

# THE SATTRIYA OJAPALI TRADITION OF ASSAM:A BRIEF OVERVIEW

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## Abstract

Ojapali is an old dance-drama tradition of Assam. It is an important audio-visual artform of Assam. Ojapali is prevalent in different parts of Assam and performed in different names and in different forms. In ancient times, Ojapali tradition has been preserved in among the tribes, non-tribes, Muslims and different people of Assam. Where Ojapali tradition can be divided only by its variety of application methods and techniques. Ojapali is a performing arts of dance-drama with religious sentiments and social responsibility. Where the importance of promoting non-formal education in the society and the key to building a society with a cultural mind set has been working Ojapali. It is dance of narration or choral singing. Having both folk as well as classical elements in it. It is a composite artform having drama, dialogues, songs, music, dance variety of folk elements and even mime in it. In 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century Sankardeva was played in Ojapali in society. After 15<sup>th</sup> century, Vaishnava devotee preserved and performed in Sattria institution for ritual purpose. It is a narration or recitation of the story of epic – Mahabharata, Ramayana, Purana, Kirtana and Bhagawata in Sattriya tradition. There are various types of hand gestures, footsteps and body movement in Sattriya Ojapali. Here will discuss the evolutionary of Ojapali tradition and also discuss about the performing types of Sattriya Ojapali in Assam.

**Keywords:** Artform, Dancedrama, Muslime, Tradition, Assam, Sattria, Artform, Mahabharat, Ramayana, Purana, Kirtana, Bhagawata, Sattriya tradition.

## INTRODUCTION

Pragjyotisha is an ancient name of Assam. At that time, it was quite developed in dance and music. The **Odra-Magadhi** type drama is characterised by the preponderance of speech and humour. The Ojapali is also an important audio-visual art form of ancient Assam. In Ojapali narration or in the folk exhibitions of the drummers specifying the humorous tales or jokes are the futures that keep the public entranced. The Ojapali tradition is a folk semi-dramatic in form. This humour is also an attractive feature of the medieval Anki Naat or Vaishnavite play. The Ojapali troupe consists of the oja or master, Dainapali or chief assistant and other three or four assistants.

Ojapali is a performing arts of dance-drama with religious sentiments and social responsibility. Where the importance of promoting non-formal education in the society and the key to building a society with a cultural mind set has been working. There are many similarities between Suknanni Ohapali and Deodhani dance which is popular in Assam. 'Ojapali' is a non-neo-Vaishnava origin dance tradition of Assam. It is dance of narration or choral singing- having both folk as well as classical elements like different Raag, Hasta Mudra (hand gestures), Pada-Karma (Foot steps), Abhinaya, Aharya (Dress and Décor), in it.

### Aims and Objectives:

The paper highlights the Ojapali Tradition of Assam and aims to focus on the tradition of Sattriya Ojapali. Which has been going since 15<sup>th</sup> Century in Sattria institution. The main purpose of the paper is to study tradition of Sattriya Ojapali in Assam.

### Methodology:

The present study is based on primary and secondary data gathered from sources like book, research papers and the internet. The paper is descriptive in nature which is based on historical method of research.

## INTRODUCTION ON OJAPALI TRADITION

Ojapali is an ancient folk tradition of Assam. Bharata's Natyasastra (2nd B.C.) Pragjyotishpur Kamrupa had a special style of drama in ancient times. In the fifteen chapters of Natyasastra -

Sarturbidha Pravritishya Prukta Natya Prayougataha  
Awanti Dakhinatya Cha Panchali Choudramagadhihi"<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Lekharu, Upendra Chandra (ed.) Bharatar Natyasastra (part-2)

- It deals with the four types of Pravitti prevalent in different parts of Bharatabhumi( India). The division of Pravitti is " Avanti, Daksinaty, Panchali and Odra-Magadhi is a local dramatic style of the eastern countries Anga, Vanga, Kalinga, Odra, Magadha, Nepala, Pragyiotisa, Videha, and Tamralipta. Pravitties are distinguished from each other on account of differences in language and costumes, manners and professions in different regions of India. Pravitti divided into four types of Vrittis are Bharati, Satwati, Kaishiki and Aravatti. The Nattya Pravitti or dramatic style has been prevalent in ancient Assam since before the 1st Century B.C. songs, dances, and instruments are part of his genre included. From this, it can be inferred that the dramatic or theatrical tradition of Margi (Classical) music was in Assam vogue in Assam as well as in Bharatabhumi( India). Have a proverb in circulated in Ojapali tradition. The ancient temples in Pragyoutis Kamarupa, dance- songs musical theatrical traditions were prevalent and performances of temples like Haigriv Madhav Mandir(Hazo), Kedar Sukleswar, Nagheriting Mandir, Kamakhya Mandir Umananda Mandir. This tradition is extinct in our society. Ojapali is established with the background of all Indian traditions like the Katahkata tradition of Tamilnadu due to having several similarities like reciting the ballads of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas etc. at the religious temples or festivals in groups in front of audiences, using some instruments in the recitation, initiating the recitation with some invocatory songs in praise of gods and the guru, having some functions of Kathaka and dharak of Kthakata with those of Ojapali respectively etc.<sup>63</sup> The main aspects of the Ojapali tradition are expressed with dance and songs, prose and poetry and the story of Mahabharata and Ramayana. Khutitaal is the main instrument of Ojapali. The lead artist is known as the Oja who accompanied by the assistant artist known as Pali. Oja is an expert or master of Dance, Prose and music and Pali means is the helper in continuing the process of performance to keep rhythm. The Oja should have melodious memory and a melodious voice. The Oja stands in the middle point of the circle when they perform the Ojapali. The Dainapali is on the right side of the palis. There are five to nine pali in a group f Oja[ali.'Oja' is depth knowledge of dancing, singing, raga,raginis, vocal, rhythm, acting and lyrical stanzas etc. It is a Guru-Sishya tradition of music. The 'Pale's presented the direction of Oja.

In the 9th to 10 th Vishnu, Shiva and Sakti rituals of Hindus gods and goddesses were found in Assamese culture. Before 13 th century, the religious music "Jagar Geet" was performed for worshipping Lord Shiva and Vishnu. "Byash Sangeet" was an epic-based music tradition in ancient Assam. The word "Ojapali" is the connection to the word "Gandharva" which was found in Ramayana written by Mdhavdev Kandali in the 14th century. Who translated the Ramayana from Sanskrit to Assamese Although the Ojapali is not found in the period. The meaning of the Gandharva indicates the musician who was singing the verse of Ramayana.

## 2.1 Classification of Ojapali :

There are two types of Ojapali:

- a) Epic-based Ojapali
- b) Non-epic-based Ojapali

a) Epic-based Ojapali: The content of these Ojapali is based on Mahabharata, Purana, Ramayana etc. There are many types of epic-based Ojapali

1. Byah Ojapali
2. Durgabari Ojapali
3. Duladi Ojapali
4. Ramayan Ojapali
5. Api Ojapali
6. Nagayan Ojapali
7. Raiman and Vaira Ojapali

b) Non-epic Ojapali: In this Ojapali tradition are not connected to Epic. It is based on Puja and Manasha Geet. There are many types of non-epic-based Ojapali.

1. Maregaan
2. Bishaharigaan
3. Sukananni Ojapali
4. Tukuriya Ojapali
5. Geetaloget

## RITUAL INSTITUTE OF ASSAM: SATRA

The 'satra' is a new-Vaishnavite religious institution. It has been more than 500 years old. The name Satra originated to the Bhagata Purana in 'Sankrit'.

Etymologically, the word Satra derives from two word 'sat'+ 'tra'. 'sat' means truth or honest 'tra' means relief. where honest people get relief that place is known as Satra.

<sup>63</sup> Sharma, Nabin Chandra, Axomar PariveshyaKala Ojapali, Pp-20

Satra institution multiplied in number and became a rich spiritual symbol of Assamese culture and heritage. The 15th century is one of the remarkable periods of Assam. In that time Srimanta Sankardeva developed the Vaishnavite movement in Assam with unique characteristics to worship God the Lord Krishna. He established himself during which the time of the New-Vaishnavite movement in India. He was the prominent iconic leader of social reformers in Assam. Satra is the artistic creativity of the Bhakti movement that was carried forward. The first satra was set up by Sankardeva at Bardowa (Nagaon District) Madhavdeva was the student of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva. After Madhavdeva's death the unity and principles of the devotee (Bhakata) became more to led up different sub-sects that's called Samhati. The Samhatis is the faith of Vaishnavite faith. But all samhatis are define their own identity. The Samhatis are \_Brahma-Samhati, Nika-Samhati, Kaal- Samhati, Purusha Samhati. Hounded above satras established in Assam.

There are two classes of administrative system of Satra\_

1) Satradhikar or Deka Adhikar

2) Bhakata

1) Satradhikar or Deka Satradhikar: Satradhikar or Deka Satradhikar is the head of the Satra.

2) Bhakat: The bhakatas are the devotee of the Satra. They represents the whole culture of the satra tradition.

The following are the components are the ---

1. Batchora : Main gate of the Sattra

2. Hati: Hati is like a row of houses, where the Bhakatas are live together. There are four types of Hati. These are-

a) Pub Hati ( housing row in an area on the east side )

b) Pachim Hati( housing row in area on west side)

c) Uttar Hati( housing row in area on North-side)

d) Dakshin Hati (housing row in the area on the south-side)

Under this Hati there are so many have Baha. Baha means a particular house which is attached is another house.

3. Kirtan-Ghar: Kirtan-Ghar is a prayer hall in Sattra. In the Kirtan-Ghar generally four-sided enclosed areas: Batchora, Chughar, Manikot, Majiya

4. Pukhuri: It is a small lake, an area of water

5. Agricultural Fields: Infront of the field of Hati.

## SATTRIYA OJAPALI IN DIFFERENT SATRAS

Ojapali is a folk traditional dance-drama which is performed by orally and dancing. After Sankardeva's death ojapali was reserved in satra boundaries for ritual purposes.

In Sattras began to be practised with spiritual thoughts among the bhakata or devotee. It becomes a medium of worshiping as well as religion. It is an art of acting with Ragas and rhythm. Various physical movements called Bhangima are used to be performed in the Kirtanaghar of Satra. In this Ojapali describes the quality of Krishna and Rama in Kirtanaghar.

From the Pre-Sankardeva era, this is a systematic form of Vyash ojapali. Sankardeva, Madhavdeva and his devotee sishya (students) were not mentioned it as a Sattriya Ojapali. But it is a reformed of Vyah-gow ojapali through sattriya style and music between many Satra. It only proves the use of Khutitaal and the similarities of raga and costumes.

There are so many Satras in Assam. But Ojapali the traditional art form has been performed only in the Natun Kamalabari Satra, Uttar Kamalabari Satra (Majuli District), Bhogpur Satra (Titabar), Kamalabari Satra (Jorhat District), Auniati Satra (Majuli District), Dakshinpat Satra (Majuli District), Belaguri Satra, Badala Satra (Lakhimpur District), Barpeta Satra (Barpeta District). Kamalabari Satras are located in different places in Assam but the ritual activities and their identity of establishment and devotee's life path are the same. That why so many similarities are their performing style. In the case of the Bhogpur satra, Belaguri and Badula satra are the same. Auniati Satra, Dakshinpat Satra and Barpeta Satra are unique styles in their tradition. Kamalabari Satras, Bhogpur, Belaguri Satra and Badula ata Satra is following the Nika Samhati, Auniati Satra and Dakshinpat Satra is Brahma samhati and Barpeta satra in Nika Samhati.

There are festivals are celebrating the Satra. These are the a) Bahag Bihu b) Magh Bihu c) Death Anniversary of Srimanta Sankardeva, Madhavadeva, Badala Ata and founder Gurus of the satra and d) Doult-Utshav

### 4.1 Stages of the Ojapali in Different Satras:

• There are fourteen stages in Sattriya Ojapali in Natun Kamalabari Satra, Uttar Kamalabari Satra and Kamalabari Satra, Bhogpur Satra, Badala Satra and Belaguri Satra--

1. Raag
2. Slok
3. Geet
4. Diha

5. Paad
6. Thiya Patan
7. Kathan
8. Dhura
9. Bana
10. Pada-Jurani
11. Rag-malita
12. Rag-Charan
13. Badya-Kheyali
14. Upadesh

The different stages of Sattriya ojapali are performed together through singing and dancing.

• Different Stages of Sattriya Ojapali in Auniati satra and Dakshinpat satra. In these satra has been some similarities in Ojapali's performance. The stages are\_\_

1. Vandana Geet
2. Alap
3. Slok
4. Geet
5. Dasavatara Paad
6. Putanaka Geet
7. Raga Charon
8. Vadya-Kheyali
9. Dhura
10. Paad
11. Bana
12. Upadesha



Figure 1:Sattriya Ojapali in Bhogpur Satra



Figure 2:Badala Satra

- The different stages of Sattriya Ojapali in Barpeta Satra are\_\_
- 1. Raag or Alap
- 2. Nandi Slok
- 3. Bargeet
- 4. Pala
- 5. Pradarshana
- 6. Raga
- 7. Diha
- 8. Juna
- 9. Ragabana
- 10. Katha
- 11. Samorani or Upasanhar

In Sattriya ojapali tradition oja performed in a special slok after sining the specific Raag on the basis of the Bhagawata and Kirtana (written by Srimanta Sakardva) . The verse is in Sanskrit\_

“SRI KRISHNAYA VASHUDEVAIYA  
DAIWAKI NANDANAYASHWA |  
NANDA GUPA KUMARAIYA  
GOVINDAIYE NAMUNAMAHA ||  
NMAHA PANKAJA NABHAYA  
NAMAHA PANKAJA MALINE |  
NAMAHA PANKAJA NETRAYA  
NAMASHTE PANKAJANGHRAYE ||  
VASHUDEVANG SHUTANG KRISHNANG  
KANSHA SANURA MARDANAMAM |  
DAIWAKI HRIDAYA NANDAM  
KRISHNAM VANDE JAGAT GURUM ||”

In sattriya ojapali the Oja performed this slok with Abhinaya and similarly he sinning the Slook with the specific Raga patern.

**4.2 Costume:** Aharya is the most important part of Abhinaya. Aharya meaning in English literature is dress and decore. In sattriya ojapali Oja wear with " Muga dhuti" and "Chapkan", chalang and Paguri(head cap) The pali are wearing whitw cotton dhuti,chapkan,chalang and Paguri(head cap)

**4.3 Instruments of Sattriya Ojapali:**

An instrument is a main object to introduce music (geet) and dance(nritta).In sattriya ojalali the main instrument is Khutitaal. Khutitaal is a type of cymbal. It is made by handicraft in two same types of bell metal. One taal hits another taal to create sounds and vibrations. The sound is "Khup" and "Tiling"

**4.4 Taal (Rhythm): There are so many Taal(rhythm) used in Sattriya ojalali. There are-** Jhaptaal, Jigri Taal,,Ektaal,Junjuni Taal,Thukuni Taal,Jhap Taal,Tretaal,Tibra Ektaal, Manda Ektaal,Mul Taal.

## CONCLUSION

In the discussion of Sattriya Ojalali, It has been seen that the Sattras are also a rich repository of our culture and traditions Their dance, drama, music, devotional songs, manuscripts, oral music, a variety of Musical Instruments, fine arts, literature, agriculture, and Craft have kept alive our rich cultural heritage in Assam. During the last 550 years, no great personality was equivalent to Sankardeva. Sattras institutions play a major role in the spiritual and cultural life of Assam. Ojalali is a folk traditional dance-drama which is performed by orally and through dance. Thus in conclusion it can be stated that Ojalali tradition has only the particular sattras in different festivals in celebrating time for praying Lord Vishnu of Assam. Other states are not yet the Ojalali tradition.

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