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Ankiya Nat and Bhaona— An alternative media approach and its convergence with Ojapali

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ABSTRACT

Sankaradeva, the maestro behind Cultural Revolution in the 14th century and Neo Vaishnavite faith Propagation in Assam in accordance to the upliftment of spirituality and cultured livings. The cultural Communication Part of Sankaradeva is a treasure of resourceful elements and the milepost of Assamese Cultural Revolution which is well recognized with his contribution through Song, drama, dances and other literary items. The Plays written by Sankaradeva is known as Ankiya Nat and the entire drama genre is known as Bhaona. Apart from different cultural and literary contribution of Sankaradeva, the drama part is taken here to a research approach to finding out its cultural values and its elements of Communication in convergence to the Ojapali folk of Assam, India. Sankaradeva is formally recognized as the beginner of Assamese play writer and performer in the full-fledged dramatic form. But before him, a different folk performance like Ojapali, Puppetry, Dhulia, Pachati, kushan Gaan was practiced in many regions of the present day Assam. These folk forms are the important medium of storytelling during that time. Many critiques mentioned these folk forms as Quasi-dramatic performing arts. From this age of quasi-dramatic performing arts, Sankaradeva turned up to a fully fledged drama genre with extra ordinary communication method which was used for promotion of cultural and religious messages. Such an approach is an alternative media approach in the present time because it works beyond the modern mass media. The Ankiya Plays and the Bhaona grow up with special stylistics of presentation and storytelling however it has a good reflection of the Ojapali in terms of the storytelling method. Such resemblance is studied herewith to get a convergence model of the age-old drama genre Bhaona and the Ojapali.

Keywords— Ojapali, Ankiya play, Quasi dramatic, Puppetry, Dhulia, Bhaona

1. INTRODUCTION

Tradition implies a bridge and breeze of evolutionary processes. Lots of folk elements constitute this evolutionary process in where spontaneously the system is coiled up with some much enshrined embody like nature, god and godliness, beliefs, myth, gesture, posture, musical sense etc which represent the socio-cultural environment of a mass respectively or irrespective of the geographical positioning. Some traditions are age-old but some are not. The drama tradition of Assam is not so old but it was enriched with lots of socio-cultural elements in the earlier days. These earlier days are brought forth with the folk drama tradition. These folk dramas are Ojapali, Puppetry, Pochoti, Kushan Gaan, dhulia etc. The tradition of puppetry is so old in the context of Assam and India too, it is far older than the Ojapali folk. This quasi-dramatic performing art is strongly bonded with the folklife of Assam. But Sankaradeva, the 14th-century maestro from Assam brought to light a massive and composite form of drama genre that is Bhaona with the initiation of his very own Ankiya play (Ankiya Nat). This commoner's friendly Vaishnavite art form encompasses with the following:

- Sanskrit literary derivatives.
- The local folk culture of Assam
- Commonality and convergence through the language of Brajawali towards greater Indian absorption
- Innovators with the promotion of the knowledge on contemporary art forms, musical forms, and Pan Indian drama tradition.

2. ANKIYA PLAYS, BHAONA, AND THE OJAPALI

The drama form of Sankaradeva which is recognized as Bhaona and the play he wrote are Ankiya Play (Ankiya Nat) is a broad spectrum area of research regarding its Communication traits, historical and comparatives study etc. Out of the above-mentioned orientation, it is hereby taken the only means of its convergence from Ojapali folks of Assam, India. It is due to the resemblance and literature proximity with the art form of Bhaona genre as well as the play by Sankaradeva i.e Ankiya Nat.

Sankaradeva gets a lot of mesmerizing elements of communication through Ojapali. So in this regard, the statement made by Birinchi Kumar Baruah in his book 'History of Assamese literature' is worth mentioning. He stated that the Pre-Vaishnavite

Ojapali dance recital might have given to Sankaradeva the basic idea for the production of Ankiya plays. It may, therefore, be reasonably presumed that the recital of *Kavyas*, *Ojapali* choral singing and spectacular shows of other parts of India, might have jointly contributed to the rise of the fully developed drama in Assamese.

In Parallel to the resemblance to local folk form, Sankaradeva tries to yield a unique form of drama with the knowledge management of classical drama and contemporary dramatic component. The *Ankiya* plays written by Sankaradeva are *Patni Prasad*, *Kali Daman*, *Keli Gopal*, *Parijat Haran*, *Rukmini Haran*, *Ram Bijay*.

Before the writing of the above mentioned six dramas, the most innovative visual art; *Chihnayatra* drama was staged by Sankaradeva, but it is not included with the six plays ascribed to him. Because it is not a fully fledged drama, moreover it is a visual art and portrayal based communication. Some sources like *Charit Puthi* imply the evidence of two more other drama namely *Janma* and *Kangsha Badh* written earlier to the *Patni Prasad* as well.

This research paper is intertwined with those circumstances of the following objectives like to have a view on the contemporary trend of folk dance and drama influential to Sankaradeva Works. Secondly, the convergence to the *Ojapali* folk culture of Assam is taken to see the derivatives on the drama of Sankaradeva.

This paper is prepared with the explanatory method. It is observed and discussed with a feed of many previous kinds of literature on the specified area. Study on the resemblance and converging trend of Ankiya drama with *Ojapali* is observed primarily and also with a Secondary source of information. In the primary proceeding, we applied visual analysis and feedback study and discussion with many audiences and expert of the field of Vaishnavite literature and culture.

3. CONVERGENCE BETWEEN ANKIYA PLAYS CUM BHAONA AND THE OJAPALI

In literature, finality varies with new exploration when time proceeds. So in many cases, some previous findings might be changeable. So dimension is changing day by day. Now we turned to the main objective point of view. We know that *Ojapali* is a folk form born up and spreading up with entire Indian trend of storytelling with music, dance based on Puranas, Myths and other Folk believes. *Ojapali* folk carries resemblance with the performing art forms of entire India like *Yatra*, *Pachaali gaan* of West Bengal, *Ram Leela* and *Rass Leela* of North India, *Kushan Gaan* of North Bengal etc. But these folk forms are not time specific so it is harder to clarify the influence map. But we can derive so many resemblances and convergence point of view in different folk form.

In case of *Ankiya* play (Nat), the dramaturgy is basically converged with local folks along with the literary convergence of Sanskrit drama as well as the principle of *Natyashastra* by Bharata. The *Ankiya* Nat, as well as the *Bhona* tradition, cannot be called as folk media also. Folk items may be there but it is not basically a folk culture because of its writer's identity. It is mentioned worthy that some people and Vaishnavite writers wrote much drama for the same purpose as *Bhaona* after Sankaradeva. Many writers will to provide their identity or profile and many of them have not provided. So many dramas for *Bhaona* performance written after Sankaradeva has not been writers' specific. But this *Bhaona* forms cannot be taken under folk drama because the entire *Bhaona* genre proceeds with the creation of Sankaradeva. After this, many *Satra* and Vaishnavite institution takes part to develop and disseminate it after the death of Sankaradeva. So in many cases, some performance, musical and gesture-based variation can be found with respect to many *Satras*, *Namghar* - Vaishnavite institution and on the basis of locality. But the whole tradition of *Bhaona* is started with the creation of *Ankiya* plays. This *Ankiya* plays of Sankaradeva carries many inputs from Sanskrit drama; he used Brajawali language which is said to be a derived language as well as artificial language. Although the creation of Sankaradeva is unique, definitely it synthesizes many folk forms, local flavor, the tune of the land to catch up the people to have a great mass communication. In the mass communication point of view, the use of Brajawali language is to catch up Indian arena so that his communication can flow in Assam and other adjacent states and region. Such type of study on the communication traits and the entire tools of communication in *Ankiya* drama and *Bhaona* are a broad spectrum area of research. But in this specific study, it is seen that the *Ojapali* folk is the most proximate one to *Ankiya* plays and the *Bhaona* culture in the convergence point of view. Many researchers explore many other proximate cases. But objectifying this paper's theme we basically go to the *Ojapali* section. Simply the background of *Ojapali* is of two types i.e. Epic based and the other is myth and folk-based which is Non-Epic. Epic based *Ojapali* is sub divided into *Vyas Oja Pali*, *Raimon*, *Bhaira*, *Durgabori*, *Satriya*, *Panchali*, *Dulori*. The other Non-Epic *Ojapali* is sub divided into *Sukonnanani*, *Bishahari gaan*, *Mare gaan*, *Padma Puran gaan*, *Tukuria*, *Geetalu geet*, *Garu* folk based *Ojapali*. The epic based *Ojapali* was formulated for the Vaishnavite worship and the other one is formulated in varied cases. As for example, *Bishahari* is performed in the worship of Goddess *Manasa*, *Tukuria Ojapali* is performed during the worship of *Tukuria Devi* etc. Epic and Non Epic *Ojapali* varies with its costumes, performance, Music, Dance, Musical Instruments. Eminent researcher Mon Mohan Ghosh stated that the performance of *Ojapali* proceeds with storytelling, recitation. It takes place basically in religious programmes.

One lector or the *Pathak* reads the story and the *Dharak* interpret the same. In the same way, we see in the *Ankiya* play the *Sutradhaar* provides a previous scenario of the upcoming story and sequence. He provides the basic theme of drama. So in this regard, the story telling process is proximate to the *Ojapali*. A troupe of *Ojapali* has a musician in which we see a convergence ray to our *Bhaona* culture. *Gayan Bayan* part of *Ankiya* plays as well as *Bhaona* has a close proximity to the *Oja* and *Pali*. The troupe of *Ojapali* in which assisting Lector and assisting *pali* is also there and in the same way the *Bhaona* performance, the *Gayan Bayan* i.e the Musician is a troupe to present music and directors and assisting person regarding its performance in the *Ankiya* drama.

In the next, we see converging trends between *Ankiya* play and *Ojapali* regarding its aims and objectives. As the *Ojapali* was running before the creation of *Ankiya* play and performance, it was basically related to religious functions. The epic based *Ojapali* deals with the stories *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Puranas*. In the same way, the themes of the *Ankiya* Plays were taken from *Bhagawat Purana* and *Ramayana*.

Sankaradeva roamed a lot in Assam as well as the Indian Territory. So he experienced a lot with his traveling. The Literature and performing art is probably synthesized with such of his interaction and visits to different territory. He probably found out so many ways of storytelling and communication procedures for which the exclusive form of drama and its performing art is brought to light. It is mentioned worthy that the *Ojapali* folk (Now it is also discussed as a classical form) trend is basically performed in the entire area of Greater Kamrup, It is even been strongly exist in the Darrang, Mangaldoi, Nalbari, Goalpara area. Many *Satras* of Assam used this communication form for their storytelling purpose and hence it is a cultural pride of Assam, after which we get the other form of dramatic approach as well as alternative media i.e. Ankiya play. In the communication point of view, this alternative media carries converging trends also to the modern mass media.

4. INFERENCE

Some kind of Ojapali like Ramayan Ojapali was prevailing before Sankaradeva's time. We have already stated that Ojapali concerns with both Epic and Non-Epic background. The drama of Sankaradeva based on Lord Krishna and its other *Avatar* Rama. Ramcharan Thakur, the man behind Guru Charit says, "Bhaona Karile Krishna Pujibe Lagaya" which implies the Krishna worship and the dissemination of Lord Krishna. That is why the spirituality, message of Lord Krishna and Story of the same is the basic communication message of Ankiya Nat or Drama. The link between Oja Pali and Ankiya drama is prominently explained by Ramcharan Thakur in his 'Guru Charit'. He stated that Sankaradeva deals with Narayan Thakur ata about *Biyah Oja*. Daityari Thakur also stated about the help of *Ojapali* taken by Sankaradeva in his Vaishnavite dissemination. *Oja Pali* was a live and most popular form in the early days in Kamrup. So this kind of popular form has influence in post-synthetic cultural forms. In the same way the Dhulia, Puppetry has also a great relevance in the early days.

Primary investigation shows that people like to enjoy the spiritual environment created in *Bhaona* house i.e *Namghar* (*Namghar* is a model prayer house started by Sankaradeva) and the mode of presentation with music, storytelling, dance is quite attractive to have a good mass communication for which Bhaona still worked as great tool of communication in the cultural field. In the Indian arena, it has got good acceptance. The use of Brajawali language in the Ankiya Play is effectively working out to reach the Pan Indian audiences. The prominent resemblance with age-old storytelling and quasi dramatic performing arts also turn up the whole appreciation level to a greater extent.

5. CONCLUSION

The drama form created and developed by Sankaradeva is quite innovative, unique and effective. It carries the following extraordinary striking points to communicate effectively i.e. 1) Prelims 2) Costume 3) Music 4) War scene 5) Overall distinctive style of enactment (Including stage system, presentational technique, another point from prelims to story) 6) Makeup 7) Dramatic Language (Dialogues, literature, - Brajawali, Assamese 8) Story, characters and mask.

Among such diverse study area of the Ankiya Play and the Bhaona Culture, here we studied the *Ankiya Play cum Bhaona* and the *Ojapali* tradition and found a convergent relationship on the basis of the content analysis done.

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