CHAPTER - V

NEO-VAISHNAVISM AND ITS IMPACT ON BODO

FOLK PERFORMING ARTS

INTRODUCTION

The Folk Performing Arts constitute the fourth sectors of folklore and folklife. R.M. Dorson classified folk performing arts into three divisions - traditional music, dance and drama. While renditions of a folktale or folk song are now usually referred to as performances, they are more casual in nature than the conscious presentation of these arts by individuals or groups with folk instruments, dance costumes and scenario props. The performing arts intersect each with the others and often appear in conjunction. Generally performing arts mean the form of creative activity that is performed in front of an audience. From the folkloristic point of view, it can be said as the conscious presentation of drama, dance and folk music by individual or group who carry these art forms from generation to generation.

1. Dorson, R.M. *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, 1972, p-4
V.1. Folk Drama

Folk drama is one of the important genres of folk performing arts of every society which can be termed as folk theatre. It is also associated with ritual and festival and even has seen close relation as well as affinities with music and dance. Drama of any sort “calls for the play world by the players generally through the use of conventional symbolic objects, masks, costumes special area for playing and conventional stylized action. Drama, in other words is primarily recognized as a play activity and therefore is closely related to game, dance and ritual. All of these call for the establishment of a play world and get in many ways similar to it.”

Most of the folk drama of every society is closely associated with religion, festival and occasional and ceremonies. Ceremonial R.D. Abrahams says “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 drama is given on special occasions only, most commonly a seasonal festival.” There are a few Bodo folk theatres found in the Bodo society. Generally Folk theatre consists of storytelling, ritual singing, dancing etc. It can be observed that folk


3 ibid, p-354
theatre keeps the rural life in peace and lustre. Anil Boro has classified Bodo folk theatre into five sub-kinds as follows: 1. *Jatra gan* 2. *Ek thengiya* 3. *Kherai mwsanay* (dance) 4. *Solo bungnay* and 5. *Subung mwsanay.* The brief study about the folk theatre or drama of the Bodos is given below:

*Jatra gan* is one of the folk theatres in the Bodo society. *Jatra gan* is a strong medium of entertainment and education. In the early part of the 20th century, the Bodo leaders or social workers of the Bodo society took necessary initiatives to reform as well as to unite the society. *Jatra gan* is also one of them which were used by them as a vehicle of social reformation. The *jatra gan* was borrowed from the Bengali *jatra* with a view to entertaining and educating the people. Even most of the dramatists were seen translating and adapting from Bengali *jatra pala* into Bodo language. It was performed in the open air stage called *Sainasali* so as to enable the audience from every side. “This *jatra gan* became very popular in the Bodo society within a short period of time and became a medium of entertainment for the rural folk people. To make it attractive, the dramatist and *ustads* incorporated some elements like music, dance and humour. There were no female actors; the male actors acted woman characters in *jatra gan.* There was not seen

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using any kind of modern technique in folk theatre like modern theatre. Even the lighting system was also very age old. Only the gas light was used, no stage decoration was done. The stage was never covered by the screen. The audience could see the actors and performers enter the stage. The band of chorus also used to sit in front of the audience. They took their seat in a corner of the stage.  

*Ek thengiya* is also another folk theatre of the Bodos. There are two words connected with this performing art and these two words are originally not Bodo word. If we see the meaning of the term *ek* means one and *thengiya* means leg. It is very difficult to say the origin of this folk theater in Bodo society. Anil Boro observes, “*ek thengiya gan* is a unique genre of folk theater where only one performer or actor plays the role of different dramatist persona. In this type of folk theatre the single performer plays the role of hero and the heroine, the king and the queen, the general and the ordinary subject.” In fact, there is only one person who performs various kinds of characters, e.g. sometimes he performs like king, queen, common people etc. This is performed in the temporary open air stage to the accompaniment of certain musical

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5. Ibid, p-219
6. Ibid, p-216
instruments like Harmonium, tabla etc. Such kind of performing arts is not seen among the Bodos of Sonitpur district.

The *Kherai* dance is a religious dance performed by the *Doudini* during the *Kherai* worship. In *Kherai* the deities are propitiated with the ritual dance and drama. The *doudini* is the key dancer. As soon as the priest or *oja* chants the *mantra*, she starts dancing rhythmic dances. The *doudindii* moves in a circular way round the Bathou altar where deities are positioned. The *oja* and the *deouri* and the elderly members of the village follow her dancing and making hand gestures.

There are eighteen varieties of dances performed by the *doudini* are *Dahal sibnay*, *bathou gidingnay*, *Cha gwlao bwnay*, *khwijema fonai*, *dahal thungri sibnay*, *thungri sayao ganay*, *mwisw gelenai*, *gorai dabrainay* etc. It is interesting to note here that in the midst of performing *Kherai* worship, the male performers make comic gestures and actions while the players of musical instruments play traditional musical instruments like *Kham* (big drum), *sifung* (long flute), *serza* (violin) and *zotha* (cymbal).

Before we proceed to study the impact of neo-vaishnavite performing arts on the Bodos it needs here to describe the social structure of the Bodo society i.e. the neo-vaishnavite and Bodos process
of worshiping and performing their rites. Because performing arts are closely associated with these. For example, in some of the neo-vaishnavite Bodo Society, there are two types of committees- one is for the performance of the traditional worship and another one is for the neo-vaishnavite kind of performance and rituals. Both of any worships and performances are observed so far with the equal eyes according to prescribed season and time of festivals. For instance, on the occasion of the birth anniversaries of the Mahapurushas as per prescribed date and other ceremonies related to their anniversaries, they perform kirtan path, nam kirtan as the Assamese Hindu does and on other hand they also perform their traditional kherai, Garza worships in different sessions and times.

According to Dilla Boro “they became initiated to neo-vaishnavism in the 1950 decades under the guidance of Gosain who came from Nagaon. He advised them to convert to vaishnavism. Gradually he taught how to worship, how to make namghar, manikut including how to perform bhaona and kirtona. Earlier the population of the village was very low and there were few small and small villages across the Belsri river. There were no men. But after 1950-70, the Bengali speaking population both Muslim and Bengali people came and
lived around them. When they were going to perform bhaona, there was shortage of actors, so they invited the neighbouring Bodo people from different villages to join and perform together. The neighbouring Bodo people also warmly welcomed their invitation and started performing bhaona. Thereafter all the family members of other villagers used to come and lived here permanently.”7 In fact, we can assume that culture could bring unity and integrity in the society

Further, Tilika, Boro explained that “after two years back, they built a namghar as said by the gosai by bringing big Sal trees from Singri hill. That time no communication was here. Thereafter, the gosain suggested them to observe the rites and rituals of neo-vaishnavism as taught by him. Consequently the people started performing kirtana in namghar and at home individually once a year. As information furnished, “to offer tortoise in the performance of namkirtan at home was one of the respectable custom of Assamese society. Earlier it was seen among the Bodo society also.”8

The gosain advised them to stop rearing of hen and pig one by one. Firstly he suggested to observe the traditional worship and tried to give up one by one. He said to keep clean their living house. He even

7. Dilla Boro, M.75, Amguri, Silikhabari, Sonitpur, Assam
8. Mangala Barmahalia, Barmahalia, Amguri, Sonitpur, Assam
said that not to plough on the day of full noon and no moon and the *tithi* of *Krishna* and *mahapurush*. It is interesting to mention here that sometimes the *gosai* being a man belonging to a Brahmin caste, used to drink rice beer and enjoyed with the villagers.  

From the above discussion it is clearly revealed about the folk performing arts of Bodos, and how the Bodo people started performing *bhaona, kirtona* in course of time. To preach the philosophical view Sankardeva and his disciples composed the *Borgits* in which the melodies, the interesting stories from the Bhagavata Purana and a few from the Ramayana etc. were incorporated Dramas; on the basis of the stories centering around the life of Lord Krishna, of the Bhagava purana, were composed and staged. The theatrical performance also attracted a large number of common people. The impact of neo-vaishnavite elements on the Bodo society of Sonitpur can be discussed in the following way:

Assamese folklife has a rich tradition of its various forms of folk performing arts. All the performing arts forms current in the district are akin to Assamese folklore as a whole; but some peculiarities are also

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9. *Informant: Tilika Boro, M, 72, Amguri, Silikhabari, Sonitpur, Assam*
noticed sometimes in some cases."\textsuperscript{10} There are some differences between the folk and classical in terms of performing arts. But it is clear that the roots of the classical performing arts are the folk, without folk classical is nothing. So, classical can be termed as sophisticated form of the folk. One constantly reacts with other and often folk and classical elements get mixed up. "In purely anthropological terms the level naturally are tribal, village and urban; in artistic terminology they are sometimes called folk which imply community expressions that are participative and spontaneous. Although never explicitly stated "folk" is co-related to the tribal village and group community and classical to the urban sophisticated whether industrialized or not."\textsuperscript{11} According to Datta, Sarma & Das "the bhaona is a theatrical performance on the model set by the great saint-artists Sankardeva and Madhabdeva constitute most valuable items of the Assamese artistic heritage. Although an ideal bhaona performance of a play written by the two great saint-artists and some of their followers has more of a classical than a folk flavor, yet the links of the bhaona with the local folk tradition are unmistakably clear. While many elements of the model for the bhaona have been drawn from the


\textsuperscript{11} Kapela, S.V, Traditional Indian Theatre: Multiple Streams, pp-2-5
earlier folk drama institutions, an actual *bhaona* at the performance level takes on a distinctly popular and folk character.\textsuperscript{12}

Though the creation of Sankardeva’s performing arts are regarded as the classical dances there are many folk elements in them which are borrowed by him from other neighbouring as well as other Indian societies. Indeed, the performing arts of the Assamese society are of the folk and classical elements. On the other hand, some people say that it is a religious drama. There is no any folk element. But it is not completely true and cannot be called completely a religious or classical drama because of having lots of folk element borrowed from the famous Indian epic like *Mahabharata and Ramayana*. P. Gowasmi mentioned about six kinds of plays—\textquoteleft Pathi-Prasad, Kaliya-daman, Keli-gopal, Rukmini-haran, Parijat-haran and Rama-Vijay. His great disciple Madhad Deva also wrote plays like—\textquoteleft Arjuna-bhanjan, Pimparaguchuwa, pimparaguchuwa are lighter dealing as they do with the pranks of the child Krishna. There were other writers who followed these pioneers.'\textsuperscript{13}

P. Goswami observes “the main objective of Sankardeva was to establish Vaishnavism of the new school. There is not much scope for

\textsuperscript{12} Datta, B. Sarmah, N & Das, P. C., *Folklore Material of North East India*, 1994, p-205

\textsuperscript{13} Goswami, P. *Festival of Assam*, p-40
characterisation but the *Ankiya Nat* (called such because it has no act division) is not simply the transcription of a story from the *Bhagavata purana* or *Vishnu Purana*.”

Madhabdeva’s disciple Madhabdeva also produced *Govardhana-Jatra* in the manner of the *putuas*. However, it is said that these *jatras* are no longer in existence. In some places, the temple dances like *Natuwa* or *Cali* dance is also seen in the *Bhaona*.

**V.1.A. Ankiya Nat**

Generally *ankiya* means one act and *nat* means drama. Sankardeva took initiatives as well as introduced many means to spread the message of vaishnavism among the different sections of the people. Among these *ankiya nat* or *bhaona* is one of the best means to achieve his goal. Considering the need and necessities to attract the mind of people he composed lots of plays to perform in the stage. “These plays are based on themes and episodes connected mainly with Lord *Vishnu* and his different incarnations, especially *Krishna* and *Ram*. It is dominated by *Bhakti rasa*, and a subtle fusion of *Sringara*, *Vatsalya*, *Shanta* and *Veerarasa*.”

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14. ibid, p-14
15. ibid, p-14
It is really interesting that the neo-vasihanvite Bodos have given up their traditional drama, now they have performed *bhaona* in their village *namghar* enthusiastically. As the informant furnished, the *gosain* or initiator took the *bhaona* as a first instrument for initiating neo-vaishnavism, through *bhaona* they tried to touch as well as to attract the mind of the simple minded tribal people. The preacher of neo-vaishnavism taught and trained the Bodo people how to dance and perform *nat*.

There is no difference in respect of decorating the *namghar* during the performance of *bhaona* in the Assamese society. Even there is no any difference with the actors as well as characters performed in the *nat*. Every stage of the play is described by the *Sutradhar*. The *nat* performed by the neo-vaishnavite Bodos also begins in the evening i.e. around 9 p. m and ends at dawn. Musical instruments are also used. Masks used for the play are those of *Garuda, Jatayu,* masks of demons such as *Ravana* and other *Rakshasa* and of buffoons or jesters. Animal masks are also used. In *Ankiya Nat*, *Sutradhara* has an important part to play. Every stage of this play is described by the *Sutradhara*.
B. Ras Yatra

*Rash yatra* is one of the genres of folk performing arts. This festival is connected with the life of *Krishna*. This was made by Sankardeva. This is also one of the very common and important vaishnavite festivals of Assam. This festival is observed in almost all the *satras* of Assam. There is a section in the *Kirtana ghosa* named *Sakrida* composed by Sankardeva and a drama named *Keligopal* by the same poet. The story in which these *Kavyas* are written, has been told in the *Bhagavata purana* and Sankardeva has given Assamese version in the book X of the same *purana*. The neo-vaishnavite Bodo people celebrate *Ras jatra* yearly on the occasion of *Krishna janmastami* in some villages in the Sonitpur district. The celebration of this *jatra* is costly. So, the Assamese speaking Hindus and Bodo people have been celebrating this *bhaona* jointly since earliest times in the area of Sirajuli,Borgaon,Ulubari,Roumari. In fact, it can be considered as a symbol of unity and integration which help and increase our homely brotherhood. It is also not that they don’t have relation with other people. But the relationship between both these two communities during the time of *Ras yatra* is wonderful, memorable and nostalgic. Despite having the permanent body, there is a reception committee i.e.
management committee constituted for the convenience of celebration of bhaona. The body invites all the responsible people particularly Bodo and Assamese people to attend in a meeting to discuss about the preparation for the performance of Rash bhaona. Thereafter the said meeting forms a strong reception committee consisting of various portfolios to hold the celebration smoothly under the leadership of the permanent management general secretary and president of Rash bhaona or jatra. They collect money from each member of both the communities for this. Sometimes it is also seen going for out collection beside the people irrespective of caste, creed, sex, and religion etc. if they have financial problem. So, the Assamese and the Bodo observe this celebration jointly.

At the outset, the celebration committee selects the name of bhaona and distribute the characters between the members of both communities. After that they start performing akhra (rehearsal) in the namghar. For the rehearsal they choose a good and easily communicable place so as to reach without any hindrance and hesitation. As a matter of fact that rehearsal is just like one kind of training how to act and behave during the performance of bhaona. The beauties and success of the bhaona depend on the practice done in the
rehearsal. The committee gives emphasis on the rehearsal and it is also seen from the request from the side of celebration committee to each actor to attend regularly during the time of rehearsal. It is also seen that the actors also try to concentrate their duties. The committee tries to show their best through this performance.

According to Babuli Boro, “for the economic condition they couldn’t observe the ras bhaona yearly, so they stopped to celebrate the Ras bhaona. There is a village called Borbil that celebrate this bhaona where both the communities the Bodo and the Adivasi people take part twice a year for the last 50 years.”

After the performance, a concluding ceremony is observed with some rituals. Nam kirton is held and a Sarai is offered for the purpose. The whole play is recited by sutradhara and all the performers pray to condone them for all the omission and commission in the performance.

Though some people are the follower of Bathou religion, they also take part in performing bhaona. For example the people of Borbil village still perform Rash bhaona twice a year. Besides these some neo-vsiahnivite Bodo villages like Ulubari, Vekveki Kachari gaon, Nizborgaon etc. perform bhaona once a year. There is no kherai

Informant: Babuli Boro, M, 48, Borbil, Sonitpur, Assam
dance and other traditional music, dance among neo-vaishnavite Bodo villages of Sonitpur. They had to give up their ancestral worship, rich culture along with the beautiful music, dance and performance after conversion to neo-vaishnavism. However, the performance of bhaona in the Bodo village has been decreasing for the last ten years. And one the other hand, the Bodo self-identity or ethnic movement also created nationalist sentiment to give up other cultural elements and has urged them to embrace and develop their own tradition and folklore materials. So except few villages most of the Bodo villages have given up the performance of bhaona. It is gradually increasing its popularity among the Assamese but decreasing its popularity in the Bodo society.

IV.2. Folk Dance

Folk dance is one of the important genres of performing folk arts. According to J.W. Kealiinohomoku, folk dance is dance done by the folk.\(^\text{17}\) The human’s cultural life is rich particularly in dance and music. Folk dances are the counterpart of folk songs and vice-versa. So, most of the time it is seen that they go together and share many important characteristics during the performances of the some dances such as Bihu, Bwisagu etc. Further these art forms not only require the keen eye

\(^{17}\) Kealiinohomoku, J.W. Folk Dance in Folklore and Folklife, ed. R.M. Dorson, 1972, p-381
of an expert as far as the ear and action is concerned, they also need equal attention for the costumes and stage, instruments, the audience and the overall interactions of all these aspects, which are essential for the totality of the performance.

In respect of Folk dance, the Bodos are very rich. There are some dances mostly related with the ritual and festivals.

(i) **Kherai dance**

It has already been said that the *kherai* is the greatest religious festival of the Bodos. There are eighteen varieties of dances performed by the *doudini*. These are *Dahal sibnay*, *bathou gidingnay*, *chagwlaobwnay*, *khwijema fonai*, *dahal thungri sibnay*, *thungri sayao ganay*, *mwiswgelenai*, *gorai dabrainay* etc. However, the *kherai* worship and dances are not performed in the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society.

(ii) **Haba janai dance**

This class of dance is the Bodo marriage dance. 'Haba' means 'marriage, work while 'Janai' means "to eat, to be". So the words *Habajanai Mwsanai* bears the meaning of Bodo dances associated with the marriage ceremony. The type of this dance has been studied and classified by Liladhar Brahma as (i) *Habajanai*(ii)*Bwirathi Dorkhengnai*
(iii) Bwirathi Daojru mwsanai (iv) Barlangpha mwsanai and (v) Bangsial or Sifung Dariya mwsanai. Among the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society such kinds of dances are not performed. The family invites the band party to perform instrumental music in the marriage ceremony.

Another dance in the Bodo society is called raijw janay mwsanai. According to L.Brahma, the ways of daily social life of the Bodos are the root cause of this class dance. “Raijw” means “Society, the state or country, the people” and ‘janai’ means “to eat, to be” and therefore “Raijw janai mwsanai” means a type of Bodo dance based upon the daily life style of the people. Bodos are laborious and self independent. The male ones plough while the female folk plant paddy in the field following the traditional method and they harvest it when it is high time. Bodo women or girls sweep the floor, courtyards and cook food as per the social conventions. The Bodo women never desire to wear the machine made cloths. They weave it attractively for themselves with beautiful embroideries. However, Maigainai (Planting of Paddy), Hi danai or si danai (weaving of cloth), Chethla chibnai (sweeping of

\[18\] Bradma, Liladhar, Religion and Dances of the Bodos, p-22
courtyard), *Goi Khaonai* (cutting of Betel nut) etc. belong to this type of dance.”

(III) **Bagurumba Mwsanai**: It is the most beautiful and attractive dance of the Bodos and associated with merry making and gossips exclusively by the fair sex. Taking both the ends of the hand woven and colored scarf called ‘*Rege-Regang*’ spread around the neck in their hands, the dancers move like butterflies. The dancers move their steps forward with alternate foot and then recede backward keeping the rhythm of the song sung by themselves. The dance which begins in horizontal lines takes circular patterns with rising tempo and ends with the beautiful waves. So the underlying meaning of *Bagurumba* is the dance created for the need of carrying the *Bathou*, the supreme God of Bathouists who is the origin of five spiritual elements from high land, i.e. from heaven. “*Pancha tatwar adi garakir avataran nritya*” is its Assamese counterpart. Beside these dance, there are some Bodo dances such as *bardwisikhla*, *rumbang*, *daosri delai mwsanai* etc.

V.2.B. Contribution of Sankardeva in respect of Dance

It has been said that *bhaona* is also one of the most important performing arts of *neo-vaishnavism* taught and developed by

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19. Ibid, p-24-25
20. Ibid, 23
Sankardeva. Generally Bhaona is a traditional form of entertainment, always with religious messages, prevalent in Assam. It was a creation of Sankardeva, who created the form to convey religious messages to villagers through entertainment. It is a simple drama which shows the victory of truth at the climax, generally using fictitious or mythological kings, queens, demons, gods, soldiers etc. The story generally depicts some initial superficial triumphs of evils over good, but it shows the ultimate victory of good.

Generally in the bhaona there are many actors who are called bhawria- sutradhar and other actors comprising the hero and heroine such as Krishna, Ram, Jujisthir, Durjyadhan, Arjun, Sita, Droupadi and so on. Among these actors “the Sutradhar is the chief actor and, as is evident from the drama, this position requires the most refined qualifications-the ability to sing solo and in chorus, to recite Sankrit verses with proper metrical cadence, and possibly to keep the whole drama in memory.”21 After Sutradhar the roles of the other actors like Ram, Krishna and others are required a great amount of artistic skill because of the actors in these roles are considered as divine beings. The roles of women are also enacted by men. Men wear the women dress and take long artificial hair on the head. It is needless to say that during

the entrance of Krishna and Radha in the *rash bhaona* or *jatra*, the role of village women folk are performed with the traditional Bodo dress in Borbil village.

The drama written by Sankardeva is perhaps not pure folk drama. Though his creation may not be pure folk drama it has enough folk elements. Alan Dundes remarks that the terms ‘folk’ refers to any group of people who share at least one common factor.”22 On the other hand, J. Handoo says that a folk drama’s special characteristic is that it differs from written, sophisticated drama in performance, audience relationship and in mode of transmission.23 The art and style of performance of the *bhaona* can be called folk. In this *bhaona* real men and women play the roles of different characters. They use dialogues in an artificial language called *Brajawali* created by Sankardeva. Now a days it is seen that *Bhaona* written in Assamese language and performed on the stage. The good and bad characters indulge in fighting with traditional weapons like bow, arrow and swords. The entire drama is performed in the middle or open space of *namghar*. The actors are surrounded in three sides by audience who sit on mats, having the side towards the *manikut*

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kept open. Different parts of the drama are connected by lyrical songs performed by an anchor, dressed in special dress and his companions.

The main drama is generally preceded by a performance of the Gayan-Bayan. It is a musically performed with traditional instruments such as Khol, tal, doba and nagara with different hard and fast sequences and formula which are also named differently. The day before the bhaona is called ganica, characterized by a similar but long instrumental musical piece. Generally, bhaona is performed in the night. After the music, the anchor enters the performance arena and explains the story in short to the audience in brajawali, sometimes, in the form of songs and dances. Thereafter most of the actors enter in dancing mode.

Sankardeva introduced the art of dance mainly in connection with the dramatic performances, which are for the most part dance and music, prose constituting but an insignificant fraction. Sankardeva, the father of Assamese society introduced the art of dancing connected with the dramatic performances which are blending of dance them dance and music. Maheswar Neog classified these dances into two groups: nrtya and nrta. The sattra circles distinguish-dances of the Sutradhara, Krishna(or Rama) and the gopis or women characters from other
varieties employed in a dramatic representation and sometimes call these _sutra bhangi, krsna-bhangi_ and _gopi bhangi_ respectively.\textsuperscript{24}

_Sutradhar nac_ is the most important element of an _ankiya_ drama has its own dance form. Maheswar Neog studied and described critically about the _Sutradhar nac_, "When the curtain or screen is taken off, the _Sutradhara_ is discovered in his bowing posture with his head, hands up to elbows and knees fixed to the ground. The musicians now play gently upon their instruments and the _Sutradhara_ keeps dancing increase tempo and intensity. The performance of the dance is divided in some quarters into two parts, the first and gentle part being called _saru bhangi_ (minor postures) and the last and vigorous part _bar bhangi_ (major posters)."\textsuperscript{25} The role of _Sutradhar_ is the most important. The _Sutradhara_ wears a kind of long white _dhuti_ (gown) with _pagguri_ (turban) on his head.

Another important character of _ankiya_ drama is _Krishna nac_. Lord Krishna enters to the stage with a particular dance which is known as Krishna dance. Neog commented on the art of _Krishna_ dance and

\textsuperscript{24} Neog, M. *Early History of the Vasignavite faith and Movement in Assan, Sankardeva and Times*, 2008, p-294

\textsuperscript{25} ibid, p-294
says that "Krishna-bhangi is known also as gosai-pravesar nac (dance of god). As the pravesa-gita is sung, Krishna(Rama) enters the stage in the company of such retinue as are required by the drama, with dancing movements. This dance is characterized by a pleasant agility. The ‘hands’ employed are not too many but Krishna’s characteristics ‘hand, displaying the playing of his flute, would strike the observer as unique: it is represented by the placing of two Kartarimukha hands in a line facing opposite directions as it is done in the Kathakali style.”

Gopi nac is also another character of bhaona. The milk maid sings and performs vraja dance around Krishna and this dance is known as gopi’s dance.

Yudhar nac (dance of battle) is also one of dances of bhaona. In the bhaona the battles are to be fought with dances of various postures. Depending on the rank and position of the character, it may be divided into several categories.

The Bhawriya nac is also commendable. The entrance of the actors after the main one is also different according to the rank and position. The dance which is employed for the entrance of the king is not the same in case of a ministers and demons.

26 .ibid,p-295
Needless to mention here that before beginning of the actual drama there is an essential function of the orchestra party in the *Ankiya* drama. Like the preliminaries of Sankardeva’s drama, this part of drama is known as *Jora gowa*. In this part, the *gayan bayan* dance accordingly of the *dhemalis*.

There is no any dissimilarity in respect of performances in the *bhaona* between the Assamese and neo-vaishnavite Bodo dance of Krishna, Gopi and other associated with dance of them. Because the teachers of these dances were the same disciples of Sankardeva and they taught the neo-vaishnavite Bodo people how to dance and perform on the stage.

There is no specific date in the performance of *bhaona* in the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society. Generally *bhaona* are performed on various occasions on the day of birth and death anniversaries of the Mahapurushas and Stradhikars and as a yearly observance for the welfare of the people of a village before transplanting or sowing seed wishing a good season for cultivation, on the *sradha* of a respected person. There are many instances of performing *bhaona* by the tribal people in the district. The village may be called as *bhaona* centered.\(^{27}\)

\(^{27}\)A.K.Oja, *op-cit*, p-222
Bhaona has become one of the important elements of the Assamese culture even today. The importance and role of Bhaona among the neo-vasihsanvite Bodos is also equally immense. Generally it is seen among the Bodo people that Bhaona performance in the village is connected with the birth anniversary of the neo-vaishnavite saints and disciples and even in the name of the founder Satradhikar of the Sattra. It is also found that the villagers performed bhaona yearly in the month of Fagun and Sat. It is a fact that once most of inhabitants of Bodo villages of Sonitpur district performed bhaona. As I have seen among the neo-vaishnavite Bodo people bhaona is mainly performed in the village Namghar and Satra locations. Some of the villages perform it on the birth and death anniversaries of the mahapurushas and some of the Bodos perform it just for entertainment.

It is noteworthy to mention here that there is a village named Oubari village under Dhekiajuli circle, where a bhaona is being performed once every year in the Siva temple of Singri during the Bihu festival for the last 30 years. Like that a few neo-vaishnavite Bodo villagers are performing nam kirtona once a year in the namghar.

As furnished by another informant of Bori Kachari village their village started performing Bhaona since earliest times closely associated
with the Koch people. According to Uttam Baruah, the Koch people of Borgaon village were Bodos. They were closely associated with the *Borgaon Satra* which was founded by P. Mahanta in the 17th century A.D. under the patronage of Ahom King. He occupied lots of land in the name of Satra. He distributed these land on the basis of certain agreement to the landless people particularly to the Bodo people of the locality to cultivate the same and thereafter the cultivator had to distribute the produced goods fifty and fifty between satradhikar and them. According to him, the *Satradhikara* belonged to the Brahmin family. To work in the paddy field was their taboo. So, they didn’t work and plough in the paddy field. Their duty was to look after the *satra* and they advised the local Bodo people to work and produce more crops in the name of *satra* to maintain and run it without any financial burdens.

Another duty of them was to initiate the tribal people of the Borgaon area. Gradually lots of people started taking *saran* under them. I visited and interviewed with the performer regarding the performance of *Bhaona* of my study area. The name of the performer is Mangala Barmahalia of Amguri village, a farmer by profession. As informed by him, the village started the performance of *Bhaona* just after the

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28. Informant: Utpol Baruah, M, 34, Borgaon, Sonitpur
29. Informant: Rupsing Dalmari, M, 64, Nizborgaon
independence. The gosain used to come in the village and stayed here with a view to initiating Sankardeva's _ek saran nam dharma_ in the village. The villagers also started initiating _ek saran nam dharma_ and performing _bhaona_ and _kirtona_. On the other hand they stopped worshipping their traditional _Bathou_ religion and performing _nam kirton,Bhaona_ and playing _khol tal,dhol_ instead of traditional musical instruments _kham, sifung,jotha,serja_ etc.

Generally it is seen that in the neo-vaishnavite Bodo villages _Ankiya Nator_ or _Bhaona_ is performed on religious occasions like - _Janmashtami_, the death anniversaries of the forefathers of a _Satra_ or monastery, and sometimes on the memorial days of Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva. Of course it is not only in Sonitpur district, but also those Bodos who are associated with the religion of neo-vaishnavism they still observe and perform the _bhaona_ and _kirtona_ together with the Assamese caste Hindu people as a whole.

But still a few Bodo villages observe _bhaona_ on the occasion of birth and death anniversaries of _mahapurush,saraswati puja_ etc. Though the main aim of performing the _bhaona_ is for entertainment, this helps and creates the brotherhood relationship and integration in the
society. Sankardeva transformed the Assamese society easily through the performance of *bhaona*.

**V.2.C. Bwisagu and Bihu Dance**

The most important dance of the Bodos, the *Bwisagu* dance or *Bwisagu mwsanai* is the class of Bodo dance celebrated during the spring time festival. The word ‘*Bwisag*’ means the first Bodo month of the year. Therefore the associated dances are called *Bwisagu mwsanai*. The Bodos have close relation to nature and the process of agriculture cultivation. The *Bwisagu* songs and dances reveal the close relations of the people to nature and agricultural process.

The Bihu dance is an important dance form of Assam and is performed during the Bihu festival. This folk dance is also performed during various stages of cultivation and at the advent of new season. Due to the patronage of Ahom king, later, the Bihu dance had attained the good position among the Ahom community and his subjects. But this was not one of the favourite dances of the neo-vaishanvite people. No written information on this was available in *carit puthis* and other books on the life of Sankardeva. In course of time the Bihu dance has become very popular and attained a position in the cultural life of Assam.
and it has become the part and parcel in the culture of neo-vaishnavite Assamese speaking society.

The tradition of performing *mukuli bihu* in Assam is not very old. According to some scholars the *mukuli bihu* was for the first time held in Gauhati judge field in 1952. As furnished by Tarju Narzari, the first *mukuli bihu* was performed in 1948 at Ghoramari, 15 kilometers away from the Tezpur town under the leadership of Omeo Kumar Das, the first Education minister of Assam. According to him, “after the independence the congress government and workers of Assam took necessary initiative to educate the people along to bring Cultural Revolution towards Assamese dance, music. In this opening *Bihu* function, Rupnath Brahma, Bodo Minister also attended in this auspicious occasion. In this programme there was no *Bwisagu* dance and song. Further, he informed that, that time, the people of this area had already accepted Assamese language and culture. He also performed Assamese *Bihu* dance in this occasion with the friends. Now I feel what Rupnath Brahma felt and thought that time! Still we are performing Assamese *Bihu* dance during the *Bihu* festivals.” 

It needs mention here that the present generations of neo-vaishnavite Bodo populated area are seen performing *Bihu* dance wearing Assamese dress to the

30. Informant: Tarju Narzari, M, 75, Ghoramari, Sonitpur
accompaniment of pure musical instruments and music. They feel proud performing it.

Generally the Bihu festival is an agricultural festival with some fertility faith as well as the festival of youthful remembrance. The Bihu dance clearly reflects this. The Bihu dance as seen among the Assamese has a few fixed patterns and seems to have a sexual basis, thus indicating its associations with some springtime fertility cult of ancient time. The Bihu dance is characterized by brisk stepping, slinging of the hands and vigorous hip movements, symbolizing mirth and yearning for union. Therefore different gestures and postures of the Bihu dance are invariably of a sex appealing type. It is also observed that at the beginning stage of performance of a Bihu song, the musical instruments are usually off and then namati sings with some expressive movement of hands creating impression which is followed by the co-singers. So, most of the time, it is seen that they go together and share many important characteristics during the performances of the Bihu dance.

The Bihu is the most important festival among the people of Assam which is celebrated during the time of Bohag or spring time. There are associated lots of distinctive folksongs with this festival.

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31. Goswami, P. *The Bohag Bihu of Assam*, p-38
33. Ojha, A, *op-cit*, p-222
There are two types of folk songs: Some are meant for the Bihu festival and some are songs of love. "The Bihu songs are normally quatrains with alternate rhymes, while minor modifications to suit individual purposes are made. The songs on the whole circulate like much handled coins, and boys and girls repeat them in certain exquisite melodic patterns suitable for the rhythms of the Bihu dance. There are hundreds and hundreds of such songs. Some of them, judged by language and tone, must be more than a century old: some are of comparatively recent origin, and the stock is constantly being added to with up to date compositions. The Bihu songs are excellent specimen of poetry; they describe beauty, both of nature and of the loved one, express adoration of the sweetheart, glorify youth and speak frustration and sorrow."\(^{34}\)

In the performance of the Bihu dance, it is seen at the very beginning of the dance, the namati (the main singer or leader), one or more dhuliyas (the drummer) talia(cymbaler), initiates the performance and joined by some co-singers and both male and female dancers. It is worth mentioning that namati, drummers and co-singers also take part in dancing with rhythmic body movements. Dhulyas sometimes dance with fantastic skill with the drum on his shoulder. Therefore though there are

\(^{34}\). Datta, Sarmah & Das, op. cit., p-62
some particular dancers in the team, yet in fact, the whole party takes part in performing Bihu dance.

The *Bihu* dance is generally performed in an open field under a big tree, or at the courtyard of a household. But these differences become due to various performances according to the time and spot. Generally a big *ahat* tree in the midst of a field is the most common place for *Bihu* dance performers, groups, consisting of both young men and women go there with their instruments. They dress and ornament themselves best before they perform singing and dancing. Now a days the *Bihu* dance has been polished and hence particular type of costumes are used for the purpose. But it is not the tradition of the folk dance and as it is spontaneous, so the binding of such particular type of costumes are actually not essential for the dance. Till recently there was no restriction in wearing robes, though a male wear a short *dhuti* and *gamocha* on the waist and a female wear a *riha mekhela chadar* either of cotton or *muga* silk. Generally an orchid (*kapou* or *bhalon*) or a seasonal flower (*tagar* or *nahar*) is stuck on the *khapa* of a female dancer.

Now a days the *Bihu* dances are performed by the groups consisting of both young men and women in the *Mukuli bihu mela* or
Sanmilan. The dancers perform their dances within the circle surrounded by the other performers and the entire female dancers move round in a clockwise direction while the male dances move in anti-clock movement. The main singer also moves within the circle and the co-ordinate among the co-singers, instrument players and the dancers dancing rhythmic movements. The player of the buffalo horn also shows between the singers and dancers and he also shows gestures when perform the *pepa*.

The most important folk music is the *huchuri* which is performed by the group of people. A *huchuri* party visits the household and with singing and dancing like movements. This kind of songs usually have religious overtone. A vaishnavite flavor can be undertaken in these songs. It is worth mentioning that *nams* are also performed as *huchuri*. Though *dhol, khol* are generally used for performing *huchuri* song, these songs are the praise of Lord Krishna and Sankardeva. The example of this songs is:

*Krishnai murare bakul*

*phul epahi*

*Niyar pai mukuli hol ai*
Gobindai Ram.\textsuperscript{35}

English rendering: Being soaked in the dew, on the head of lord of Krishna, the bakul

(a holy flower) unfolded its petal, Gobindai, O, Ram

V.3. Folk Music

Folk Music or song is one of the genres of performing folk arts. Every community has its own folk songs which are performed in different occasion. Like other societies, there are also lots of folk songs connected with the different festivals and ceremonies of the committees of Assam.

"While oral literature transmits orally from generation to generation, folk music or traditional music—"passes on by ear and performed by memory rather than by the written or printed musical score."\textsuperscript{36} Folk music is also regarded as one kind of performing art because of performance. If we observe it will be clear that the text of the song is completely a specimen of oral literature but when it is performed then it is transformed and it becomes folk music. There are some musical instruments accompanied with folk music and these create

\textsuperscript{35} Informant: Ramani Kanta Boror, M, 75, Ulubari
\textsuperscript{36} Dorson, R. M. Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction, p-363
melody, rhythm, tune etc. Then the script of the song becomes the unimportant because of performance. "Now a days due to close contact of folk music and classical music and the influence of mass media, folk music is influenced by classical and vice versa. On the other hand the popular musicians collect various elements of music from folk music in the name of modernization and so called popularisation. Therefore it becomes complicated to identify a popular music from a true folk music. However traditional musical instruments are very important as in fact a particular kind of folk music is at a time, identifiable by its instruments only."37

The creation of Sankardeva, such as nam kirton, pal nam, nagara nam, ek nam, pavitra nam etc. presume one kind of music. There is lyric, tune as well as melody. Generally these are performed in the village namghar, satra and individually at home. But these music seem to have no pure folk element because of having religious and classical element. These can be called one of the parts of folk music.

There is a tradition of singing and performing folk music in the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society in Sonitpur district. These can be studied under the following sub-heads:

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37 Vastyayan, K. op-cit pl55
B. Nam Kirton

Nam kirton is also considered a one kind of music. In the satras and namghars of the neo-vaishnavite Bodo areas of Sonitpur, the Kirtana or the Kirtonghosa are sung in the assembly of the devotees in the congregational assemblies where some portions of the Krishna are sung to the accompaniment of the musical instruments like cymbal, nagara. Kirton is also performed on the occasion of the festivals (dol jatra and Ras jatra) that have got spiritual, cultural and social values. It is also seen that the functions are held with the co-operation of all concerned. It is a matter of fact that this can strengthen the social harmony as well as unity.

C. Pal Nam

The performance of pal nam in the Sonitpur district is very rare. But it is also held in the Sattra with the assistance of devotees. Sometimes it is observed in the individual house in the village and on some special occasions. In a Pal nam, the devotees of the villages come to the sattra or namghar and they sit together taking the most senior or most experienced one in the centre. The acharja who takes his sit in the centre of the devotees goes on repeating three verses of the Kirtonghosa or Namghosa, while the others go on repeating the same. It needs to be
mentioned here that this nam continues for a period of more than 4 to 6 hours in the minimum and sometimes it continues up to seven days at stretch. In such a situation it is seen that the singers take part in the congregational meet on rotation. As information furnished, before 20 years, there was a tradition of holding pal nam once a year in Thelamara area. Lots of participants from the Assamese caste Hindu and Bodo community participated and performed here. Now a days, it is not seen among the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society of Sonitpur.³⁸

'Prasad (pulse, banana, apple, sugar candy etc.) is offered before the altar and at the end of the function these are distributed among the devotees and others attending the same function. It is also seen that the Bhakats, Deoris of the village get more packet than the common people. As the informantion goes that such kind of performances were common among the neo-vaishavite Bodos of Sonitpur district. But it is not seen now.

D.Nagara Nam

This is the most common form of the devotional performance in the Assam is Vaishnavite society. Generally this nam is performed in all the neo-vaishnavite villages of Assam. In Assam, each vaishnaivite
villages and areas have their own namghar where the mass people of the village meet and go on chanting the names of God. They go on chanting the attributes of Hari incorporated in the verse of Kirtana and Namghosa and sometimes the other verses of other vaishnavite scriptures. In the Nagaranaam a big Nagara, a big drum made of cleansed leather and a few pairs of cymbals big or small in size are used. The Pathaka who sits at the centre of the Singers (Devotees) initiates the verses of the ghosas and the others follow with different melodies and sometimes with alterations.

This Nagaranaam simply called nam is the most common in every villages of the Sonitpur district. Though, in the villages inhabited by the neo-vaishnavite Bodos also there is the custom of performing the nam since long time past, no nagra nam is performed. Rather the new converts of the Krishnagurus are more interested in chanting this type of Nam. The pathaka starts the verses with such a melody and the co-signers sing with such times that the listener’s generally become charmed. Through the Nam the essence of Bhakti Cult is indirectly preached and the common men and women are given the spiritual and philosophical knowledge and idea.
**E. Ek Nam**

This is the most common form of nam in the Assam is Vaishnavite society. Generally this nam is performed in all the villages of Assam. In Assam, each vaishnaivite village and areas has its own namghar where the mass people of the village meet and go on chanting the names of God. They go on chanting the attributes of Hari incorporated in the verse of Kirtona and Namghosa and sometimes the other verses of other vaishnavite scriptures. In such functions also prasads are distributed.

**F. Pavitra Nam**

There is a tradition of performing nam in the month of Bhadra is called Pavitra nam. The Bodo women folk perform this type of nam everyday in the whole month of Bhada.

After performing the nam, prasads are distributed among the women and the other participants including young and children. In this way it is seen that the Bodos have come far away from their aboriginal beliefs and practices related to Bathouism.
G. Folk Songs Associated With Marriage Ceremony

There is a tradition of Juran diya among the Bodo followers of neo-vaishavism which is one of the important customs of the neo-vaishnavite society. This ceremony takes place in the bride’s house where the groom’s mother offers her ornaments, traditional wedding dress i.e. mekhela chador made from pat silk or muga silk. Besides these she is also presented with a big fish, a pair of betel nut etc. which are symbols of prosperous married life. The women folk from the bride’s party attend the ceremony and sing songs while the formal presentation function continues.

Various songs associated with the marriage ceremony are sung and performed by the Bodo women folk of Sonitpur district. These are—Pani tola git, dora adora git, goxai pujar git, sradhar git, pinda sona git, Koina Sojowa git etc.

For example, the following marriage song is sung:

Sajou duralir hat

Amar daliloi he

Kare ghanta loa Ratha e mure loa mala

Ja muhalai jaba lage nakariba heca

Jai hatate Daibakir
The above song describes the bridegroom’s mother as Daiboki, the mother of Srikrishna. In the first part of the song, her ceremonial wearing are described, then her sensational mind and then the path is described as the path of Gakul. The tank or river from where the water would be lifted is described as holy river Yamuna.

The singing of the marriage song is closely interlinked with the different customs and other rituals of marriage. For each and every occasion observed in a traditional marriage, the women folk have one or the other types of songs to match with it. The marriage songs are part

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39. Informant: Daibaki Boro, Namati Habigaon, Binduguri, Sonitpur
and parcel of a traditional marriage in the traditional Assamese society. This is also true in case of other local communities like the Bodos.