

Boro Jatragaan and Its emergence in Boro Society

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Abstract:

‘JatraGaan’ is a strong medium of entertainment and education. When the Boro society was in deep slumber and exploited, the young educated section of the society, leaders took the initiative to write drama through which they can educate the illiterate section of people through entertainment to reform and unite the Boro Society. And this was possible through organization and magazines through which one can express their personal feelings, desires, hope to spread the awareness. The Jatra Gaan was most popular entertainment since 1919 to 1970s led by some Jatra Ostads. The episode of Boro Jatra Gaan are threatened to be extinguished without leaving the old dramatical works in printed form. The search of old ‘Palla’s and preservation of these through giving printed form have proved arduous and well-nigh impossible.

Keywords: Jatra Gaan, Exploited, Awareness, Ostads, Extinguished, Palla, Dramatical, Preservation

INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, Bodos used to perform variety kind of theatrical dances during the Kherai Worship of Bathou religion which fall into the category of Religious Folk Drama. These are folk dramatic performances where the elements of mythological tales pre-dominate. Non-Religious folk dramas are sub-divided into six categories, i.e. (1) ‘Ekthengiya’ (single actor performance) (2) ‘Jatra Gaan’ (Jatra performance) (3) ‘Solo Khintanai’ (Story telling) (4) ‘ThaokriPalla’ (5) ‘KhemtaPalla’ (6) ‘Phutula Gaan’ (puppet theatre). Jatra Gaan is one of the forms of folk theatres performed by the Bodos.

Priyaranjan Sen says, “The Yatra used no stage, scenery of curtain and was originally a musical performance accompanied with miming and dancing”. Again, she says, “the performance took place on a square shaped arena surrounded by the audience”. The popular meaning of the word Yatra (Jatra) in Boro is however, the performance of a play in open air stage also known as ‘Langdang Gaan’. The Bodo common folk do not spell the parts ‘Jatra’ and ‘Gaan’ separately but use to spell together instantly.

‘JatraGaan’ is a strong medium of entertainment and education. When the Boro society was in deep slumber and exploited, the young educated section of the society, leaders took the initiative to write drama through which they can educate the illiterate section of people through entertainment to reform and unite the Boro Society. And this was possible through organization and magazines through which one can express their personal feelings, desires, hope to spread the awareness. Satish Chandra Basumatary says, “At present, our first and foremost responsibility is to increase the acquaintance and understanding among us. Mainly we make it successful in two ways -- (1) formation of organizations and (2) spreading by newspaper. To express the personal feelings regarding language, society or racial feelings, hope and desire we need especially such small organizationsss”. So, through the formation of Bodo Chattra Sanmilani

(BCS) in 1919 and by publishing the first Boro magazine 'Bibar', the Boro youths could become conscious about their role of eradicating such problems. It was during this period that many social plays were adapted. Most of the Bodo plays are 'Jatra' or meant for enactment on open air stage and contain many Act Division and most of the themes were also about religion. In the same period, when Brahma Movement was started by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, the process of conversion to Neo-Vaishnavism, Christianity and others social activities like excessive use of rice beer and other superstitious belief were going on. Socio-religious plays were mostly adapted with a moral ending. It is noteworthy to notice here that the JatraGaan was borrowed from the Bengali 'Jatra' and also from Assamese 'Yatra'. Most of the playwrights were seen translating and adapting Bengali Jatra pala into Bodo language. The Jatra was staged in the open-air stage called "sainasali". This JatraGaan became very popular in the Bodo society within a short period of time. To make it more attractive, the dramatists and Ostads included elements like music, dance and humour. The technique of using more songs and characters are only found in Jatra.

Bodo dramatists are the ones who adapt or translate the plays from other language and also write their own original play. For the successful performance of JatraGaan, it required a "Gaan Master" or "ostad" to lead the "Jatra dol" (Jatra party) from the very beginning. Ostad is very well versed in cultural aspect of the Bodos and also an all-rounder. All-rounder in the sense that he is expert in dancing, playing musical instruments like harmonium, tabla, cymbal, flute and also expert in all kinds of dialogue of all characters to teach the artist. According to Mr. Sabin Basumatary of Bishmuri, "Santosh Kumar Basumatary also known as "Sola Ostad" used to teach all kind of songs, dance and instrument which were required for JatraGaan". Ostad arranged and managed the Jatra dol from the very beginning as per their requirements. The artists of JatraGaan is called "Gaan aola". "Gaan" in simple terms carries the meaning of music, and "aola" is called "aoli" in feminine is a suffix as of Hindi "wala". Organizer, Ostads, helper and any member including orchestral party members of Jatra are regarded as "Gaan aola". There are usually 40-45 members in a Jatra dol.

The themes of Bodo Jatra are mythological, social, historical, imaginary or romantic. Audiences also sometime take participatory role. The Jatra with the traditional hunting, appearance of deities like khoinasanti, animal like tiger, bear, birds, deer, asur (demon) in the stage prove to be attractive to the common audience. The costumes of king, queen, princess, sword fighting, and war were also attractive. In JatraGaan the character of women is usually performed by male actors themselves. Ostad Maniram Islary was the one who introduced 'sokhri' s or female dancers in Boro Jatragaan.

In English, drama and play are found to be the same but Jatra is an open theatre act and no synonyms are there in play of drama and Jatra. The Jatra act is done in such an open platform that the audiences cover from three sides of the platform. Dhol, harmonium, flute, tabla and other instruments are placed on the rear of stage area. The actors wear brilliantly colourful dresses and jewellery. Kings wear crown on their heads and fight with the bright and long swords. Jatra starts at night and continues up to next morning. The pandel is made temporary structure made of banana tree posts and leaves are used for the roof. During the play light is provided with the help of banjar, torches, lamps and petromax lights were mostly used in those days.

Monoranjan Lahary writes, "The earlier plays of Bodo Jatra can be seen having some characteristics. These were firstly, it was written just for entertainment of audiences. Secondly, the plays of that period were written for social reformation. Thirdly, the plays were acted in open air stage." The dramatist mainly aimed at giving entertainment and education through their plays. As the majority of the Bodo people at

that time were illiterate, backward and superstitious, the dramatists endeavoured to make their drama a strong weapon of social reform and enlightenment.

Objectives and Methodology

The objectives of this article are to look at the Boro JatraGaan as an important element of Bodo folk culture. Its social role is to see the cause of its development and reasons for radical disappearance from Bodo society.

The work will attempt to study the Boro JatraGaan through an analytical approach, interviewing method and materials derived from secondary sources. As secondary sources, articles and related topic reviews and treatise of Bodo Dramas which have appeared in different mouthpiece, magazines and book under the platform of different organizations have studied for this work.

Emergence and Development of Boro JatraGaan: Introducing ‘Khemta Palla’ and ‘Thaokri Palla’

The idea of Boro JatraGaan originated from ‘Thaokri palla’ and ‘Khemta palla’. Manoranjan Lahary says, “Before the Jatra party was born there were two dramatic shows named ‘Thaokri palla’ and ‘Khemta’. In these, the acting, dances, characters and songs were in rude form and these were just performed for entertainment of audience. The plays are crude in its form and technique’. Manoranjan Lahary again says, “Prasanna Boro Khakhly of Rangjuli, South Goalpara and born in 1879 wrote “khemta gaan” and ‘khemta’ was the first play from this point of view. Similarly, Thaokri palla was there which was enacted under Binya Khata mouza of Kokrajhar district. It was also crude in form and technique’. Regarding these two plays no more is known in details except this.

Being the earliest form of Folk Drama among the Bodos which is related with religion, storytelling, depicting stories of rural life associated with dance and music cannot be considered as crude.

Thaokri palla was a folk dramatic performance where the element of storytelling pre-dominated. The performers of this folk dramatic form used to move and turn around like a spinning wheel while singing, dancing and narrating some entertaining tales from his repertory. The word ‘thaokri’ means a spinning wheel. Palla is a familiar word in Bengal and Assam. Any dramatic performance in the open-air stage or any dramatic performance performed in front of audience is called a palla. Hence ‘thaokri palla’ literally means round of the spinning wheel. This semi-dramatic performance is a combination of storytelling, singing, dancing and enactment of various moods and temperament of human, divine and animal characters.

Khemta Gaan is also another form of semi-dramatic performance that was prevalent among the Bodos of South Goalpara. This folk dramatic called khemta Gaan as the music and rhythmic pattern of this form is set in one particular thaala and khemta. This folk dramatic form does not appear to be a very ancient like thaokri palla. However, Bodo literary historians opine that this folk dramatic form is one of the early forms of Bodo drama. Khemta Gaan performing troop consist of a band of choral singer and dancers. The choral singer played the musical instrument and performed the songs while the dancers danced and enacted the dramatic scenes and popular stories of rural life.

These two early dramatic shows could not satisfy the desire of the people to the full. They needed a full length and mass entertainment. For the cause of this requirement the playwrights and authors took up their pen to write drama and used it as a weapon for social reform and enlightenment.

Boro JatraGaan (Early Period)

The emergence of Boro JatraGaan is an important element in the Bodo society. All people irrespective of age and sex enjoyed the Jatra. When the modern cinema was not that popular in rural places, JatraGaan dominated the world of mass entertainment among the Bodo people.

In 1919, the 'Bodo Kachari Chatra Sanmilani' was formed at Dhubri, the then headquarter of the undivided Goalpara district and efforts were made to create literature with a view to help the Bodo people who were without education and social consciousness. Sobharam Brahma was its President and Satish Chandra Basumatary was its Secretary. Premananda Mochahary says, "This Boro Chatra Sanmilani exalted a vigorous literary movement and drama." In the same conference, decision was taken to publish the first Bodo magazine 'Bibar'. So, the year from 1919-1937 is known as 'Bibar Mooga' or 'Bibar Age' as many ravishing young authors, playwrights, leaders emerged. And through this magazine they shared their views and ideas.

One of the informants says, "Bibar Mooga and Olongbar Mooga were ones of the most crucial period where many young youths came out to write plays and use it as a weapon for social reform".

So, with the aim to unify and develop the Bodo society Satish Chandra Basumatary wrote One Act Play 'Nala Buha', the first Bodo drama which was staged in the first conference of the Boro Chatra Sanmelani in the year 1919 which brought JatraGaan among the Bodos. It is the milestone of the Boro JatraGaan as it is known to be first staged in the annals of Boro Jatra. Monoranjan Lahary says, "it was Satish Chandra Basumatary who first wrote Bodo dramas for performance by Jatra dol, on the open-air stage called 'sainasali' in Bodo". From this we can know that he was the pioneer of the Bodo drama. With the encouragement of him, many playwrights like Dwardendra Nath Basumatary, Bhuben Swargiary and others came forward to compose drama for performance in open air stage.

The playwrights were also encouraged by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma who preached Brahma Dharma in the Bodo society to bring social reformation. And so, the plays that were enacted for Jatra performances were meant for social reformation and enlightenment. As most of the audience were illiterate rural people who did not have access to other forms of better entertainment, the playwrights and gaan master(ostad) had a definite objective in view of educating and reforming the society by staging their plays in the form of Jatra.

It is noteworthy that JatraGaan was borrowed from the Bengali Jatra with a view to entertain and educate people. In this context, Monoranjan Lahary says, "In the last decade of the 19th century and first decade of the 20th century when Jatra and theatre was prevalent in Bengal its influence could be felt among the people of Goalpara district" (now Kokrajhar). He also states that "Bengali language was a medium of instruction in the schools of this period. So, the Bodo youths had access to Bengali literature". So, the playwrights of Goalpara (undivided) during that period were closely related to North Bengal for which they got the chance to see Bengali Jatra. Its popularity which caused them to translate and adapt Bengali plays into Bodo and staged them in the open-air stage in the rural areas of Bodo dominated area of Goalpara (undivided). Monoranjan Lahary writes in this context "the influence of Bengali drama caused Dwardendra Nath Basumatary to translate from Bengali drama into Bodo and went to Calcutta to learn the technique of drama writing and stage direction for six months". Satish Chandra Basumatary, the pioneer of Bodo drama also translated some of his works from Bengali drama and moulded them with his own form, technique and characters. The plays of this period were written in Assamese and Bengali scripts. Nevertheless, while translating the plays, the playwrights always kept in mind to suit local taste. Most of the earlier Bodo drama were Jatra with five Act division and written for performances in open air stage.

The playwrights of this period are Satish Chandra Basumatary, Bhaben Fwrwngiri, Maniram Islary, Dwarendra Nath Basumatary, Santosh Kumar Basumatary (Sola Ostad) and others. They were the early playwrights who wrote, translated and adapted drama in Bodo for Jatra dol. They created a wave of Jatra but one who led the Jatra party in the village for staging the drama was Dwarendra Nath Basumatary.

In this way, the demand of JatraGaan became abundant. According to Mr. Sabin Basumatary, one of the interviewee says” whether it was marriage ceremony, saraswati puja or any occasion, the Jatra dol was must and was booked in advance by the village committee or puja committee to perform Jatra on the specific date”. He also says, “the gaan master (ostad) taught plays as well as staged them in different places”.

After its emergence, the Jatra influenced immensely on the lives of common Bodo people and the people got amusement as per of their requirement. This dramatic performance had captured the imagination of the simple hearted Bodos of the time, for them it meant lot of leisure from day long hard work, a moment of exchange of mind.

Decadence of Boro Jatra Gaan:

With passage of time the taste of people changes. With the changing of time the likes and dislikes of people also change. The popularity of Jatragaan too, began to wither with time. Jatragaan ruled among the common people by giving mode of entertainment during earlier times only.

Reasons behind its decadence:

Lack of Jatra Ostad --- The Jatragaan enacted in different areas led Gaan Ostads to bring about sensation and dramatic movement. After the death of popular Jatra Ostad Dwarendra Nath Basumatary, the strong wave of drama and its popularity among the public declined. In this context, Monoranjan Lahary says, “the playwrights who wrote drama after Dwarendra Nath Basumatary could not draw the attraction of the public”. In the area of Kamrup and Mushalpur the Boro Jatra Gaan was led by the learners of Dwarendra Nath Bsaumatary. But they too could not keep it alive. The lack of upcoming playwrights also was one of the reasons.

Due to the financial crisis also the Jatra artist could not carry on with this profession. Hardly they were paid around Rs.70-80. One of the informants says, “most of the artists were either ruwati (maid servant), dahwna (male servant), cultivator and the manager in most of time mishandled the money they were paid after performance.” So, with this amount of money they could not maintain their day to day life and sometimes they were not paid even. So, to organise “Jatra Dol” the ostads also lost their interest.

The modern cinema was also another reason for its decadence. It replaced the Jatragaan. People began to have more interest in modern Indian cinema. It became most popular public entertainment media. With the coming of electronic media like T.V and other objects the interest of people changed. Cinema Hall became a mode of entertainment and the lengthy nights of Jatragaan show was ignored.

The other element is growing scenario of social evil activities like playing dice and having alcohol in the area of the program place. This social gathering of people slowly began to take the route of these activities. All Bodo Student Union (ABSU) after noticing these activities began to trash such activities which indirectly affected the other common people who have come to see the Jatragaan. Under the influence of Assamese Mobile Theatre like Kohinoor Theatre founded by Sri Ratan Lahkar in 1976, Abahan Theatre and others, the Boros also began mobile theatres by travelling from place to place in Boro dominated area. This too replaced the Boro Jatra Gaan

Also, Bodoland Movement of 1989 also affected adversely. According to one of the informants, “almost 90 percent of the people was involved in mass movement for separate state”. In such situation there was no suitable environment for such entertainment.

CONCLUSION

Jatragaan had a great impact on Boro Society. As already mentioned, it is a mode of mass entertainment. Though it was performed in the Open-Air Stage or Langdang Gaan with no decorative stage, the people enjoyed a lot. The people enjoyed mostly kalponik or imaginary drama and mythology. The audience were mostly attracted to the costumes because of its glamour, sword fighting etc. It was so popular that no matter what rich or poor, the parents of groom or bridegroom have to bring jatra gaan for guests on the last day of marriage party. Also, on the occasion of Laxmi puja, Saraswati puja the committee member used to pay in advance and book it for the said day. The plot of Jatragaan were mythological, historical, social and imaginary. Satish Chandra Basumatary and Dwardendra Nath Basumatary were the pioneers of Jatragaan.

Keeping in view and observing the interest of the audience the Jatra Ostads adapted the play. So, its literary context was poor. Even though it emerged as a weapon for social transformation, patriotism and bringing unity among the people, with this the Jatra Ostads educated illiterate people of society.

However, with the passage of time the importance of Jatragaan also began to fade away due to various reasons. The lack of leadership of Jatra Ostad to adapt and organize jatra dol, financial crisis, lack of opportunity for artists, modern cinema etc. were few reasons. The artist is paid less which is not sufficient. Jatragaan was not only for entertainment but it was also a common meeting ground of people which is absent in present day. In some of the rural areas we can hardly find ‘Ek Thengiya’ where a single participant does every character of the play. And in top of that most of our manuscripts has been lost due to lack of preservation and only few have been published.

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