

A Comparative Study of Borgeet of Assam with Indian Classical Music

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Abstract

The name 'Borgeet is popularly ascribed to a special set of devotional songs composed during the late 15th and early 16th A.D. by Shrimanta Shankardeva and his disciple Shri Shri Madhabdeva, The two chief exponents of vaishnavism in Assam. In India bhakti movement started on the basis of devotion with the main objective of spreading the vaishnav religion and strengthening the tradition of worshipping different incarnations of lord Vishnu. In medieval age, music developed rapidly because the growth of music based on devotional songs which were bound up by classical ragas and its rules. The devotional music was based on the raga -raginis on that period. From the 7th to 10th centuries ,the vaishnav devotees called 'Alobaro' of southern India propagated this religion through the devotional music .The research paper encompasses the study of classical elements in borgeet, the devotional music of Assam and project a comparative study between borgeet and Indian classical music.

Key words: Presentation, Swar, Pada, Tala, Raga.

Introduction:

The neo-Vaishnava movement initiated by Srimanta Shankardeva created a socio-cultural renaissance in Assam in the later part of the 15th century. It was revolutionary in the sense that Neo- Vaishnavism in Assam meant not only a religious faith but also a way of life which is based on the liberal doctrine of bhakti or devotion opened to all classes and castes. The most important place of initiating the Neo-Vaishnava Movement is seen in two unique institutions—Sattras and Namghar, which are associated with social, religious and cultural life of the Assamese people. The literal meaning of the term sattras is a religious session that is the place of religious activity. The term sattras has been used to propagate the vaishnav religion and which coordinate with the mentor-disciple tradition (guru-shishya). Shishya or students following Vaishnav traditions lives in sattras from their childhood. They follow the rules of sattras and bound to maintain discipline of the sattras. They learn about Vaishnav culture, traditions and also dance, music, drama and general education from their respected gurus in sattras. The head of the sattras is called sattras adhikari. Sattras adhikari is the supreme of sattras and he is the path finder of sattras disciples. The Sattras and Namghar were not merely centre's of religion and prayer, even it also promoted mass education and serve as a centre and school of musical pursuit, songs, dances and bhaona(drama). The Sattras contributed a

rich treasure for bhakti literature and developed new form of arts like Sattriya dance (classical dance), Borgeet (devotional music), Ankiya Naat or Bhaonas (a form of one act play), Rasleela geet etc. In 15th century to spread Vaishnava faith, and for centuries this form of performing arts natured and preserved by the Sattras. The borgeet are called celestial or great songs in assamese literature. Those songs where the devotion generated imagination of Srimanta Sankardeva and Sri Sri Madhavdeva come alive in sentiment, idioms and tune. Srimanta Shankardeva and his follower Sri Madhabdeva created and composed Borgeet using brajavali dialet and in various subjects of SriKrishna. In the later part of 15th century Sankardeva and his closest disciple Madhavdeva established sattras religious institutions in Assam and composed a large number of devotional songs based on ragas and fixed talas.¹ They used devotional music as a medium to spread Vaishnavism in Assam. Srimanta Shankardeva created Khol instrument and applied different talas in borgeet and other songs. Borgeet are based on moral and spiritual sentiments. Borgeet has many similar elements with of Indian classical music. The definition of Raga in Indian music is –‘Ranjayanti eti raga’ in Sanskrit.² That means the tune which directly touches our heart and pleases our mind is called Raga. A raga is a tonal composition of musical notes having a sequence form or structure of a particular significance. In India the term classical music is generally used to denote raga music which is an ancient art claiming its origin to the Vedas. Long before the advent of the Christian era, the raga music system had not only developed its own definite rules and grammar of theory and practice of music but also formed fairly comprehensive theories about the art of music appreciation. Most of the saint -composers belonging to the bhakti movement of medieval India used raga music for their song compositions. All the saint composers like Tulsidas, Kabir, Mira, Nanak, and others used raga music for their compositions. Borgeet is a very rich culture of north east India. It is classical form of devotional music popular in Assamese culture. It has own its characteristics. It follows the strict rule of classical raga and tala.

Ancient Charya Padas:

Numerous references have been found about the worship of Lord Vishnu in Assam during ancient times. But the history of music in ancient Assam becomes clear only after the 15th century A.D. According to the archaeologists and music experts, the status of the music of that time can be presumed only through the Bodhik charya stanzas or the pada geets found in Assam. The Charya Pada stanzas composed between the 8th to 11th centuries refer to the names of ragas, and these tunes have been mentioned in those stanzas that match with the music of Kamrup or ancient Assam. The name of the ragas such as Baradi, Mallari, Dhanashree and are found in these stanzas.³ Some names of ragas matched with those of the bargeet are:

Ragas in ancient Buddhist Charya Stanza

Varadi
Dhanasi
Mallari

Ragas in Borgeet

Varadi
Dhanashree
Mallar⁴

Evidences were found, the Buddhist community people lived in Assam from the 9th to 10th centuries like poets Meennath, Gorakhnath, and Sarahpad. The book 'Charyacharya Vinishchay' that discovered in Nepal mention about the raga based songs composed by these people for pursuing religious devotion. The ancient Assamese music tunes which are similar to these Charyapadas have also been found.⁴ The Charyapadas were written and composed in ragas. Charyapadas were composed at the denouement of Magadhi and Pakrit dialect and it was the period of rising different language like Assamese, Bengali, and Oriya language. That is why found many similarity of Charyapadas dialect with Assamese, Oriya and Bengali.⁵

Numbers of Borgeet:

Borgeet are written in poetic (*pada*) style and mainly on the subjects based on Sri Krishna lila from *Bhagawat Purana*. While performing Borgeet, the first *Pada*, marked as '*dhrung*' works as a refrain and is repeated over the course of singing of the succeeding verses. In the last couple, of borgeet the name of the poet is generally mentioned. The structure of borgeet is said to model the songs of 8-10th century *Bouddhik Charyapada*. Srimanta Sankardeva used for all his borgeet in *Brajavali* language, an artificial Maithili- Assamese mix language.⁶ Sankardeva composed about two hundred and forty borgeet, but a fire destroyed them all and only about thirty four of them could be retrieved from memory. Sri Shankardeva, much saddened by this loss, gave up writing borgeet and asked Madhavdeva to write them. Madhavdeva to undertake the task of composing songs in a similar pattern. Madhavdeva collected his guru's songs from whatever retained in the memory of the disciples and others and also composed a number of new ones himself. The total number of such songs came to one hundred and fifty seven. At present 34 borgeets has been found which are written by Shankardeva.⁷

Mode of presentation:

In performing style of borgeet, songs are grouped together for singing at different hours of the day. There are certain compositions which are primarily sung in the morning. Similarly, there are other songs prescribed to be performed during the mid day or evening services. At the beginning of every *prasanga* (part) borgeet is sung by the bhaktas or devotees and after the borgeet they sung *ghosa- kirtana* written by Sankardeva and other performances according to the tradition. The performance usually starts with short recital known *guru ghata*. It starts with playing on the percussion instrument called *khol*, which was created by Srimanta Shankardeva. After that followed by *alapa* in particular raga in which the song has to be sung. The *alapa* is sung with invocation of words like *hau,-ri-ta-na-na-na-hari-rama*. etc. Borgeet are usually sung in two ways. That is with *tala* and without *tala*. This conforms to the ancient style of singing *prabandha gitas* in two styles-*Atala* and *sahatala*.⁸ When the borgeet is sung in a *tala* or different *talas* it is called *bandha raga geeta*. On the other hand when no *tala* is employed the same is known as *mela raga geeta* which means a song without rhythms. Borgeet is set in raga. The names of most these ragas are similar to those prevalent in hindustani and carnatic ragas. Sankardeva and Madhavdeva utilized more than thirty -like Dhanashri, Gauri, Kalyan, Asowari, Barari, Basanta, Belowar, Bhatiyali, Bhupali, Keder

raga etc. A striking of the borgeet is that there is no any concept of raginis in borgeet. Borgeet are mainly sung as prayer songs in the different services of the Vaishnava payer halls or the namghars. As such these songs are grouped together for singing at different hours of the day. There are certain compositions which are primarily sung in the morning. There are other songs prescribed to be performed during the mid day or evening services. Borgeets are basically subjected on different stories of lord Sri krishna. It expresses different rasas like Lila, paramartha, viraha, virakti, cor-caturi etc. Songs may be divided into different sections that is paramartha, lila, jagana (songs having waking from sleep, in the morning), calana (child krishna movement), khelana (the pastoral sports of child krishna), Nritya (dancing) etc. 'Jaya jaya Jadava, Suna Suna re Sura bairi Pramana, Ago mai tohara tanaya, Alo mai ki kahabu dukha, Mai hera gokule chanda ave, Tejare Kamalapati' are the few popular borgeet of Sri Sankaedeva and Sri Madhavdeva.⁹

There are certain Ragas like Raga Dhanashri in Borgeet which have very similar notes to the Hindustani classical Raga Bhimpalashri.

For example- Borgeet in raga Dhanashri-Tala-Pori

Dhrung- *Narayan Kahe bhokoti karu tera
meri pamaru mana madhava ghane ghana
Ghatuka papa na sura//*
Pada- *Jata jiva jangama kita patangama
Aaga naga jaga teri kaya*¹⁰

Meaning- It is prayer song describing the power and beauty of divinity of god Narayana (another name of Sri Krishna).

The swaras used in raga Bhimpalashri in Indian music are- Aroah-Ni Komal, Sa, Ga Komal, Ma, Pa, Ni Komal, Sa (tara), Avroh-Sa, Ni Komal, Dha, Pa, Ma, Ga Komal, Re, Sa. The similar swaras are found in above borgeet. The raga elaboration in borgeet are divided in three sections, i.e. Juroni (Lower notes of the alapa) Urani (Middle octave) and Ghuroni (Higher octave).¹¹ In Indian classical music 'Lakshangeet' are such compositions which are sung to express the nature and characteristics of a particular raga. In sattriya tradition some ragas has lakshangeet which is called mallita in assamese language. For example- Lakshangeet or mallita in raga Dhanashri in sattriya tradition given as below-

Geet-Raga Dhanashree

Dhrung- *Janaka raga shri Janya raga
Aparahna Geya rupa monohari*
Pada- *Prabala Purbanga prakriti gambhir
Ga Sa Ni Sa Ga Re anga ruchir
Saraj vadi Samvadi Pancham
Sagraha niyasa shravana uttam.*¹²

Meaning-Here in the above composition it is mentioned that Dhanashree is the janaka raga (Father) and shri is the janya raga (children). It is a purbangavadi raga and prakriti (nature) is gambhir, Saraj is the vadi swara(main repeating swara) and pancham is the samvadi(repeating note lesser than Vadi) swara. The complete raga description is given in the above song.

A comparative study of Borgeet with Indian classical music:

The six basic elements of Indian classical music are Swara, Tala, Laya, Raga, Rasa-Bhava, and Pada. Which are also found in Indian classical music? Similarly the song called borgeet has many classical elements.

1. **Swara:** The sound which has a vibration quality of a pleasing nature and immediately pleases the mind of the listeners without depending on any factor is called Swara. The series of seven swaras Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni denotes as Saptak literally means "containing seven" and is derived from the Sanskrit word *sapta* which means "seven". In Indian classical music there are three Saptak- Mandra (lower), Madhya (middle) and Tara (higher). According to the sattriya artist Borgeet are sung in three octaves Mandra, Madhya and Sara. Indian classical music is based on 12 shuddha and vikrit notes. Sattriya artist follows the same.

2. **Tala and Layakari:** Tala is that by which music is established or regulated in time. It may be called a musical time. It bound by the number of beats which we called Tala. In classical music there are different Talas used in different style. Borgeet performs with specific tala like Parital, Rupaktal etc. and different layakarais. Variations in different tempos and rhythms in relation are called layakari. On the part of musician, vocal or instrumental the standard tempo is usually maintained by an accompanist. In Dhrupad-Dhamar and khayal style of classical music, layakari (Rhythmic Variations) is very important. The Kalawant in dhrupadi style sings the Pada and plays with the different timings of Tala. Highlighting the techniques and beauty of the Pada in a prominent way. Similarly some sattras like kamalabari sattria in majuli district of Assam sings borgeet with layakari.

3. **Raga:** The word raga is a Sanskrit word which means "colour, or passion". It may be defined as an acoustic method of colouring the mind of the listener with an emotion. Hence raga means cluster of notes to which people's mind is attracted. Borgeet are also based on different ragas.

4. **Rasa:** Borgeet are based on religious topics. It elicits devotional and psychological response from the listener. Rasa has been referred to as aesthetic delight. Some common Rasas are - (a) Bhakti (b) Karun (c) Shringar (d) Batsalya (e) Vir

The Indian classical music also elicit devotional response .The Dhrupad and Dhamar style of classical music developed in temples and religious places. The taste of Bhakti, Karun, Shringar, Batsalya and Vir rasa are found in Dhrupad –Dhamar style as well as Borgeet.

5. **Text:** It literally means the lyrics. In Dhrupad style of classical music the compositions Padas are designed in a specific and clear pattern. Borgeet has specific and standard text.

6. **Alap:** The both traditions presents alap (elaboration of raga) using various syllables like Hau-ri-ta-na-na-Hari, Rama, etc. When alapa in hindustani and carnatic music is mostly extempore, it is pre-composed in Bargeet. The alapa utilizes the swaras used in the song with particular stress on the dominant notes. As such the singer with his alapa can bring out the general outline of the raga before the commencement of the song.

7. **Atala (unfixed) and Satala (fixed) Compositions:** The both traditions presents Atala and Satala or Sahtala composition (fixed and unfixed compositions). When a borgeet is sung in a tala (or different talas) it is called 'bandhanar geet (closed form)'. On the other hand when no tala is employed the same is known as 'melanar geet' which means a song without rhythm. In Indian classical music Nibadha and Annibadha are the two types of.

8. **Two division of composition:** Dhrung and Padas are the two divisions which are sung in Borgeets. In khayal style of Indian classical music, there are two divisions which are called styai and antara.

9. **Rag Sanchar:** The both traditions perform rag sanchar or elaboration of raga before singing the composition.

10. **Language:** The language used in Borgeet is ancient Assamese which is also called brajavali. The language used in dhrupadi style of Indian classical music are Abadhi, Braj, Maithili, Hindi, Sanskrit languages etc.

11. **Subject matter:** The style of compositions in Indian classical music are based on Nayak-Nayika, god and goddesses and based on the stories of epics and puranas. But borgeets are based on religious stories of lord Sri krishna. These are based on epics and stories of bhagawat purana.

12. **Oral Tradition:** The both traditions follows on oral traditions or Guru Shishya tradition.

13. **Time theory:** The both traditions follow the time theory of ragas.

Conclusion:

The both tradition of Borgeet and Dhrupadi style of classical music, have their significant style and features. But somewhere both the traditions have many similarities. Borgeet is one of the classical and devotional forms of north east India composed by vaishnava saints in medieval age. This form requires more scientific study and research and theoretical work. It is a rich culture of Assam. The traditional music groomed under Guru-Shishya tradition of Indian culture. Srimanta Sankardeva's bargeet have for their principle matter, religious experience, and philosophic reflection on the world of morality. The songs helped Sankardeva to spread vaishnavite in Assam in 15th century. It is our valuable treasure. We have to take initiatives for preservation. It is a devotional rule bound music tradition groomed

under guru shishya tradition in the religious place called satras in Assam. The Sangeet Natak Akademi, Gvt.of India has taken many initiatives for the preservation and development of these traditional songs. Borgeets are performed by following the raga and fixed tala methods, which is possible only by learning it in guru shishya (teacher-student) tradition.

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