rival
and the pain welled up in her heart.
“Hari, my dear Hari, you have become like an enemy
since you slighted me so.
She rolled round on the floor groaning.²

¹ Translated by the author from Rukmini *Hararn* Nat by Sankardeva.

² W L. Smith (2007) The Translation of Shankaradeva's Parijata Harana Nata. p. 173

In Bhaona, some special needs are also met through songs. Songs also describe scenes that the playwright cannot show in the drama. Sometimes a long event is summarized in song. The songs contain detailed accounts of each event. In the play *Parijat Haran*, the song describes Krishna's journey to fight Narakasura as follows:

Govinda flew on the back of Garuda,
eager to slay Naraka.

The King of Birds went with the speed of the wind
and reached Kamrup in the blink of an eye.
Hari sounded his conch time and again,
and the demons' hearts shook to hear it.
They knew that Madhava was on his way
and went off roaring to fight.¹

In the same song, Krishna's battle with Narakasura is vividly described as follows:

Kettledrums announced the battle
and cries of "kill, kill!" and "Hold, hold!" filled the air.
Enraged, Naraka charged,
intending to cleave Krishna with his sword.
Hari twanged the string of his bow
and plagued the demons with a flurry of missiles,
slaughtering the demon warriors,
slicing off arms, shoulders, and heads.
Seeing this, the other demons fled
as arrows struck and felled them.
The angry Jagannath hurled his discus
and cut off the evil Naraka's head.

1 W L. Smith (2007) The Translation of Shankaradeva's Parijata Harana Nata. pp. 176-177

The delighted gods
beat the victory drums and tossed down flowers,
shouting "Jaya, jaya Yadava."

Let everyone repeat the name of Hari!¹

One of the most notable features of the songs of Ankiya Nat is the use of ragas and rhythms. There are several rules followed in the Bhaona songs in terms of ragas and rhythms. The songs of the Ankiya Nat are tied to a certain rhythm.² There is a song after the Nandi³ Sloka. This is the first song of a Bhaona is called Nandi Geet. Nandi songs are always of pleasant ragas and rhythms. However, not all plays contain Nandi songs. There are many different ragas and rhythms used in the songs of Ankiya Nat.

In terms of the use of ragas, it is seen that the last songs of most plays use the ragas 'Kalyan' and 'Purvi' and are sung to the 'Kharman Tal' However, the notion prevalent in the society that 'kalyan raag' and 'kharman tal' should be used at the end of the play in the last song is not true. Keswananda Devgoswami said that there is no guarantee that the Kalyan raga and the Kharman tal can only be used at the end of the play.⁴ For example, the last song of *Patniprasad Nat* uses Shyam Raag and Parital.⁵ Similarly, Purbi Raag and Kharman Tal are used in *Parijat Haran* and Ahir raag and Ektali in *Keli Gopal Nat* in the last song.

The ragas used in the songs of Ankiya Nat are Sareng, Suhai, Sindhura, Kannada, Kau, Ashwari, Dhanshri, Mahur, Gauri, Bhatiali, Belwar, Basanta, Sri, Srigandhar, Tur, Nat, Natmalla, Ahir, Kedar, Shyam, Kalyan, Purvi and so on. The rhythms are Ektal, Parital, Chutkala, Rupak, Yatital, Barbisham, Sarubisham, Kharman, Jauti, Dharamjauti etc.

The use of ragas and rhythms to suit the atmosphere created by the story is the essence of Ankiya Nat.⁶ War songs are given in ragas like Kanara, Tur, Kamod, Natmallar, Saranga, Srigandhar, Dhansri, Gandhar etc. Similarly, in lamentation or sadness, ragas such as Suhai, Srigandhar, Gauri, Bhatiali, Kalyan, Dhanshri, Sri, Basanta, Kedar, Bhupali, Chalengi, Kau, Belwar Ashowari etc. are played. They are used in war songs, in songs of journey or entry and exit, in songs such as ektali, parital, jauti, rupak, etc., in songs of sadness or lamentation, in songs such as jauti, visam rupak, mathjauti, parital, dharamjauti, chutkala.⁷

Bhatima is one kind of praise song. There are three types of Bhatima used in Ankiya Nat. The starting Bhatima, the characters Bhatima and the Muktimagal Bhatima. In Ankiya Nat, the

1 W L. Smith (2007) The Translation of Shankaradeva's Parijata Harana Nata. pp. 176-177

2 Goswami, N, 1984, p. 555

3 There are many elements mentioned in Natyashastra are used in Ankiya Nat. The thirteenth element of purva-ranga, that is Nandi.

4 Devgoswami, K, 2011, p. 21.

5 Bora, M, 2008, p. 48

⁶ Bhuiyan. R, 2012, p. 86

7 Devgoswami, K, 2011, p.22

divinity of the main character Krishna or Rama is expressed through the starting Bhatima. This Bhatima takes the audience to an atmosphere of devotion. The characters Bhatima describe the appearance and qualities of the central character. In fact, this Bhatima is used to attract the audience to the character and to arouse interest in the theatrical story. In addition, the playwright Sankardeva used Bhatima to show the attraction of one character to another in the need of the play. For example, in the play *Rukmini Haran*, there is a Bhatima praising the appearance of Rukmini –

“ huna huna Rukmini mai
Harigun kahana najai
mukh indu koti prakash
dashan motim mand has
nayan pankaj nav pata
karatala utpala rata.”¹

This Bhatima says that the praises of Hari (God) cannot be finished. The face is like billions of moons. The teeth are like pearls. The eyes are like new lotus leaves. The palms of his hands are red like lotuses. In the play, the character Suravi Bhat sings this Bhatima before Krishna. This shows that Krishna is attracted to Rukmini without meeting her. The Bhatima is used to naturalize this attraction in the eyes of the audience.

The Bhatima added at the end of the Bhaona is the Muktimangal Bhatima. This Bhatima wishes the welfare of the audience, the Bhavaria (Actors) and all those involved in the Bhaona. The Muktimangal Bhatima at the end of the play awakens spiritual feelings in the minds of the audience and contributes to immersion in devotion. There are many different types of rhetoric in the Bhatima, such as rhyme, metaphor, etc., which contribute to the beauty of the play. Another feature of Bhatima is that various acting hands are displayed during its performance.

ABUNDANCE OF DANCE WITH SONG

There is a lot of dance along with songs in the performance of Ankiya Nat. There are so many dances in Ankiya Bhaona that it is sometimes called dance rather than drama. They dance even when they cry in sorrow in Ankiya Bhaona: they dance even when they attack in battle. The dances of Ankiya Bhaona are performed in different forms according to different characters. Dance is used to express the entry, exit, and mood of the characters. Bhaona dances are of various types – based on various performance styles such as dance, Tandava, Lasya, etc. These dances last from the beginning to the end of the Bhaona.

¹ Translated by the author from Rukmini Haran Nat by Sankardev

Dance is used in the songs of Ankiya Nat. Nandigeet is the first song of the bhaona. This song has a hint of a dramatic story. The Sutradhar dances purely to the rhythm or beat of the song by acting his hands. The entrance songs are composed for the entrance of various characters in the Bhaona. There are many different types of characters in the Bhaona. The dance form of these songs is determined according to the character to be entered. The *Naiskramiki* (exit) songs are similarly meant to bid farewell to the characters. These songs also have different dance styles according to the mood of the characters. *Aksepiki* songs are sung when the position of the character changes. The dance is performed to the beat of the khol and by moving various parts of the body. This dance usually does not involve acting. *Prasadiki* songs are performed to mitigate an incident. This song is danced to the rhythm. Songs are used in the development of the dramatic story and the execution of humor in Ankiya Nat. These songs are dominated by acting. Such songs as Rukmini Haran's 'Ae Sakhi Sudin Bhour', 'Ghan Ghan Muruchi Paray Bara Nari', and Ramvijay's 'Bilapati Maithili Mai' combine with dance and emotional acting. The last song of the Ankiya Nat is also called *Kharman Geet* because it is often sung in *Kharman Tala*. This song is not acted and just danced in different poses.

There are many different types of dances used in the Ankiya Bhaona. Various poses and dances are used to present an environment or dramatic story in a more artistic way. The dance is controlled by the theme of the play, the environment, the characteristics of the performer, etc. It uses both Tandava and Lasya dance styles and sometimes acting. Some of the most notable Bhangi dances are the Bhangi of sages like Narada, Nandi Bhangi, Payar Bhangi, chali dance etc. In Bhaona, Narada or other sages enter such poses. Usually such entries do not contain songs. However, when the characters of Kaushik in *Ramavijaya* and Narada in *Janmayatra* enter the stage, the entry song of the Parital is sung. In other plays, these characters are danced to enter with special rhythm of the instruments. Therefore, dance is very important in Bhaona. The dance of Bhaona later gave rise to one of the classical dance forms of India, Satriya Nritya.

INSTRUMENTS OF THE BHAONA

The khol and Tal (cymbals) are the most important instruments of Bhaona. These instruments are used in bhaona from beginning to end. When some characters such as Krishna, Rama or various famous kings enter the stage, instruments such as Daba (big kettle-drum), Sankh (conch-shell), Kangh (gong), Bartal (big cymbal), flute and Kali (clarion) are also played. These types of instruments are also played at the beginning of war in Bhaona. The Avanadha instruments including the Khol, Mridanga, Dhaba, and Negera are seen playing in songs¹. Among the Ghana instruments played by striking hard materials or by striking two objects made of the same material are Pati Tal, Bhortal, Kherengital, Khuti Tal etc. are particularly

¹ All the instruments are leather-covered drum, playing with fingers or bamboo sticks.

popular.¹ Sushira instruments include the use of conch, kali and flute. Tata (Stringed) instruments such as Chander and Rabab are not used in Bhaona nowadays.

CONCLUSION

There is no denying the heritage and importance of Assamese drama which began 570 years ago. Sankardeva incorporated songs, dances, music instruments, etc. into the Bhaona in a very sophisticated manner. These elements made the Bhaona very attractive to the audience. He was able to build a stable society by providing moral education to the people through Bhaona performances Sankardeva was able to subdue even the greatest enemies and bind them with friendly relations through Bhaona. There were no professional artists who performed the songs, dances and instruments of the Bhaona. They were ordinary villagers, simple people. Therefore, Bhaona improved the artistic life of these people and made them healthy through physical exercise. There are many changes in the production of songs, dances and instruments in Bhaona nowadays and Bhaona has lost its uniqueness with the coating of modernity. In order to stabilize our society, it is essential to preserve the uniqueness of Bhaona as a means of high moral education and as a cultural resource that can revive the mind and soul. Therefore, everyone should take care to give proper maintenance to this precious cultural resource.

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¹ These are brass metal cymbals that vary in size.