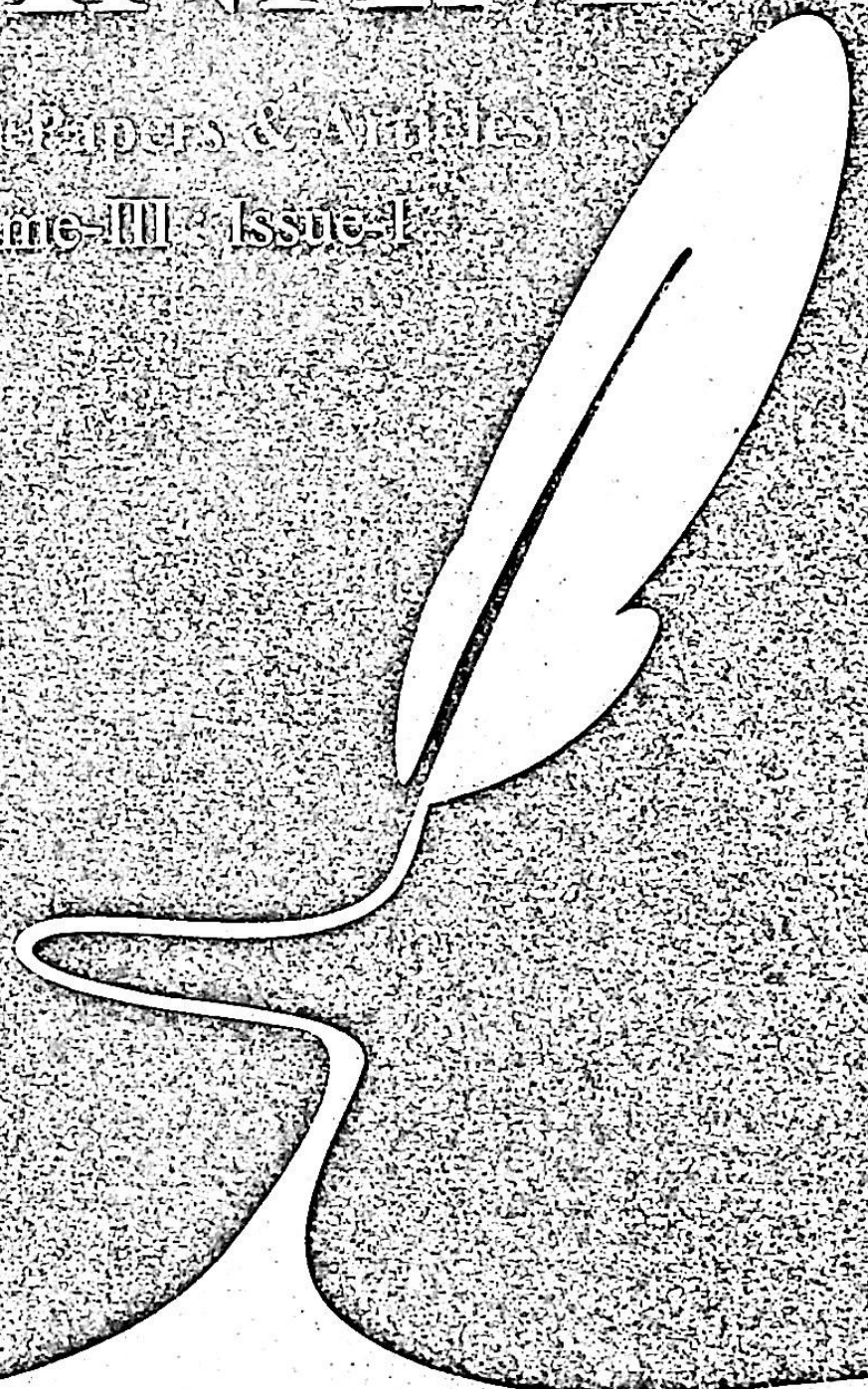


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Folk Theatre Bharigaan

Dr. Pranita Mahanta
Department of Assamese,
Assistant Professor, Bikali College, Dhupdhara

Abstract

North East India is a land of many different tribes community with diverse ethnic origins. Assam is a part of North- East India. Assam is the inhabitant of many tribes and non-tribes who are living together. Among the tribes 'Rabha' is one of the major tribe of Assam. The Rabhas are widely scattered but mostly concentrated in the undivided districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang. Besides Assam, their distribution spread over Meghalaya, West Bengal, Manipur etc. They are rich in their own ethnic culture. They celebrate different festivals like agricultural or seasonal festivals, celendaric festivals, limited participation festivals, rites of passage etc. The Rabhas have different folk art or folk theatre form like – Bharigaan, Hanaghora, Barmani puja, pauradeo puja, Tukuri puja etc. But at present these art forms have many changed and transformed to a different form. Among the different artform 'Bharigaan' is one of the most popular folk art form among the Rabhas. In this study attempts are made to discuss about popular folk theatre "Bharigaan" performed mainly by Pati Rabhas of Goalpara and Kamrup district of Assam.

Keywords: North-East, Tribes, Rabhas, folk theatre, Bharigaan.

Introduction :

North East India is a land of many different tribes community with diverse ethnic origins. Assam is a part of North East India. Assam is the inhabitant of many tribes and non-tribes who are living together. Among the tribes of Assam 'Rabha' is one of the nine scheduled Tribes in the plain districts of Assam. Rabha are rich in their own ethnic culture. They celebrate different festivals like agricultural or seasonal festivals, celendaric festivals, limited participation festivals, rites of passage etc. Among these BaikhoKhokci or Daduri worship, Hasong worship, Fire worship, Runtak worship, Grwmbuda worship, Langa –burha worship, Barmani worship and so forth. Singing and dancing as well as playing on various musical instruments are essential in the contexts of these festivals. The Rabhas in general celebrate various rites of passage connected with birth, marriage and death. The Rabhas are the follower of animism and their supreme God is Rishi i.e. Shiva. The Rabhas have different folk art or folk theatre form like – Bharigaan, Hanaghora, Barmani puja, pauradeo puja, Tukuria puja etc. Besides these artform there are some different folk -dance performance also like –Sather dance, Hamzar dance, Fire dance, Hanaghora dance etc. But at present these art forms have much change and transformed to a different art form. Among the different artform 'Bharigaan' is one of the

popular folk artform among the Rabhas of Kamrup and Goalpara district of Assam. In this study attempts are made to discuss about popular folk drama performed mainly by Pati Rabhas of Goalpara and Kamrup district of Assam.

The Rabhas:

'Rabha' is one of the nine scheduled plain Tribes of Assam. "The Rabhas are widely scattered but mostly concentrated in the undivided districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang. Besides Assam, their distribution spread over Meghalaya, Bangladesh, Nepal, West Bengal, Manipur etc. As per 1971 Census, they constitute 8.63% of the total plains tribal population of Assam and 0.63% of the total State population. Their rate of literacy is 22.24% according to the same census and rank fourth among the scheduled tribes of Assam Plains. Linguistically the Rabha belongs to the Bodo sub-group under the Assam-Burmese group of the Tibeto-Burman stock.² From the point of ethnic affinities they resemble the characteristics of the Mongoloid race, which was priorly known as 'Kirata' i.e. the Indo-Mongoloids.³ In Assam there are sub-clans among the Rabha tribes i.e. Rangdani Rabha, Pati Rabha, Maitari Rabha, Bitalia Rabha, Dahori Rabha, Changa Rabha, Kocha Rabha etc.⁴ The language speaking sub-groups of the Rabhas i.e. Rongdani, Maitori and Kocha speak their own respective dialects of Rabha among themselves in their day to day life. But they can also communicate with other neighboring people like Assamese and Bengali speakers with a peculiar form of Assamese or Bengali pidgin. On the other hand pati, Dahori, Hana, Bitolia and Totola sub-groups, who have lost their own Rabha language, are well versed in Assamese or Bengali Creole rather than standard Assamese or Bengali.⁵ The majority of the Rabha people reside in the village or the remote areas. The main occupation of the Rabhas in general is agriculture. The staple food of the Rabhas is rice. They are omnivorous. They prefer dried powdered fish, meat of pig, goat, hen, duck, pigeon etc. They also like to eat various kinds of vegetables. Mod / Sako i.e. rice-beer is their pure favourite beverage.

Discussion :

Eminent Folklorists R.M. Dorson for study of folk culture as well as folk life has classified it in his book titled—"Folklore and Folklore: An Introduction" into four pronged aspects- Oral literature or Verbal Art; Physical folklore or Material culture; Social folk customs and Folk performing Arts.⁶

Folk performing arts is the forth sector of Folk-lore and Folk life. According to R.M. Dorson—"A forth sector of folklore and folk life may be designated performing folk arts. Here, we think primarily of traditional music, dance and drama. While the renditions of a folk tale or folk songs are not usually referred to as performances, they are more casual in nature than the conscious presentation of these arts individuals or groups with folk instruments, dance, costumes and scenario props. The performing arts intersect with each other and often appear conjunction."⁷

Folk performing arts has a rich place in human society of the world through which the people can enjoy and get happiness. Folk performing arts may be divided into three sub groups- folk drama, folk music and folk dance.

Folk drama is a part of performing art which is a fusion of music, dance and acting. But

the existence area of folk drama is very limited. R.M. Dorson observed—"Folk drama exists on a village or small group level. The performers are members of the community and therefore known to most of the audience. The dramas are given on special occasions only most commonly a seasonal festival."⁸

The tradition of Assamese folk drama is very old. In Assam there were different local tradition of folk drama among different groups of people e.g- Putalanach, Bharigaan, Dhulia Bhaona, Khuliabhaona, Ojapali etc.

"Bharigaan" is a traditional folk theatre mainly in the south Kamrup and Goalpara districts, more or less confined to the pati Rabhas of Assam. This folk theatre has been playing a major role by passing down Rama tradition. In Indian social life the influence of Ramayana is noteworthy. Centering on the main characters of these two epics the 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata' hear say is prevalent in the society. In Bharigaan the influence of the characters like Ram, Laxman and Sita are prevalent.⁹ The theme of the Bharigaan is mainly taken from the great epic Ramayana and Mahabharata and most of the dramas are in the form of handwritten manuscripts.

There are some units in the play of Bharigaan. The units of Bharigaan are-
1. Khol player, 2. Invocation, 3. Proposition and 4. Main plot

1. Khol player :

Prior to main action, khol and tal players muse their hands with dancing poses. Such play is called Khol badan. Then the oja enters on the stage posing to dance keeping sowar in right hand and plays posing to dance with the prime khol player and a tal player. At this time, the oja does not sing any hymn.

2. Invocation:

In the stage of invocation, the oja inaugurates invocation and the palis imitate while the khol and tal players accompany their music. In Bharigaan music takes precedence over acting.

A piece of such invocation is quoted below-

Tumi Hari dinomay e tinibhubanaekoy

Kejanaetomarmohima

Qowtiqowtiprajapaticaturmukha kora tuti

Dannyadannya Ramchandra Surya bongshajanni rai

DasharatatonoyadoyalRogunatha.....¹⁰

1. Proposition :

In this point, the oja attempts to create curiosity in the heart of audience with the announcement of the name of proposed drama.¹¹

Such a quotation is below-

Dosha din yudhyakori Vishmamaharathi

Shar sayyatShayan kora Mahamoti

Ato: por shunadronporborsamar.....¹²

There is a Main Bhaoria who is known as a Muli or Gedal along with a group of accompanying artistes in Bharigaan. The Muli starts the sing items i.e. pada, which the other

artists repeat. He is also seen to carry a fan. He usually wears the Dhoti and the Sadar and is sometimes seen to wear the beads of the Rudakshar beads. This arises practice the use of Mask. The Ketuwa characters are also very relevant. Where it is necessary, Masks are used by Ketuwa. Mime and Masks are both important elements in Bharigaan. The characters of Bharigaan are as inactive as of the puppet show. The oja makes them active through songs sung with music.

4. Main Plot :

The main plot is again in several dividers. These dividers are action, dance, song, dialogue, hands, humour and epilogue. After such proposition, the action of the play begins with nritya-geet (dance and song). The oja makes entrance the very important. The characters of Bharigaan are as inactive as of the puppet show. The oja makes them active through songs sung with music¹³. When the main drama ended, one hymn is sung by the oja and palis. The performance is closed by a dance named Kali nritya. One youth wearing the mask of kali dances so rapid in the scale of tal and scope of khol.

Masks and Weapons: In Bharigaan, masks play an important role. The use of mask is a special feature of Bharigaan performance. Masks is popularly known as 'mukha'. Most of the actors wear only wooden masks. Masks are made in such a way that it is wearable.¹⁴ Various colours are used to make the masks attractive. These masks are kept in the worship hall. The performing team under the guidance of the oja prayer offered to these masks specially in some religious occasions like Shyama puja, Ambubashi, Sankranti etc.¹⁵ It is mentioned that in some performance of Bharigan there is no use of mask. The uses of various weapons are special feature of Bharigaan. The weapons are sword, bow, goda of bamboo and paper made and spear. All these are handmade. It is observed that modern weapon like Khoja Banduk (one kind of gun) is also used by some characters.

Language: The language of the Bharigaan is a mixer language. The Bharigaan is performed by using various languages such as Assamese, Bengali, and Rabha. Hindi words are also sometimes used in the Bharigaan performance. The use of Bengali language is considered as special feature of this performance.

Cosmetic and Dress: To act Bharigaan needs some robes and cosmetic. To make cosmetic, rice powder, lime, vermilion, turmeric and ash are used for colour. All these are collected from locals. The oja wears home weaved bhuni, a long sleeved short shirt, a flowery gamosa. He wears nepurs (half circled ornament) two feet. The palis wear bhuni, shirt and gamosa. The khol and tal players also use same dress. The actors wear various dresses, ornaments and masks according to their roles and reference. The Ketua characters wear multi colour dress and musk to create humour among the audience.

Songs: There are five types of songs in the Bharigaan. The 1st song Bandana is sung in the opening and closing of the Bharigaan. The 2nd song is sung by the oja and the palis at the time characters entrance on stage. The 3rd song is related to war concerned among the various characters. The 4th song is related to tragic pain of characters. The 5th song is called sara and pada. The oja and the palis sung the sara.

Kali nritya: The Bharigaan is closed by a dance named Kali nritya. One youth is performing the Kali nritya.

Conclusion:

The Bharigaan is one of the traditional dramatic performances of the greater Assamese Folk culture. Now is in declining trend and may become an extinct form if proper and timely measures are not taken for its promotion and preservation. In present time it is a challenge for the Bharigaan teams to continue their performance in changing scenario. It is the responsibility of the department of cultural Affairs to take promotion and preservation of Bharigaan and other similar folk theatre of the state.

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