



Sankardeva as playwright and director of assamese drama: A Study

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Abstract

The history of ancient Assamese drama has a rich history. This history began from Sankardeva. He composed six unique plays, from the base of folk dance and drama. Sankardeva propagated neo-Vaisnavism in Assam. He composed plays for propagating Vaishnava religion. Sankardeva wrote plays to teach people and impart aesthetic beauty. By producing Assamese drama, Sankardeva showed drama 15th- 16th century's Assamese people of, which at that time only had to be satisfied by hearing about Sanskrit drama. The drama composing became a tradition in the later period of Sankardeva also. Nowadays this drama is seen as a medium of entertainment. In this research paper, there is an attempt to examine the personality of Sankardeva through his play.

Keywords: Ankiya Nat, Sankardev, Religion, entertainment. Vaisnavism

1. Introduction

Drama is an important art of imitating human life and this art is based on love, imagination, beauty, etc. In the primitive era, after returning from hunting, the man gave a lively account of the hunt to the companion and thus the play was born. In ancient times, the play originated from dances and songs held in the temple of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and pleasure. Various literary philosophies around the world also state that plays were produced by religious events. Priests practiced acting to teach the public from English religious books, and with this act was born mystery and miraculous plays [1].

The history of Indian drama is very old. It is estimated that Bharata Muni composed the *Natyashastra* in the second century. Various regional folk theatre programs and several Sanskrit plays have been composed since the *Natyashastra*. Assam has various folk theater practices since the old days [2]. The *Kalika Purana* mentions that the Odra Magadhi tyle was a continuation of ancient Pragjyotishpura and Kamarupa. Written in ancient Assamese language, Charyapada said that folk theater used to be performed in Assam in olden times. *Krishna Kirtan* described contemporary folk theater of Assam [3]. Taking elements from previous Sanskrit theatrical trends and folk theater, Sankardeva composed the first Assamese drama in the 15th century. In Sankardeva's time, there were many folk-dramas. Ramcharan Thakur mentions in the *Gurucharit* that Sankardeva showed Jagdish Mishra a performance of Ojapali.

Sankardeva as composer of play

Sankardeva produced Anakiya Nat through the Brajavali language. Brajavali is an artificial language. Sankardeva created the Brajavali language by combining the old Assamese and Moithili language of Urisha. Before this, Sankardeva started a primary foundation of theater through Chinayatra [4]. Seeing the Chinayatra, an intimate devotion was born in the minds of all people to Sankardev. Then there was a change in his life too. He changed in the Guru of Bhakti religion [5]. But there was no written evidence of this

theater. After this performance, Shankardev composed 6 plays. This play is called Anakiya Nat. Ankiya Nat has some unique features. Satyendranath Sharma has shown these characteristics as follows: (a) dominance of sutradhara (narrator) (b) use of poetic righteous songs, slokas and bhatima (a kind of prayer song) (c) Brajavali language, (d) rhythmic Prose (E) Music and Dance [6]. Ankiya Nat is a type of dance-drama, with songs and dialogues in Brajavali, sloka in Sanskrit. There is no scene and action division in this drama and different episodes are linked together through sutradhara. The play of Sankardeva is called Ankiya Nat for keeping aside the drama of previous playwrights and honoring it. The Acting performance of Ankiya Nat is called Ankiya Bhaona or Bhaona. Bhaona means to act or render the character of someone.

Sankardeva is called the father of Assamese drama. He wrote plays like *Patni-Prasad*, *Kaliyadaman*, *Kelly-Gopala*, *Rukmini Haran*, *Parijat Haran* and *Ramvijay*. B.K Kakati has said about the background of Sankardeva's play's composition-“The final source of the externally divided Assamese drama, Assamese Orapali has full potential for choral performance. Such performances have given rise to Assamese drama [7].

Structure of Ankiya Nat

The structure of these plays of Shankardev is the same. The play begins with a Nandi shloka. (Sanskrit shlokas) and other Sanskrit shlokas are used in the midst of the play, indicating that Sankardeva's Sanskrit language knowledge was abundant. By giving these Sanskrit verses in the play, the playwright succeeded in giving seriousness. The story of the plays were taken from the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Ramayana*, the Anakiya drama was made for the promotion of religion. That is why Sankardeva chose the story of the play from the Hindu sacred text.

In Sankardeva's Nata, there is a certain mode of performance. At the beginning of the play, Guyana-Bayana sing and dance like the Pururanga of Sanskrit drama, in general, a recital unit consists of 9 to 12 drummers and singers. After performing the Gayan-Bayana, the Sutradhara

(narrator) starts the play with his dance and recites the slogans. The Sutradhara announces the story to the audience and the actors are then introduced through the direction of the Sutradhara. B Barua says-

Through the new genre is popularly known as Ankiya Nat, it bears no resemblance to the Anka type of Rupakas of Sanskrit. Ankiya Nat is a generic term in Assamese and means dramatic compositions in a single act depicting the articles of Vaishnava faith. It should be borne in mind that Sankardeva himself called these dramatic compositions nat and nataka after the Sanskrit terminology. Other titles used by the Vaishnava poets for this type of plays are yatra, nrita and anka [8].

The exact written date of Shankar Dev's plays is not known except Rambijay. It is estimated from Charit Puthis that Shankardev had written all the plays in the 15th century itself. But in the Ramvijay drama, Sankardeva added the date of his last play through a Sanskrit sloka. This was the Saka era of 1490 or in the Indian calendar year 1568. Prior to this play, Shankardeva completed all his other plays.

Sankardev As director of Ankiya Bhaona

There were no professional actors in Sankardeva's time; They were recruited from the villagers. Sankardeva trained them to sing, dance and act. In this way, Assamese acting had become amateurs work. Sankardeva's religion was free from casteism and all people of society could follow the religion and participate in dramatic performances. But after the death of Sankardeva, casteism again grew up. The roles of the leading characters of Krishna and Rama and their concerts are played by some beautiful youngsters, especially by the upper castes, as they seek obedience in their dramatic roles of other actors and audiences [9]. There was an idea of caste discrimination in the society and the result of caste discrimination in the performance of Ankiya drama. However, the problem of caste discrimination in Assam was less than in other states of India.

Sankardeva built the namghar (prayer house) as a two-roofed prayer hall. All performances of Ankiya plays were performed in namghar. For the construction of namghar, Sankardeva used wood and bamboo, which were found in the villages of Assam, and even poor people could easily construct it. Everyone could enter namghar without any restrictions. That is why everyone participated in Ankiya plays at that time. Because of this, this drama easily made a place in the minds of the people.

Sankardeva used the free plain floor and courtyard of the nam-ghar to perform this drama. The audiences sat from all directions and the actor acted in between. The actor's relationship with the audiences was very close and the audiences considered themselves as a part of the play. In this way Sankardeva made all the audiences as a part of his play through namghar. The audience also enjoyed the drama and propagated the religion. In this way, Sankardeva not only showed talent in composing the play, but also showed his knowledge in the performance of the play. Therefore Sankardeva can be called the exclusive, composer, producer and director of the play. M Neog narrates about the stage of Sankardev's drama-

In the case of performance in a nam-gharis set apart for the theater, marked out by bamboo posts and bars on all sides except in the middle of both the ends...on the towards the manikut, sit the hero and his company; and the other actors occupy the seats on the sides in respective groups, The

further end of the stage is reserved for the orchestra (gayana-bayana) and the sutradhara. Sometimes a large canopy (chandratap, a white cloth with loose frilled edges and ornamented with piece of circular red cloth representing the sun, the moon and lotus leaves) is hung over the stage, which is also decorated and festooned with leaves and flowers [10].

Lighting system of Ankiya Bhaona

Bhota, Ariya and Aganigarh were used to light up the performance of the play. In those days there was no electricity, clay lamps with mustard oil were used to provide light. These lights also had religious meanings. Nine clay lamps were placed in the Aganigarh. These were the nine devotional symbols of Hinduism. Coming down from it, the actors entered the stage. This meant that one can meet God through nine devotions. Cotton cloth was burnt by adding mustard oil in the bamboo cylinders. It is called Araria. On the stage, two men came dancing with holding two areas in front of the Gayan-Bayan team. Ariya also gave light and pointed out that when somebody is not capable of doing nine devotion, then only by two devotions like Shraavan-Kirtan are enough to achieve God. The meaning of Sankardeva's religious teaching of these dramas was also rooted in the content of lights. That is why it is difficult to imagine Sankardeva's immense talent in today's vision.

Costumes and cosmetics, paint and hair

Sankardeva had used the Aharya (costume and makeup elements) of the play described in the NatyaShasta of Bharat. At that time, the material found in Assam was used for the decoration and make-up of the characters of the play. The character of the drama used material like Ghori, Dhoti, Chappakan, Tangali (Westband), Mala (garland), Har (necklace), Baju (Bracelet), Mukut, turban etc. and used to give attractive charm to themselves in the view of the audiences. Khanikar (One who paint colour) used to paint the actors. Local materials like kharimti (mica), dhal (chalk), hengul (vermilion), haital (Yellow arsenic) etc. were brought for color. All the characters were given colors according to their characteristics. Various Masks like Kansa, Ravan, kalisarpa, Garur, etc. were used. In these plays also had featured some artificial animals and birds.

Songs and music

Sankardeva used various dances in the performance of the play. In these plays, all the characters entered and exited the stage through dance, in this drama when the character cries, they only cry through the dance. The characters also fight in the dance. There is so much use of dance in these plays that this play can be called modern opera. It is through this play that Sattriya dance has been accepted as the classical dance of the modern period. Therefore, Sankardeva can be called the first guru of the dance of Assam.

Multiple use of the song is seen in Ankiya Nat. In these plays, songs were used to reflect the character's entry, departure, and various dramatic situations. How the character has dressed, how the character feels, how the characters come to stage, all of them are given details in this song. In the 16th century, when dramatic instruction was not used in dramas, Sankardeva used this dramatic instruction through songs. Classical ragas and rhythms were written in these songs. By listening and watching this song, one comes to know about the knowledge of classical singing of

Shankar Dev. In the Sanskrit slokas, in the dialogues and descriptions of Anakiya play, It is also given in the songs. Those who have a keen interest in music can enjoy the full drama through only songs. Through the Bhaktima used in the play, one knows about the dramatic character. This Vatima awakens the devotional spirit in the viewer's mind.

Musical instruments of Bhaona

The Musical Instruments use in Bhaona are Khol and Tal, Flute, Mridnaga, etc. In addition to the mentioned musical instruments other musical instruments like Kali, Daba, Kahal etc. are also played when the character of God like Krishna, Rama Narayan enter on stage. All musical instruments were made in Assam. Shankardeva made the Khol instrument first. It has been mentioned in Charit Poothi. The music instruments used in Bhaona are considered sacred. Khol is called the instrument of deity also.

Conclusion

Sankardeva arranged for the promotion of Vaisnava religion and for this purpose he used drama. But it is very difficult to reveal the literary beauty in objective literature. There was a purpose in the creation of Shankardev's play also, which was necessary to monitor the presence of righteous sentiment. But Sankardeva was one such dramatist whose talent was incomparable. The talent of the previous dramatist was much less than Sankardeva. Therefore, the specialty of Sankardeva's drama was not seen in the drama of later period's dramatist. But the drama of Sankardeva still captivates the audience in a short time and the popularity of these plays has still remained. Social life played an important role in the development of drama. With the change of society, drama has also changed a lot. As Assam entered the modern era, entertainment elements began to be widely used in Bhaona. Bhaona has run since old times and is moving closer to modern drama. It is an important question whether the Anakiya drama will be capable of making the official introduction of Assam in the future or not.

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