

## BHARIGAN : A FOLK THEATER OF ASSAM

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### Abstract

Folk theatre or drama is a part of performing art. It is a fusion of a music, dance and acting. Like other genres of art the drama can also be divided into Folk, Popular and Sophisticated. The existence area of folk drama is very limited. 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.

The tradition of Assamese folk drama is very old and a fascinating one. The history of Assamese drama began in the early part of the sixteenth century. Prior to that different local tradition of folk theatre were there among different of people. Such as Dhulia Bhaona, Putala Nach, Kusan Gan, Khulia Bhaona, Ojapali and Bharigan.

Bharigaan is a traditional folk theatre current in South Kamrup and Goalpara districts, more or less confined to be the Pati-Rabhas. The subject matter of this folk theatre is mainly inspired by the Ramayana story from the Mahabharata and Puranas moreover, Bharigan has got very much impact on the common people as a source of entertainment in the form folk theatre. The present paper is a humble attempt to highlight the influence on the Bharigan considering different aspects of social and other behaviour of the people.

Keywords: Bharigan, Oja, Pali, Culture, Folk, Drama etc.

## 1.0 Introduction:

Assam, the Land of rich cultural heritage has a long tradition of folk drama. The inhabitants of this land were not deprived of entertainment in the field of visual arts. People of this land performed many forms of performing arts comprising of various elements of drama. These folk arts can be called as rudiments of dramatic entertainments which can be traced long back and continues till today with popularity in Assam. These folk performing arts till date have occupied a special position in the rural society of the state. Some of these folk performing arts are Oja-pali, Putala nach , Dhulia bhaona, Khulia bhaona, Nagara nam, Kushan gan, Ankiya nat and Bharigan. In this study attempts are made to discuss about a type of folk drama popular in various areas of the Goalpara and Makeup district of the state and performed mainly by Pati Rabhas of the regions which is popularly known as Bharigan. This folk art which is a mixture of music, song and drama are performed in various areas of Goalpara and Makeup district of the state and nearby areas of Meghalaya such as Kothakuthi Hirapara, Mashlam, Khameri, Bengduba, Bondapara, Rongjuli, Dudhnoi, Bongaon, Manikganj, Khardang, Habanda, Deoripara, Makri, Rongchai, Badahapur, Baijuri, Nibari, Kukurkata, Bolbola, Ketekibari, Agiya, Balijana, Hatigao, Bordak, Khuksipara, Nabang, Suwarmari, Dangorbhita and Sakadha. The Bharigan which has a religious, cultural and recreational purpose, has been mainly practiced and performed by the Pati - Rahbas. This folk art which is a mixture of music, song and drama are performed in various areas of Goalpara and Makeup district of the state and nearby areas of Meghalaya such as Kothakuthi Hirapara, Mashlam, Khameri, Bengduba, Bondapara, Rongjuli, Dudhnoi, Bongaon, Manikganj, Khardang, Habanda, Deoripara, Makri, Rongchai, Badahapur, Baijuri, Nibari, Kukurkata, Bolbola, Ketekibari, Agiya, Balijana, Hatigao, Bordak, Khuksipara, Nabang, Suwarmari, Dangorbhita and Sakadha. The Bharigan which has a religious, cultural and recreational purpose, has been mainly practiced and performed by the Pati - Rahbas.

### 1.01 Objectives:

- (a) to bring forth various elements of Bharigan as a folk theatre.
- (b) to encourage research work on Bharigan by highlighting it's various aspects.
- (c) to look into the prospect of providing a platform to the performers of Bharigan.

### 1.02 Methodology:

The data of present study is taken from both secondary and primary sources. The primary data has been collected through the interview and observation. For the purpose of this paper visited the villages and interviewed the people related with Bharigan and observed the performances. For the secondary data, books, articles in magazines, newspapers published related to the topic and research work available in this respect have been taken for help.

## **2.00 History of the name - Bharigan :**

There are diverse opinions with regard to the name Bharigan. According to a section of people, the name has been derived the fact that the items necessary for the performance was carried by one or two person who were known as Bhari ( the carrier) and due to the exercise of this activity the performance was named as Bharigan. There are some who opined that the term Bhari was used to mean Bhao, Bhaona or Bhaoriya whose literal meaning is acting, drama and actors. A few others opined that the word Bhari came to be adopted due to the use of weighty mask in the performance and it was known as Bharigan. It may be mentioned here that according to some artists of Bharigan, the name Bharigan is derived due to the role of person (Bhari) who carried the necessary items to the different places for staging of song based dramatic performance.

## **2.01 The theme:**

The theme of the Bharigan is mainly taken from the great epic Ramayana and Mahabharata. The theme of the dramas such as Ravan bodh, Mahiravan bodh, Sita horon, Toronisen bodh, Saktishel, Patal kando, Bali bodh etc.

## **3.00 Person associated with performance of Bharigan :**

In the performance of Bharigan there are many persons who are associated for successful staging of the performance.

### **3.01 Bhari**

The person who carry the necessary items including mask ,dresses, costume & makeup items, weapons, musical instruments to the place of staging of the performance. In the ear line times, due to the lack of means of transportation, the Bhari (carrier) played an important role without whom the staging of the performance was just impossible

### **3.02 Oja or Mul gayok or Geedal :-**

The Oja is the chief person in the whole performance of Bharigan . He is the director ,singer and narrator of the sow. The oja has a similar function with that of Sutradhar of Ankiya Nat. His presence is important from beginning till the and of the show . He introduces all the characters of the drama .He narrates the story and maintains co-ordination between the music, song ,story and the acting .The Mul or Oja leads the performance with a whisk in his hand. He recites verses and he dances with the assistance of Palis . He normally wear white dhoti or large gamocha, white Panjabi Kurta with long comforter and wear nupur (jingling anklet ) in both the ankle .He wears a white pag ( specially designed cap) in his head.

### 3.03 Pali :-

The Oja is assisted by a group of person who are known as Pali . They repeat the song and verses which was initiated by the Oja. The number of polis varies as per the strength of the member of the Bharigan group. Normally 10 to 15 Palis assist the Oja in the performance. They wear white dhoti or Gamocha with white Punjabi Kurta and take comforter in their neck known as Pajar.

### 3.04 Bain and Jhali bojuwa :-

There are two types of musician in Bharigan performance . They are Bains who play khol,a traditional drum and the Jhali bojuwa who play medium size cymbals. Normally two person plays the khol and two person plays the cymbals. But sometimes four Bains also play Khol and four person play the cymbals in the performance.

### 3.05 Dohari :-

In the performance of Bharigan, the chief assistant of the Oja is known as Dohari. He is expert in song, verses and gestures & movements.

### 3.06 Bhaoriya:

The performance of Bharigaan take it's course with appearance of various characters like Rama, Lakshman, Sita, Ravan, Mandodari, Matuli, Durga, Kali, Maa Bhagawati, Hanuman, Bibhishan, Sugriba, Neeljit, Neelkanta, Nirman, Kabiraj among others. They appear in the stage with makeup and costume as per the demand of the characters. The actors take necessary weapons as per the requirement of the characters.

### 3.07 Ketuwa or Bohuwa :-

This character is a much awaited one for all the audience as he adds humour to the performance. Though there is no any direct influence of this character in the story but due to the demand of the audience this character is an unavoidable part of Bharigan.

### 4.00 The Performance:

Bharigan is normally performed on the occasion of some religious functions and social events. Sometimes it is also staged with only recreational purpose. But whatever purpose may be, the whole performance is carried out with utmost religious devotion. Before the beginning of the performance Mah-Prasad(offering to Almighty) is offered to the Goddess Kali. The Oja or Mul, the musician and the actors put their makeup and costume in the Cho-ghar(green room). The performance begins with 'Khol Bandhan' which is playing o khol and cymbals by the musicians for about half an hour. This preliminary part may be compared with the Dhembali of Ankiya Nat. After this preliminary, the Oja enters in the stage with a whisk in his one hand. He started the prayer song which is known as 'Gita Bandan'. "Tumi hari dinomay etini bhubone kore me jani tumare

mohima, Kuti kuti prajapati chatur mukhe koru tuti chari veda nepayo taro mahima. The Palis assist the Oja by reciting the last part of every verse. This part lasts for about half an hour. The Oja and Palis continue the song and verses(Dhuwa Panda) in praise of different deities. Before starting of the main story, two actors known as Lakhor Chawa and another actor known as Muni enter in to the stage. They enter in the stage with fire in their hand. This act has resemblance with the Agnigarh of Ankiya Nat. These characters symbolises Lord Rama, Lakshmana and Vishwamitra. After their departure from the stage the Oja introduces the various characters with songs and dialogues as per the need and time of the story. The characters appear in the stage and perform their role with dancing movements the story takes it's own course as per the direction of the Oja. The performance continues the whole night. At the last part of the performance, Goddess Kali appears in the stage with dancing movements. It is believed that the dance movements of Goddess Kali should be staged after the rising of Sun. At the end of the performance, the Mah prasad is distributed among the performers and audience in the morning.

#### **4.01 Use of Language :-**

The Bharigan is performed by using various languages such as Bengali, Assamese and Hindi. Though Assamese language is the dominant language of majority of the locality, the use of Bengali language is considered as special feature of this performance. The performers of the Bharigan Dol informed that Hindi words are also sometimes used in the Bharigan performance.

#### **4.02 Use of Mask :-**

The use of different mask is a special feature of this performance. These masks are made of wood and various colours are used to make these masks attractive. These masks are treasured with almost care either in the worship hall or under the guidance of the Oja of the performing team. It is believed that prayer should be offered to these masks specially in some occasions like Shyama Puja, Ambubashi, Sankrati etc.

#### **5.00 The present scenario of performance of Bharigan :-**

The popular folk art of Goalpara and Kamrup district was very often by various Bharigan teams such as kothakuthi Hirapara Bharigan Dal, Bondapara Bharigan Dol, Maslam Bharigan Dol, Khamari Bharigan Dol, Bardakpuranipara Bharigan Dol, Meghadam Bharigan Dol. During the discussion with the artists and members of two Bharigan teams and local inhabitants of the regions it is observed that during last few decades they have experienced a declining trend in the performance of Bharigan some members of the Bharigan Dol which was formally established in the year 1895 informed that they experienced the declining trend from last 30 to 35 years. They remember that 30 to 35 years back, there were competition between Jatra party and their team. Recounting his experience some members says that they remember, they counted the number of performance of Jatra party in our locality in every particular year and to many years they

got 12 to 14 invitations where as the Jatra parties got less invitation. But slowly the number of invitation for Bharigan performance decreased day by day .

#### **6.00 Conclusion :-**

The Bharigan , one of the dramatic performance of the greater Assamese culture now is in declining trend and may become an extinct form if proper and timely measures are not take for its promotion and preservation. As it is already stated that it is a challenge for the Bharigan teams to continue their performance in changing scenario ,it is the responsibility of the Department of cultural Affairs to take appropriate measures for promotion and preservation of all the similar folk arts of the state financial assistance to the performing teams, inclusion of names of the artists of such folk art in the list of state cultural awardees, frequent invitation of such teams in the various official and cultural programmes can make a great difference in motivation the artists. Frequent telecasting of performance of Bharigan and other similar performing arts in Doordarshan and other television channels can encourage the people to participate in these kinds of performing art. They informed that it is their responsibility to preserve their heritage to the young generation of their locality to interested about Bharigan.

Data Collect:

1. Boro, Satish: Age 53 yrs.
2. Khakhalary, Bhairab: Age 77 yrs.
3. Rabha, Bibhuti: Age 49 yrs.
4. Rabha, Karin: Age 78 yrs.
5. Rabha, Pyramid: Age 52 yrs.
6. Rabha, Kandrupa: Age 60 yrs.

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4. Khakhalary, Jyanshankar: Loko Sangskritit Abhumuki.
5. Singha, Dr. M Gopal: Asomar Paribaishyakola: Bharigan