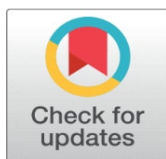


ASPECTS OF ANKIYA NAAT BHAONA: MASK, MAKEUP, MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, WEAPONS, AND COSTUMES

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ABSTRACT

The accompanying elements of the Ankiya Naat Bhaona include masks, make-up, musical instruments, weapons and costumes as well as other performative components. Srimanta Sankardeva, the most venerated Guru ornamented the tradition of Bhaona by weaving indigenous creative forms and aesthetics available in the traditional corporeal processes like puppet theatre, Kushan Gaan, Oja Paali. The art of making masks has rich historical roots in both India and Assam and the Guru brought new life to mask-making practices while passing on a dignified sharing of it with meaning for Bhaona performances. The eclectic application of makeup to differentiate and embellish characters within his works is also takes special note. Moreover, musical instruments are an essential part of the bhaona and they have a pivotal role in aesthetic and narrative construction as well. To bring this point forward, the way in which weapons are utilized throughout the performances is of great significance to character depiction as well as dramatic presence.

Keywords: Ankiya Naat Bhaona, Folk, Art Style, Folk Theatre, The Guru

1. INTRODUCTION

Ankiya Naat Bhaona is complemented by auxiliary elements such as masks, make-up, musical instruments, weapons, costumes etc. Together, these elements constitute a full material framework realised through a range of tools and techniques to support the performance tradition as well as its delivery from hardware infrastructures.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Ankiya Naat Bhaona is soon a show of auxiliary elements that serves as modes of expression. In addition to using masks, makeup, weapons, costumes and other accessories to act out the performance and facilitate its successful execution. The Guru, Srimanta Sankardeva (1449-1568), was pitchforking these classical traditions with his indigenous sensibilities. It is through this synthesis that he was able to forge Bhaona as a coherent performative form and it must be noted here with remarkable success in its presentation.

3. SUBJECT DISCUSSION

In Ankiya Naat Bhaona, we see Srimanta Sankardeva harnessing the folk traditions of ancient Assam. While shaping this dramatic form, he extensively utilized the diverse indigenous theatrical traditions prevailing in the region, long before European theatre-making practices arrived on its shores: rich folk elements like puppet dance, Oja Paali, Kushan Gaan, Bhaari Gaan, Deodhani and Devadasi dance.

Sankardeva shows great discretion and sagacity in incorporating these disparate art forms into the ethos of Bhaona. To keep the form coherent and refined, he approached the process seriously, with deep study, reflection and analysis. In that process, it was not merely existing elements he added; instead, for some local rites (rituals de un lugar), with a new artistic language he transformed and redefined them.

Another thing that should be observed is the fact that a lot of component and characteristics of Ankiya Naat bhaona were derived from the songs & dances based on folk they used to perform along with its respective material culture in social oriented domain(s) of life in Assam, some dating back to medieval times. Sankardeva conceived a Bhaona performance. The story of the play was no more important than these background elements in making the performance work. Understanding this and therefore Sankardeva always involved to adjust folk artistic patterns as well as the essential factors within the structure of Bhaona. By skillfully weaving Oja Paali, puppet dance and Kushan Gaan, he reached a new pinnacle in Ankiya Naat Bhaona that became a vibrant tradition throbbing with drama. Hence, Bhaona became an entertaining and straightforward show among the laymen.

In performance, Ankiya Naat depicted by Srimanta Sankardeva various art forms. In so doing, he also made heavy use of material from various folk theatrical traditions. The fact that theatre forms had existed as entertainment and for educating people even before the Ankiya Naat Bhaona came into being, is evident.

At the time of the creation of Ankiya Naat Bhaona, elements from these traditions were integrated.¹

Drawing on theatrical traditions such as puppet dance and Oja Paali, Srimanta Sankardeva undertook the task of developing the necessary materials while creating Ankiya Naat and shaping it into Bhaona. The staging of Bhaona required a wide range of tools and materials. By closely observing the everyday practices of the people of his time, he gathered various indigenous art forms, reworked them, and incorporated them into Bhaona. In doing so, the Guru demonstrated remarkable skill in the use of auxiliary elements such as masks, makeup, musical instruments, weapons, music, and costumes.

4. MASK ART

An important and distinctive contribution in the integration of folk art styles was the development of mask art by Srimanta Sankardeva. Human society has a very ancient tradition of the art of making masks which is widely used in diverse cultural settings. The tradition of making and wearing masks also has a long history in Assam, with their use having been documented in many folk dances and community rituals since ancient times.

With Ankiya Naat Bhaona, Sankardeva added a new dimension to the time-honored tradition. By offering a new direction, he transformed the creation and use of masks and in a more refined expressive presentation. Masks were widely used in early folk dances and theatrical traditions, usually made of wood. Wood was the main medium, but at times materials like animal hide and other substances were used as well.

However, Sankardeva went beyond all these known ways by making the procedure of mask-making easier and using different kinds of materials. Not only did he expand the range of possibilities within that form, but also made it more accessible and adaptable to Bhaona's performative structure. This ancient folk art element touches the perfection of its extreme with a huge public following, which was filled up in them by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva and became a great cultural asset for the national life of Assam.² The Mahapurusha, Srimanta Sankardeva created different kinds of masks with the materials like wood, bamboo, clay and cloth. While making these masks and fixing the cloth a kind of adhesive made out of lentils was generally used. For figures of characters such as demons and giants, burnt clay and jute were used. These ways of making masks have been used before, a long time ago, they just became part of the bhaona performance later on.

5. MAKEUP

Makeup is a necessary complementary part of the Bhaona tradition founded by Srimanta Sankardeva. A play requires a variety of materials for staging in order to safely portray the multiple characters, and thus varied application of makeup is paramount. An entirely different type of make-up was used to distinguish the gods, demons, giants, sages and animals and birds. In many Bhaona performances, colors were applied to the body and intricate designs were drawn to enhance characterization. To achieve this effectively, the Guru relied greatly on his intellect and creative insight within the context of his time. When applying colors to the body and drawing designs, materials like yellow orpiment (Hital), indigo (Nil), and pipe clay (Khirmati) were used.³

The colors used in Ankiya Naat Bhaona are generally diverse. Regarding this diversity of makeup, it can be stated as follows:

- 1) **Hital (Orpiment):** Yellow color.
- 2) **Nil (Indigo):** Blue color.
- 3) **Sendur (Vermilion):** Red color.
- 4) **Khirmati (Pipe Clay) or Dhal:** White color, used for characters like sages.⁴

Overall, in the Bhaona system established by the Mahapurusha, the matter of makeup was extremely significant. By combining various colors in Assam's Bhaonas, the types of makeup used were of the following kinds:

- 1) **Green:** made by mixing Nil and Hital.

- 2) **Pink:** made by mixing Khirmati and Sendur.
- 3) **Orange:** made by mixing Hital and Sendur.
- 4) **Dark (Shyam):** made by mixing Nil and Khirmati.
- 5) **Yellowish:** made by mixing Khirmati and Hital.⁵

6. MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Among the auxiliary elements in the Bhaona tradition established by Srimanta Sankardeva, musical instruments hold a significant place. While drawing upon elements from folk theatre for the creation of Ankiya Naat, Sankardeva accorded proper importance to the use of music and instrumentation. During Bhaona performances in the Namghar (prayer hall), musical instruments were used to accompany songs, Vithma (dialogue delivery), and other performative aspects.

This practice persists to the present day, with instruments being used based on the dramatic context of the work. Bhaona performances are accompanied by various musical instruments, including Khol (drum), mridanga, bortaal (big cymbals), sorutaal (smaller cymbals), flute, doba, nagara and more.

7. WEAPONS

Though every component in the Bhaona tradition established by Srimanta Sankardeva can be considered exclusive by means of its right. The Mahapurusha arranged all artifacts for the staging of Bhaona as the performers, called Bhaoriyas, followed and still practice today. The Bhaoriyas used materials that were appropriate to the needs of various characters.

Weapons were an important part of all these materials especially for kings, gods, demons and giants messengers and other such figures like Lord Krishna's Lord Vishnu. The weapon of the bhaona are primarily the bow and arrow, mace, staff/umbrella; sword and shield. These were usually made of available local plants, bamboo and cane around it, Dkhuwa (a plant type) and such making it practical as well as indigenous.

In addition, beholders of Namghars and villages involved themselves in manufacture of items like trays (Sarai), decorative sticks (Thagi), masks, bows and arrows as well as maces for the requirement of Bhaona.⁶ The Bhaoriyas themselves often built such constructions.

8. COSTUMES

Ankiya Naat Bhaona organized by Srimanta Sankardeva owes a great deal of power from folk traditions and its is reflected in the way costumes are used. Though it is somewhat reflective of older traditions, with the Oja in Oja Paali wearing a headgear called (Paag), and long sleeves as the garments worn by Sutradhar and puppeteers during puppet theatre shown as Pishta Chola etc.

Gayan (singers), Bayam (musicians), Sutradhar, and the characters representing deities, demons, female roles and kings wear appropriate costumes within Ankiya Naat Bhaona. Not just Sutradhar, Gayan and Bayan but other characters too are given distinctive costumes to maintain clear visual separation and make the performance more effective.

The Sutradhar, Gayan and Bayan wear a costume called as the Paaptori (a particular traditional dress).⁷

9. CONCLUSION

Ankiya Naat, the traditional based theatre developed by Srimanta Sankaradeva with its musical instruments, masks, makeup and classical aesthetic is an important part of Assamese cultural identity. And through a carefully governed dramatic convention that merges music, dance and folk elements, it distills local practices into an even more aestheticized and coherent form. It has been both a preservation and strengthening of the cultural root of Assamese folk arts, inspiring younger researchers and writers to connect with these traditions and carry them on.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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