CHAPTER II
ASSAMESE FOLK DRAMA AND ANKYĀ NAT

FOLKLORE OF ASSAM:

The infra-structure of Assamese Culture is constituted by different races, tribals and non-tribals. The racial assimilation of the different ethnic groups, races, tribals and non-tribals, Aryans and Non-Aryans have made Assamese nation and its distinct culture. Modern Assam is a part of the early Prāgjyotishpura and Kāmrupa. This has been nicely described in the Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Purāṇas, Kālika-purāṇa, Yogini-tantra etc. The name Prāgjyotisha is commonly associated with the Lauhitya, Kāmrupa and Kāmākhyā. Dr. B.K. Kākati comments that the word Prāgjyotisha is the combination of some Non-Aryans words Pagarjun (jo)-tie (C = Ch), meaning a region of extensive hills.

In the Rāmāyana Prāgjyotisha is called as a city. Prāgjyotisha was a famous kingdom in early times which is called a Mleccha kingdom ruled over by the King Naraka, Bhagadatta. In classical sanskrit literature Prāgjyotisha and Kāmrupa occurs side by side, for example Kālidāsa’s literature.

1. Ghoudhury, P.C. : The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the twelfth Century A.D., p. 26
2. Kakati, B.K. : The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā, p. 6
3. Purani Kāmarupar Dharmar Dhāra, p. 9
4. Kiskandha Kanda, Sarga 42
According to B.K. Kakati the word Kāmrupa is a combination of two non-Aryan words, i.e., Kāmru or Kāmrut. The first available epigraphic record mentioning the name Kāmrupa is the Allahabad inscription of Samudra Gupta. 5 B.K. Kakati points out that the word Kāmrupa symbolises a new cult. The very word Kāmrupa-Kāmā-khyā suggests that the cult is to be derived from some Austric divinity. 6

There are diverse opinions regarding the origin of the name Assam. The word is an anglicised form of the Assamese word Asama. 7 It is connected with the Āhoms or Shān. The term Āhom seems to be originated from the Āsam, (āsām > āsām > āham > āhom). Sir E. Gait thought that the term Assam came from āsam. 8 According to the tradition of Āhoms, the modern name Assam is derived from āsama in the sense of 'unequalled' or 'peerless'. B.K. Kakati points out that in Tāi Chām means 'to be defeated' and with the prefix 'ā', the formation 'āsam' would be 'undefeated', 'conquerors'.

From this point of view, if this is right, the name āsam was used for the first time to the Chām invaders and gradually the conquered land by them and lastly the entire Brahmaputra valley has been associated by the name. Moreover, there is another opinion regarding the origin of the name Assam which, according to Baden-Powell, 'is most probably traceable to (the

5. Ibid, p. 13
7. Choudhury, P.C.: The History of the Civilisation of the People of Assam to the twelfth Century A.D., p. 25
8. Gait, E. History of Assam, pp. 245-246
Boro) Hā-Com the low or level country.9

According to the Epics and Purānas the earliest inhabitants of Prāgjyotishapura and Kāmarupa were the Kirātas, Nisādas, Cinās, Asura and other tribes. From the linguistic and anthropological standpoint it may be say that different groups and people like Negrito, Astro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burmese, Aryans etc. lived in the early Kāmarupa. From the religious point of view, the dwellers of Assam may be divided into Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddha, Jaina, Sikh, etc. Sometimes the dwellers of Assam may be divided into two wide categories, i.e., tribal and non-tribal. The tribes, non-tribes have contributed immensely for the formation of Assamese Culture. Hence by Assamese Culture we mean the Composite Culture which has evolved by the ceaseless efforts of the different ethnic groups. Assam has been a land of controversy over language. Though Assamese is the chief language of this state, this language has not originated from a particular source and it is not rich from a particular angle, rather it is constituted by the different elements of tribals and non-tribals. Assamese language and culture have developed through assimilation from contributions of the various ethnic groups. The Aryan culture of Assam has taken a distinct pattern with the intermixture of non-Aryan groups.10

One of the important characteristics of Assamese society is that most of the dwellers are peasants. Their pattern

9. The Indian Village Community, p. 135
of living, customs, rituals, lifestyle are tradition oriented. The villages of Assam are the root source of Assamese culture. Most of the belief of Assam is closely related with agriculture, rice and tols of agriculture. Handloom, textile, and folk-performing arts are intimately connected with rice and crops. In social life people perform so many rituals and festivals and these are also based on agriculture. The popular festival of Bihu is agro-based. Several festivals of Assam have evolved through religious culture. So we can easily infer that dance and drama are deeply connected with religious festivals. Saivism and Saktism was the popular form of religion from ancient time. So many temples of Siva has constructed in many places of Assam for the worship of Siva. The devotees have performed many festivals during Siva-rātri and other occasions. Dance was the main attraction in connection with the Siva worship. In Assam dance was first introduced in the temple of Siva and a class of Nāti was in every temple.

In the Cultural history of Assam temples and shrines constructed by the Ahom kings have immense value. The worship of Durgā is an all India level festival in connection with Saktism. Among the regional festival 'Manasā pujā' (worship of Manasā Devi) and 'kāli pujā' and 'Sarak pujā' at Goalpara district are famous in Assam. Relating with this worship there are so many dramatic and quasi-dramatic institutions which have taken a

13. __________ : Asmar Loka Samaskriti, p. 178
great role in the folk-culture of Assam. Moreover, the tribals of Assam worship so many Gods and Goddesses and on the basis of their worship several dance form has flourished.

The worship of Visnu was evidently prevalent in Assam from early times. In the last decade of the fifteenth century Sankardeva introduced the Neo-Vaisaava movement which is an epoch making phenomenon in the religious and social life of medieval Assam. The movement impact on religious literature, fine arts and social life of Assam is indeed great and abiding. Through the Bhakti Movement of Sankardeva, Mādhavadeva and others Assamese Culture has got a new model. The most important characteristic of the Vaishnavism of Assam is the Ṣatra institution and Nāmghara through which the faith was propagated. Satras and Nāmgharas are the very source of inspiration and integration among the different section of the people and the development of various cultural items. As a center of cultural and social development of Assam, the Ṣatra and the Nāmghara institutions are remarkable in the life of Assam.

Though each region has its own cultural and social characteristics, they are one through many, their fundamental identity is one. The characteristics of folk-culture is deeprooted in the Assamese Culture. Like the Assamese Culture, Folk Culture of Assam has also developed through the process of assimilation and

16. Ibid, Introduction, xii
integration. Folklore of Assam comprises its folk-literature, folk-custom, folk-beliefs, folk-songs, riddles, proverbs, magic, folk-medicines, performing folk-arts etc. It is the lore of the people. So it includes all human activities related to society and the world. Folklore of Assam may be classified into four kinds—Oral folklore; (2) Social folk custom and rituals; (3) Material culture and (4) Performing folk-arts. Oral folklore covers folk-song, folk-tale (Sādhu-kathā), folk-language etc. Assam may proud for her rich heritage of folk songs (Kabita). Bihu song, Husori, Biā-nām, maisali, Mout song, Bandanā or Stuti-git, Ballad (i.e., Badan Barphukanar geet; Joymatiর geet; Bāramā-rahir geet, Moni-konwarar geet, Phulkonwarar geet, Janāgāvarur geet, Haradatta-Viradattar geet, Kamalā Kumarir geet, etc.). Nisukani geet, dhāi geet, karma geet, Garakhīr geet, Nāngeli geet etc. are in the categories of loka-kabita. Folk tale deals with legends, myths, sādukathā etc. Oral folklore covers riddles, idioms, proverbs etc. While social folk-custom deals with festivals, game-sports, folk-medicine and folk-religion, on the other hand material culture deals with tools related to fooding, ornaments, painting instruments of music etc.

Origin of folk-drama:

Performing folk-arts is one of the important powerful traditional mass media for communication in folklore, performing folk

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17. Sarma, N.: Assamiya Loka Samaskritir Ābhās, p. 38
arts comprises traditional folk-songs, folk-dance and folk-drama. B. Va-ta points out that we can notice the different elements of performing folk-art in the festivals and rituals. Generally, folk-drama is a dramatic institution having dramatic qualities connected with folk-culture. Folk-drama is a significant part of the performing folk-arts which is written on the basis of rural life and transmitted orally. The term 'Nātyadharmi' and 'Lokadharmi' has been mentioned in the Bharat's Nātyasāstra. Folk-drama is not a branch of drama, it is a dramatical institution. In the primitive society people celebrated various socio-religious festivals. Dance was the main attraction of these festivals. Gradually elements of drama has mixed-up with traditional dance and songs and ultimately folk-drama began. Folk-drama is primarily religious in character. The first stage of drama was folk model. It is commonly said that drama springs from religious institutions in connection with its performance of dance and songs. Evidences have found about the existence of drama from the time of Bharata's Nātya Sāstra.

Imitation is a natural faculty of man. This imitating faculty is gradually improve from the childhood. This quality is not strong in the animal world and inanimate classes. Man has a general tendency to imitate the characters from other animals or other men. Sometimes, it is said that drama has originated from this primitive

'Folk-drama began in primitive pagan rites and magic ceremonies of song and dance.'
faculty of man. Bharata's *Nāṭya Sāstra* shows that drama is the imitation of action.  

Men and their doings (*Loka-Vṛtta-నukarana*) have to be represented on the stage, so drama is called Sanskrit by the generic term rupaka, that which gives form. According to Dhananjay drama is the imitation of situation.  

Aristotle has also pointed a similar view. For Aristotle, drama is an imitation of action in the form of action. In most civilised countries like Greek, India, Egypt, Rome, England etc. drama had originated from religious festivals.  

According to James Frazer, such magical dramas have played a great part in the popular festivals of Europe. Dionysus was the god of fertility whose powers applied especially to wine, the wealth of Greece. Four festivals were held throughout the year in his honour. These were: (1) Festival of vintage, sometime it is called country or Rural Doconysia, it was held in late December and early January; (2) Festival of the Wine Press, held in the late January and early February; (3) the third was the festival of Tasting, held in late February and early March; (4) the fourth and last was the great Festival of Celebration, or the City Dionysia, held in the late March and early April. Greek drama came to flower in this last Festival.  

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22. *'Lokavritanukarana Natyamatong Miya Kritam' - Nayata Sāstra*, 1/109
23. *'Abstanukriti Naytam', Dasarupaka, 1/7 - Dhananjay*
25. Roberts, Vera Mowry: *On State, A history of Theatre*, p. 21
27. Ibid., pp. 21-22
devotees were dancing, singing chorus and it was Thespis a
director of choruses, who for the first time arranged dialogue
by penetrating an actor. In this way Thespis connected the essen-
tial element of drama. 28

The English drama had its origin in religion, it grew out
of the liturgy of the Church. The early religious plays were,
broadly of two types — The Mysteries, based upon subjects taken
from the Bible and the miracles dealing with the lives of saints.
This early drama was frankly didactic in nature. The complex ser-
mons of the wholly books, the saint tried to preached to the
common people through the medium of performance. As a result the
category of Mystery and Miracles came out.

In India the history of drama is very old. India has a very
rich theatre tradition which goes well beyond the history period
of her civilization. Several dramatic elements may be observed
in the two great epics, i.e., the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata,
Vedic literature, Pāṇini's Astādhai, Patanjali's Mahāvaishya,
Buddhistic literature etc. Keith points out that the dialogue
hymns in the Rgveda are the root of drama. 29 The rudiments of
drama are found in Rgvedic dialogues. The Vedic rituals are
full of theatrical elements, so much so that they can be termed
as cult-dramas. From these elements evolved the Sanskrit drama. 30

Apart from the Vedic literature two great Indian epics, the
Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata speak of flourishing theatrical
activity and emergence of drama a chief mode of popular enter-
tainment. Stories, instrumental music, dances and humorous plays

29. Keith, A. B. : The Sanskrit Drama in Its Origin, Development,
Theory and Practice, p. 14
30. Varod Pande, M.L. : Invitation to Indian Theatre, p. 25
were liked by the people of the epic age. The literature inspired by Buddhism and also other contemporary works give us interesting information about Indian theatre, particularly, about the theatre of ancient era. We find numerous references to the flourishing theatre of the common folk. It is said that the delightful elements of music and dance and the funny character of a jester is a gift of common man’s theatre to the theatre of the elite or Sanskrit theatre.

Ancient Greeks have recorded their love for Indian people, music and dancing. Many dramatic forms enumerated by the Sanskrit dramaturgists under the heading — Uparupakas or minor dramatic forms describe well the folk-theatre scenes of ancient and medieval India. Most of the Uparupakas as described by the Biswanath though effort has made for Sanskritisation has expressed the characteristics of folk theatre. 31 Mahānātaka is the good analogy of Sanskrit drama that the Sanskrit dramatis were influenced by the popular folk-theatre. S.K. De writes, 32 Having regard to this fact as well as to the peculiar trend and treatment of such works as Mahānātaka, we find no special reasons to doubt vernacular semi-dramatic entertainments of popular origin must have reacted on the literary Sanskrit drama and influence its forms and manners to such an extent as to produce irregular and apparently non-descript types. 32 Like the

31. Sarmā, S.: Paramparāgata Prācyā Nātyābhinaya, p. 15
Sutradhāra of Ankiyā Nāṭ in Assam and the Adhikāri of Yātrā in Bengal, the detail direction of acting and description has to be found in the Mahānātaka's. In the Middle age the Vaishnava Bhakti Movement greatly influenced by the traditional-folk-dramatic form. The Vaishnava Saints used this kind of media for the propagation of their faiths. A Rangachārya comments that the influence of the Vaishnava Bhakti doctrine is responsible for a new trend in the folk-stage.33 Despite the influence of the different religious waves and the developing secularisation in the presentation of themes — the forms of Indian folk-drama and dance were always able to preserve their ancient cores. Some stock characters of classical drama-opening prayer to the deity, the Sutradhāra to introduce the theme and a clown are often adopted in the folk drama.34

Indian folk and traditional theatre scene is extremely rich, varied and enchanting. There are many folk theatre form in the different parts of India. Of course, it has regional variety and some peculiar characteristics. After the decline of the Sanskrit dramas folk theatre developed in various regional languages from the 14th century to the 19th century. Before the rise of the Western drama the upper classes of India in order to meet their social and religious crisis sought the help of the people and adopted some of their ways of life.35 According to S. Pradhān,

33. Rangachārya, A.: The Indian Theatre, p. 74
34. Majumdar, S.: Uttarbanger Lokeṛa, Preface
35. Ibid, Preface.
jātrās of these periods were nothing but a development of folk theatre. Bharatendu Harish Chandra who was regarded as the pioneer for the birth of Hindi drama used folk convention, the opening prayer song, tabuleaux, comic interlude, duets, stylised speech and combed them with the Western form. In Bengal Girish Chandra Ghose and other playwrights followed the same form.

History of the study of drama from the different parts of the world gives us sufficient information and data that drama is eclesiastical in origin and it also reflects that dance and songs were intimately connected with the religious festivals. Hence, from this point we can infer that drama has evolved through the mixture of guests, mimes, movements, riddles, idoms or by linking dialogue. A.H. Crapke writes, 'like the dance, the popular dance is being ultimately derived from this popular type, the statement is justified that the drama itself is an outgrowth of religious and cult. Drama never got a concrete shape and found its perfection at its very birth. First time it was in the 'folk form (Loukika rupa) or 'folk-drama' which is full of dance and songs. M.L. Varad Pande remarks that Theatre started in India in the form of dancing by her aboriginals. They dance to emote feelings, express wonderment and fear at changing cycles of nature. Dance was also their tool of communication, method of education and means of preservation of tradition. Dance is the mother of theatre. In this way drama has been developed from

36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
its traditional folk-stage when it has fulfilled from all artistic conditions i.e., guests, dialogues, language, artistic side etc. Although drama evolved from its traditional folk-form, nevertheless, it is noticed that parallely a strong tradition of folk-drama has been flowing along with the fulfledged drama in all countries.

Characteristics of folk-drama:

The common characteristics of folk-drama may be detailed in the following way:

1. Folk-drama in the real sense of the term is the integration of acting, music and dancing. According to J.C. Mathur, Regional and folk-drama has been a mixed form embracing dialogue, dance and music. T.F. Ordiss has also offered a similar view. He writes, "The shaping factor in folk-drama was the sword dance with its circle, chorus and carefully concerted movements."

2. The subject-matter of folk-drama is generally religious and didactic. Under the impact of Vaishnava Bhakti Movement the story of Krishna, of his childhood, of Radha's love for him and of his love-exploits in general became a very popular theme on the folk-stage. Till now the themes of folk-drama were either heroic from the <i>Mahābhārata</i> or the ideal conduct on the model of the character of Rāma, the hero of the <i>Rāmāyana</i>. Of course, folk-drama in the real sense of the term is based on episodes from the lives of the people.

3. Folk-drama is an entertainment to people and simplicity is its vital force. Everywhere there is simplicity in the use of language, theme or production.

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40. Mathur, J.C.: Drama in the Rural India, p. 106

41. Quoted from the Violet Alford's book Sword Dance and Drama, R.M. Dorson, pp. 4-5
(4) Folk-drama is not static. It is dynamic. Changing state is one of the chief feature of folk-drama. In modern times most of the folk-dramas are the product of particular educated individual and this form of folk-drama greatly influenced by the urban life.

Such type of folk-drama loses the simplicity of ancient time. This type of writings having folk-dramatic characteristics is regarded as literary folk-drama.

(5) Folk-dramas are secular form of performing folk arts. These are not confined with a particular community or a particular religion. Everybody is writing, acting, dancing and enjoying.

(6) In the early days, plays were performed either in the palace or in the temple-yard and that too on special or festive occasions. But in the case of folk-drama the village cross-roads or an open space become the site (Rangabhumi) for the stage.

(7) Make-up and ornaments is also an important feature of traditional folk-drama. Various kind of colours and mask is used in the rural folk-theatre.

(8) There is no clear difference between Purvaranga and Prasthavanā in most of the folk-theatre. Of course, Bhāvanā in Assam and Kutiyattam in Kerala there is differences between Purvaranga and Prasthāvanā.

(9) Jor, Āriā, Mahatas were the traditional tools for lighting system in the folk-theatre. In modern times electric lights and patromax light has been applied in place of these traditional tools.

(10) The character of Vidusaka or Clown (Bahuwa) takes play a vital role in almost of the folk-drama.

(11) Sutradhāra (narrator) is the director and he also plays a significant role in the folk-theatre.

42. Bhattacharjee, G. : Bānglā Lok Nātya Samiksā, p. 48
(12) There is an improvised room.

(13) Scrapes is used in the traditional theatre. J.C. Māthur thought that the curtain in the traditional theatre is used as an (i) exciting introduction to the principal characters and (ii) as a part of the preliminary ritual of homage to deities.43

(14) In the traditional folk-theatre, the characters of women have been performed by the male actors about thirteenth or fourteenth year boys. Exception is to be found in South Indian theatre.

In spite of these common features, the regional folk-stage has some distinctive features depending on the living conditions, natural surroundings, outside influences and other factors.

**Origin of Assamese Folk-drama:**

Assam and the North-East India is the paradise of folk-culture. Assam may specially be proud its rich tradition of Folk-theatre or the quasi-dramatic institutions. From the earliest time of civilization Prāgjyotishpura-Kāmerupa was pioneer of music-dance and acting. This view has supported by the anthropologists.44

Bharata's Nātyasāstra makes a four-fold classification of pravṛttis or local usages in dramatic representation. These pravṛttis are different from each other on account of their differences in manners, language-taste, etc. in the different parts of India. These pravṛttis are daksinātya, avanti, drahamāgamdhī and pāncalāmaddhyamā. Among these four drahamāgamdhī is the local usage of the eastern countries Anga, Banga, Kalinga, Odra, Magadha, Nepal, and Prāgjyotish. Scholars opines that the Nātyasāstra of Bharata has written before the 1st century B.C.45 From this it

43. Māthur, J.C. : Drama in Rural India, p. 21
44. Datta, B.N. : Asamiyā Sangeetarātithya, p. 3
may be easily assume that there was a special kind of dramatic form before 1st century B.C. According to Manoranjan Sāstri, Hastacurveda may give us some valuable information about the early introduction of dance-music and acting.46 Pālakāpya, the author of Hastacurveda, his father was a Sāmagāyana. The name Sāmagāyana refers to the antiquity of dance-music and acting. Sāstri pointed out that the āśram of Pālakāpya was seems to be situated near at the Parasurām Kunda. According to Mahāmohopādyā Hara Prasād Sāstri, his time was 5th to 6th century. From this may be infer that before 5th-6th century the tradition of dance music and dramatic form was strong. If we accept the systematic existence of dramatic art in India from the evidences of Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata then, similarly, it will be reasonable to accept the existence of a developed systematic dramatic art form in Assam by the evidence of Pālakāpya.47

We have found some information about dance-music and dramatic form from the description of the Chinese traveller Huien-Tsiang. While the Chinese traveller came in Prāgyotishpura, the king was Kumār Bāhāskaravarman. The king has arranged a party of dance and music for the guest of honour. This party was continued for one month in every day.48 Bāhāskaravarman ruled over Kāmarupa during 7th century A.D. In the 9th century A.D, the king of Kāmrupa was Vanamālavarman. In his Copper Plate inscription a temple to Hātaka-sulin Siva the devotees worshipped Siva with dance and music.49

47. Ibid, p. 3
48. Neog, M. : Sattriya Dances of Assam and Their Rhythms, p. 3
The word daluhāngana has mentioned in this inscription. Daluhāngana means group, angana means girl, hence daluhāngana means temple women or dancer of temple. In the Bargāon inscription of King Ratnapāla reference is made to Nāytesvārā Samkara, the master of the art of dancing ever exhibiting tāṇḍavaś in his movements.50 In the same dynasty the epigraph of Indrapāla is eulogised (praised) to him as ‘anavadyavidyādhāra’. We also find some information about music, dancing and dance-ornaments from the inscription of King Isvaraghosa (10th, 11th centuries). In this inscription refers to professional singers, called sutas.51

Sculptures of Assam give us valuable information about our early practices of dancing, music and folk-dramas. Among the early sculptures, the Natarāja icon found at Sibsāgar and preserved in the Assam State Museum, dancing figures, Cole Park, Tezpur, dancing figures Deo Parbat, Numaligarh, dancing Genesis, Kāmākhya temple are remarkable.52

The Kālikā-Purāṇa also gives some evidences regarding dancing and music. In the Kālikā-Purāṇa (11th or 12 centuries) there are numerous references to vocal and instrumental music.

In Vedachārya’s Smṛti-ratnākara mentioned the celibralin of ‘Jāgor institution’ on the occasion of Visnu-Puja and Siva puja.53 So many songs in the ‘Charyāchāriyāvinichay’ composed by Jidha who was a man of Kāmrupa. The songs of Charyāpads is the classical

50. Neog, M.: Tradition and Style, p. 16
51. Isic, .
form of music with full of rāg-tāl. These are the sources which help us to know the existence of dramatic institution in early period of Assam.

The Pre-Vaishnava period of Assamese literature is fundamentally lyrical in character. The terms Nat, Nati has mentioned several times in the Rāmāyana of Mādhav Kandali. Moreover, the name of some musical instruments like drum (dhol), rām-tāl, kar-tāl, Tokāri, dotārā, bānā, kendarā, tabalā, dagar, etc. has also noted in Kandali’s Rāmāyana. The name of some musical instruments, has mentioned in the ‘Babrubāhanar Yuddha’ by Haribar Vipra. Another Assamese poet Surya Khari Dalbagya in his Daṣaṇgrājbhān-cāvakti has also mentioned the name of some musical instruments like sankha, ghantā, kartāl, dāk, dhol, dogor, nāgārā, khol, jīnjnīri etc. In the Vaishnava period, Assamese culture has remarkably developed in its various branches. This period is regarded as the Golden period in the history of Assamese culture. Mahāpurusha Sankaradeva composed operatic plays among the people for the propagation of Bhaktidharma which is popularly known as ekasarana dharma (i.e., devotion to one God). Sankaradeva introduced a type of drama, best known as Ankyā nāt which is a powerful massmedia for communication among the different sections of people.

Under the impact of Bhakti Movement in Assam folk-drama flourished into a new model. For example, Ojā-pāli. Sankaradeva helped the form of ‘Biā-gowā Ojā-pāli’ to propagate his religion. Negariting at Dergāon, Hayagriva Mādhavi at Hājo, Billeswar at Belsor, Parihareswar dewalaya at Dubi (near Pāthsālā) had dancing halls attached to them in which navadāsis danced to appease the
Deities.

The temples, i.e., Biswanāth at Sonitpur, Devadāsi, Ojā-pāli and Jātṛīyā nṛtya — these three dance style of Assam has been blowing from very ancient time.

All these above noted evidences help us to know the strong heritage of Assamese dance, music and folk-drama.

Types of Folk-drama:

There are different opinions about the classification of folk-dramas. According to some scholars folk-drama may be divided into two, depending on its nature. Other scholars divided folk-drama into three or four groups.

The folk-dramas of Assam may be divided into three classes:

1. Dance-song dominated ones, (ii) Quasi-dramatic and (iii) Jātṛā. This classification is not effective to cover the numerous kinds of Assamese folk-drama. Following are the different types of folk-drama in Assam: 1. The ojā-pāli, 2. Putulā-nās, 3. Dhuliā Performance, 4. Khuliā-bhāvariā, 5. The Bhāvariā performance, 6. Pacati, 7. Goalpariā Lok-nṛitya etc.

1. The Ojā-pāli Party:

The ojā-pāli, party of singers is one of the oldest form of semi-dramatic institutions among the folk-dramas in Assam. Evidences found from inscriptions, anthropology, literature.

54. Upādhyā, Krishnadeva: Lok Sāhitya Ki Bhumikā, p. 170
55. Parmar, Shyam: Traditional Mass Media, p. 8
sculptures etc. help us to infer the antiquity of the tradition of Ojā-pāli. Of course, we do not found any direct proofs for the existence of Pre-Vaisnavite Ojā-pāli.⁵⁷ P. Chaliha infers that it is the institution of 8th - 10th century⁵⁸ A.D. N. Sarma points out that the Ojā-pāli song springs from the classical (Mārga) tradition of Indian music.⁵⁹ If we accept this view, then naturally the Ojā-pāli party will be the institution of 1st Century B.C. This kind of folk-theatre is very popular in Kamrup (undivided) and Darrang districts. Sankaradeva introduced this institution in the satras and from this time the practices of Ojā-pāli has been running.

The term 'ojā' derived from the Sanskrit term 'upādhyāya' which means 'master', perceptor. The chief narrator and the chief leader of the Ojā-pāli troupe is called Ojā. His associates are called Pālis. The ojā-pāli party is formed by one ojā, generally from five to seven pālis and one Dāinā-pāli. The status of Dāinā-pāli is next to the Ojā. Dāinā-pāli is the right hand assistant⁶⁰ of Ojā. The Ojā put on a very special kind of dress which is mostly resembles with that of a Sutradhāra in an Ankiyā nāt. While the pālis put on ordinary Assamese dress like Dhuti, Shirt, Chādar (scarf.) etc. The Ojā must be expert on dancing and the Dāinā-pāli must be humorist. The principal character Ojā would recite a

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57. Neog, M. : Purani Assamīyā Samāj Āru Sanskriti, p. 130
59. Sarma, N.C. : Asomor Ojāpāli, p. 11
mythological story begin with a diha and the entire group would join in the dancing and singing. The Pālis uses khutī-tāl. The Dāinā Pāli has an additional duty. The Dāinā-Pāli not only recites with companies, but also he takes part with the oja through dialogues. He explains the difficult points of the story in simple language. This humorous dialogues between oja and Dāinā Pāli is the centre of main attraction. The dialogues and gestures between ojā and Dāinā Pāli makes it as dramatical institution. But unlike the performance of fullfledged plays Ojā-pāli party need not uses any kind of screen or special kind of stage. The Ojā-Pāli party performs in the middle or in one extremity of the audience.

The Ojā-pāli party has been divided into different ways by different writers. H. Bhattacharyya, divided Ojā-pāli party into three according to topic they select for recitation. S.N. Sarmā and M. Neog divided this into two. A.C. Hazarikā divided Ojā-pāli of Mangaldoi area into two and he divided Ojā-pāli of North Kāmrup area into four kinds. However, from the stand point of text, context, structure, method of performance, the Ojā-pāli party may be divided into two kinds —

1. Ojā-pāli based on Epics and
2. Ojā-pāli not based on Epics.

62. Neog, M. : Tradition and Style, p. 21
63. Sarmā, S.N. : Asamiyā Nātya Sāhitya, p. 4
64. Hazarikā, A.C. : Manchalekhā, pp. 197-206
64. Sarmā, M.S. : Asamar Ojā-pāli, pp. 22-50
The first type of ējā-pālī chorus performs the episode of the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. The following forms include this type of Ojā-pāli chorus: (a) Vyāsa jangit or Byāh-goā-ōjā-pāli or Byāhar-ōjā-pāli or Savā-goā-ōjā-pāli; (b) Rāmāyana-jangit or Rāmāyana-goā-ōjā-pāli or Rāymond-ōjā-pāli; (c) Vaurā-ōjā-pāli or Vāuriā-ōjā-pāli or Virā; (d) Durgbārī ojā-pāli; (e) Satrīyā-ōjā-pāli or Bahiā ojā-pāli; (f) Pāncali ojā-pāli and (g) Duliari ojā-pāli.

The second type of ējā-pāli party do not generally performs the episodes based on Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata and Purāṇas. This type of ojā-pāli party recites the episodes connected, particularly, on the occasion of the worship of the serpent goddess Manasā or Padmā or Bisahari. From the stand point of subject-matter this type of ojā-pāli party, again may be divided into the following five forms:

(a) Suknāni ojā-pāli (from Sukavi Nārāyana the author of the padmā-purāṇa), or Rang-goā ojā-pāli; (b) Bisahari ān or Geet-goā; (c) Kare pujār ān or Kare ān; (d) Padmā or Paddā-Purāṇār ān; and (e) Tukuriā ojā-pāli.

Moreover, there are some other form of ojā-pāli party like Nagalā ojā-pāli or ojā-pāli nṛta. This type of ojā-pāli is born by the assimilation of Byāh-goā ojā-pāli and Satrīyā ojā-pāli.

Apti ojā-pāli party is another form of ojā-pāli party. Generally, Apti-ōjā-pāli party performs the episode of Rāmāyana Mahābhārata and Purāṇas arranged by women.
The Vyāh-gowa oja-pāli seems to have been connected with the Vaisnava tāntric form of worship of Vāsudeva. The performance of the oja-pāli party starts with the ārati. There are about 27 rāgas employed in this type of choral singing. The oja-pāli party is chiefly connected with religious context. From this point it is a kind of performing religious art. As a powerful traditional folk-media it acts in the various aspects of human life like, social, political, ethical etc.

(2) The Puppet theatre:

The puppet dance (putulā nāc) is a form of popular ancient semi-dramatic institution. India has a long and rich tradition of puppet theatre. Ancient Indian literature, including the great epics, Kāhābhārata in Ban Parba frequently refer to puppet plays. The existence of puppet plays has mentioned in the Kathā Jārit Sāgar, Bhāgabata etc. According to some scholars like St. Kanok and Peschale, the puppet dance were the fore-runner of drama. Of course, Keith and other Critics put forwarded an opposite opinion. String, rod, glove and shadow—these are the four basic styles of puppets are found in India. India is famous for two popular forms of entertainment -- Marionettes or puppet theatre and shadow theatre. Today, many parts of India (like Rājasthān, Karnātaka, Tāmilnādu, Orissā, Kerala, West Bengal, Assam)—Puppet plays are popular form of entertainment. Exactly when, how and where the puppet dance evolved and appeared on the Assamese scene

65. Anog, K. : Jānkārdeva and His Times, p. 22
67. Varad Pānde, M.L. : Invitation to Indian Theatre, p. 64
is not known. The word 'Pañcālikā' is used for the word doll in the Kālikā-Purāṇa and perhaps the word 'Pañcālikā behār' implies puppet dance. The probable time of 'Kālikā Purāṇa' is 11th century A.D. From this point of view puppet theatre may be said as the institution of before 11th century. According to some scholars puppet theatre is prior to ojā-pāli party and ojā-pāli has originated from puppet dance. 68

Each party of puppet dance consists of about four or five man. One is called the manager of the party who is also called Sutradhāra or master, one is known as Bāyana and the remaining are called pālis.

The role of the Sutradhāra is very significant in Puppet theatre. The puppets made of light soft wood or cardboard known as 'Kunhilā' are jointed and gaudily dressed. The puppets are manipulated with a string by the Sutradhāra from behind a screen. Bāyan is the chief helper of Sutradhāra. He along with his assistants creates an artistic atmosphere by using musical instruments, like khol (small drums) and Tāl (cymbals). Episodes of the Rāmāyana are generally made the subject of such plays. 69 Though there is no language in the mouth, and life-force of the dolls yet there is heart effecting sight. 70 The puppet theatre is done at night.

68. Sarma, S.N. : Asamiyā Nātya Sāhitya, p. 4
69. Choudhury, N. : Prakshāpat, p. 6
   Bardoloi, P.(ed.) 'Putalā Nās Arū Eyār Bhabichat' Article, P. Goswāmi, p. 6
70. Medhi, K.R. : Studies in the Vaishnava Literature and Culture of Assam, p. 68
    Bhattacharyya, H.: Assamiyā Nātya Sāhityar Jilingani, p. 78
In Assam Puppet Theatre was very popular at Nalbari, Bajali area. Now-a-days, due to some socio-economic and political conditions the current of puppet plays become stagnant.

(3) **The Dhuliā Performance** (The Dhuliā Party or the Party of drummers):

From the primitive times the party of drummers has been playing a very important role on social and religious functions. The Dhuliā party of Kāmrup and Darrang districts as a semi-dramatic social institution gives much pleasure to the rural people.

The Dhuliā party of Assam may be divided into four forms — (i) Kāmrupiā dhuliā, (ii) Bardhuliā party, (iii) Joydhuliā party and (iv) Dhepa Dhuliā party.

(i) **Kāmrupiā Dhuliā Party**:

From ancient time Kāmrupiā dhuliā party has been playing a very significant role on the folk-life of Assam. South Kāmrup area (Dakhin Kol), Barbhag, Bangaon, Bahjani, Kaithalkuchi, Barnibāri, Bālilesā, Chāndkuchi, Datarāgāon, Bārigāong of present Nalbari districts, Pānbāri, Roumāri, Sālada, Batiāmāri-carna, Uijgirā, Kārhānā of present Barpeta districts were the Centre of Kāmrupiādhuliā party.71

The Kāmrupiā dhuliā party performs their institutions by the invitation of the committee of jāvā, Puja or other festivals and marriage ceremony. Such type of performance was known in Kāmrupi dialect as 'Bittāl'. Each Dhuliā party consists of

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71. Assam Nātya Sanmilan: Rangamancha, pp. 44-45
    Das, G.C. (ed.): Dakhin Kol, p. 2
men from five or six (not less than five or six) up to 30 or 35 according to the nature of their performance. During their performances they use generally Dhol, Cymbals (Tāl), mask of goblins, demons varieties of physical feats, powdered-rice where necessary, etc. The Kāmrupī dhuliā party is constituted by three kinds of dhuliās — main drummer (Ghāidhuliā), Bhāwariā, Kharmarā and Kustīdeā. There are two Ghāidhuliā in each party. They are also known as Gurordhuliā. The Ghāidhuliā is the leader of the party. During performance his character is like the character of Sutradhāra in Ankiyā Nāt. Each dhuliā party must consists of at least two or three Bhāwariā. One is called main Bhāwariā (Mukhya Bhāwariā). The main Bhāwariā begins the Bhew. Other remaining dhuliās are known as Kharmarā and Kustīdeā. The dhuliā party starts their functions with the beats of small drums and small cymbals. The drummers and the assistants put on multi-coloured and spanglid dress. After 10 or 15 minutes the another troops enter to the khola and they begin to beat big drums and big cymbals. The second stage of their performance is known as kholā phureni bājanā.

In this stage only one drummer beat a small drum with the help of another man who beats a small tāl and they moves three or four times on the place of their performance. Generally this is done by the Bāyana who conducts the items in the fourth stage which is known as Vāirāuthā. In the third stage the drummers show various acrobatic feats, such as jumping, skipping, running,

72. Bhattacharjee, H. : Assāmiyā Nātya Sāhityar Jilingani, p. 75
73. Khola — a particular place where the dhulia party perform their show.
walking on stilts, rope-dancing and the like. They give acrobatic performances like the modern Circus parties. The fourth stage is farcical devices with song and dance to excite laughter. In this stage the party frequently exhibit scenes of drama. Pieces borrowed from the popular episodes of the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas and other sources. Sometimes they perform stories based on contemporary problems in their own dialects.

(ii) Bardhuliā party:

There is another form of dhuliā party in undivided Kamrup and Darrang districts which is known as Bardhuliā party. This type of party is connected with the worship of Visnu. The structure of Bardhuliā party is same with the Kamrupia dhuliā. The only difference is in the context from the other dhuliā party.

(iii) Joydhuliā party:

Joydhuliā party of Goalpāra district is another form of dhuliā party which have fulfilled all the properties of dhuliā performance. The only difference of Joydhuliā party, from the other form of dhuliā performance is that where dhuliā performance have only one of drum but on the other hand joydhuliā have twice party of drum. Except this other conditions remain same.

(iv) Dhepa Dhuliā Party:

Dhepa Dhuliā party of Darrang district is another popular form of quasi-dramatic institution. Once the king of Darrangia and the people were attracted by the Dhepa Dhuliā party as a popular form of entertainment. Dhepa-Dhuliā was essential on

74. Bhattacharyya, B.K.(ed.): Prakāsh, 8th issue 1987, p. 81 (Krittumukhi Darrangia Dhepa Dhuliā) article by B. Deka.
on the occasion of marriage, sabhā, funeral, hom-yaggu, pujā-festival, etc. The Dhepa dhulīā party of Darrang consists of men from six to eight. Among these two beats drum, one is known as main drummer (Ghāl dhulīā or Āgadhulīā) and the second is known as back drummer (Pisdhulīā) and the remaining beats cymbals. They are called Tālis. There is a close relation between dance and Dhepā-dhulīā party. Most of the dance of this party is the kind of tāndva nritta, like Khuti nācan, Kowani nācan, Bowani nācan etc. Besides the above noted forms of Dhulīā party, there is another form of Dhulīā party namely, Byār dhulīā or Band party, but this type of dhulīā party is basically an orchestra party.

(4) Khuliā Bhāvanā:

The Khuliā Bhāvanā is another popular folk-dramatic institution. Some scholars said that Khuliā Bhāvanā flourished in the light of Ankiā Bhāvanā. This type of semi-dramatic institution performs on the occasion of various kind of festivals. The Khuliā Bhāvanā consists of one Ojā, six or seven or eight Khuliā, some tāli (not less than two) and some Bhāvariās. Dance and acting are the essential parts of Khuliā Bhāvanā. Like the Ankiā Bhāvanā, Khuliā Bhāvanā party also uses only khol and cymbals (Tāl). They also performs the episode from the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata and other Purānas. This type of folk-drama is popular in the Darrang and Kāmrup districts. In Mongaldoi area Khuliā Bhāvanā is known as Khuliā Vāuriā.
The Bhāvariā performance:

The Bhāvariā gives so much pleasure to the rural people by creating humorous situations through dialogues and guests. The Bhāvariā put on uncommon multi-coloured dress. They perform their show on the occasion of festivals, important religious and social functions. The Bhāvariā not only excites laughter with his songs but also hits the truth. Today the attraction of Bhavaria performance to become decrease. Once it was Ningni Bhāvariā who could be able to irritated in the minds of the people by creating humour.

Pacati:

Pacati is a folk-dramatic institution where only the women takes part. As a seasonal festival Pacati is celebrated on the month of Vāda. This folk-festival is basically connected with the birth of Kṛṣṇa. Janmāstami is celebrated on the occasion of Kṛṣṇa. Pacati is to be held publicly or privately after five days of the celebration of Janmāstami. Since the birth of a new-born baby, upto five days, the mother (prāsūti) remains in the state of unpurity according to the traditional folk-belief. Hence, in the six days the mother is purify by washing with pulse and Turmeric (Māh and Hāldhī) and the system of Nāmakarana is arranged for the new-born baby. On the basis of this folk-belief Pacati is celebrated on the occasion of the birth day of Kṛṣṇa. This is known as Pacati because it is held after five days of the birth. In this festival the participants perform the.

75. Medhi, K.R.: Studies in the Vaisnava Literature and Culture of Assam, p. 66
birth of Krsna through dance and acting.

(7) Folk drama of Goālpārā (Goālparīya Loka-Nātya):

The undivided Goālpārā district is very rich for its indigenous folk-culture. Especially, the folk-drama of Goālpārā has been taking a very significant role on their day-to-day life. Today a peculiar art style is still living through the popular folk-dramatic institution in the different parts of this district. The folk-dramatic institution of Goālpārā may be divided into two types. The first type comprises Kusān gān, Dotora gān, and Vāri gān. Kusān gān and Dotora gān are found in West Goālpārā, but Vāri gān is found in South Goālpārā. This type is a full-fledged dramatic institution. The second type covers Māraḷi Puja, Kātipuja and Carak Puja. This type is a quasi-dramatic institution.

The Kusān Gān is full by the dramatic properties i.e., dance, music, dialogues and acting. This is a very popular folk-theatre in Goālpārā. There are some other types of folk-plays in Goālpārā district. Among these Goālanijātra, Vāsān jātra, and Manāijātra are significant.

In spite of the above mentioned folk-dramas in Assam there are other forms of folk-dramatic or semi-dramatic institutions, such as, Gāyan-bāyan, Nāgārā-nām, Pālmām, Uihā-nām, etc. Some scholars point out that Bhāvanā may be said as a folk-drama from its performing style and communicative side. However, it should also be accepted that the ideal Ankiyā Bhāvanā is not a perfect form of folk-drama rather Ankiyā Bhāvanā is refined and it is promoted to the classical art.

76. Baruā, Abhen (ed.): Sānālāp, Goālpārār Loka Nātya. Article by B. Datta, p. 223
77. Ibid, pp. 222-223
form by the hands of Sankaradeva and Nādhavadeva. Scholars also pointed out that Jātrā abhinaya (Jātrā party) may be said as a folk-dramatic institution which has flourished under the impact of Bengali jātrādal.

Origin of Ankīyā Nāṭ:

When in Europe during the last part of the Middle age——Morality, Interlude and Farceical dramas were matured, at that time in the last part of the fifteenth century or the first part of the sixteenth century in the Eastern part of India specially, in Assam, a higher form of peculiar dramatic institution flourished. Sankaradeva was the father of this institution. Nādhavadeva, the chief disciple of Sankaradeva had remarkably contributed in this field. After Nādhavadeva, Gopaldeva and others created a number of dramas in the light of their predecessors. The plays written by Sankaradeva and Nādhavadeva are popularly known as Ankīyā Nāṭ. Sankaradeva and Nādhavadeva used the terms like Nāṭak, Nāṭ and Jātrā. Sankaradeva and Nādhavadeva used the term Nāṭak, Nāṭ and Jātrā synonymously. They used sometimes Nāṭak, sometimes Jātrā or Nāṭ in a same play. The biographer (Caritkār) of Sankardeva and Nādhavadeva used the term Ankā. According to the Nāṭya Jāstra the word ‘Anka’ means a

78 i. Param Purusa Purusottam Janatan Narayana 
   Srisri Krishna Ohi Savamajdhe Kalidaman
   nam līla jātrā param koutuke karab.

ii. Kalidaman karabat nāṭak, Krishnar
    Kīngār Ohi van.
    Bora, "(ed.) : Sankardevar Nāṭ, p. 103

79. 'Pārijāt hen nam ‘Anka māhā anupam
    karīla Sankar tāte pace' — Ramcharan Thākur. 'Sankarcarit'
    Dewāner bāni suṇi sitā sayamabhar/
    Ramaayana ‘Anka kari dilanta Sankar//'
    — Laitari Thākur, "Surucarit"
sign for classification of the different stages of the story of a drama. Gradually latter Vaisnava society uses the word अन्त्य by fixing the suffix of 'ता' as the adjective अन्त्यता. The main cause for the use of the word अन्त्यता सात by the latter Vaisnava society was perhaps that the अन्त्यता सात composed by जंकरादेव and नाडावादेव has a peculiar qualities than the post play writers. Hence, to marked a clear cut distinction between जंकरादेव and the other dramatists, they used the term अन्त्यता सात. However, the plays composed by जंकरादेव and नाडावादेव and their successors' plays are known as अन्त्यता सात and its performance is called नियसन.

Jancharakdeva wrote six dramas. These are: (i) भट्टि-प्रसाद (Favour to the consorts), (ii) पारिजत हराना (nape of the पारिजत), (iii) कालि-दावाना (taming of the कालि-वाग्य), (iv) नुकिनि हराना (abduction of नुकिनि), (v) केली-गोपाला (sportive dance of गोपाल) and (vi) रामा-विजया (Victory of रामा). Inspite of these six dramas, जंकरादेव at the beginning of his dramatic career performed a very effective drama which is known as चिन्ना यात्रा. Channa-yatra, supposed to be said as the first play of जंकरादेव. Thus चिन्ना यात्रा (1468) may be regarded as the preamble to the first regular असमाते drama, stage and music. D. Neog maintains that चिन्ना यात्रा must also be the first work of its kind in the whole range of modern Indo-aryan languages. According to नागचारण ठाकुर, जंकरादेव arranged the performance of चिन्ना यात्रा at about

80. जार्मा, स.न.: असामीता नाट्य साहित्य, p. 11
81. Ibid, p. 11
82. Neog, Dimbeswar: New Light On History of Assamese Literature, p. 162
his nineteenth years. According to Kathāguru Carita Sankaradeva arranged the performance of Cinna Yātrā after the return of his first pilgrimage. The opinion of Kathāguru Carita seems to be accepted. Cinna Yātrā may not be call as a drama because it was devoided of dialogues. Madhavadeva, the favourite disciple of Sankaradeva composed five plays. These are ārun bhanjana (breaking down of the Arjuna trees), ārdhorā (Capture of the thief), Bhumi-lutiwā (Rolling on the ground), Pimparā gucwā (Removal of the ants), and Bhojana-Vihāra (The Picnic). Bhusana-harana, Nāsa-jumurā and Kotorā-khelā are the three suspected plays in connection with the name of Madhavadeva.

Source of the origin of Ankiyā Nāṭ:

Before Sankaradeva nobody wrote drama in Assamese language. Then where from Sankaradeva found inspiration for writing plays? Did Sankaradeva done this work from Vacum? Repling to these vital questions critics of Drama as well as the author of the history of literature gives diverse comments. According to one group of critics, Ankiyā Nāṭs are a distinct novel thing which is the product of the genius of Sankaradeva. It is not comparable to the Northern Indian language and it has no direct relation with Sanskrit dramas. According to another group of critics the Ankiyā Nāṭs are peculiar form of dramas which has created by the inspiration and impact of Sanskrit drama and Kāthāhī drama. Critics also opines that Sankaradeva has created this new type of drama by taking the following elements — (a) the elements derived from the early Indian Nātya

83. Lekhāru, U.C.: Kathāguru Carita, p. 36
Choudhury, N.: Prakshapat, p. 10
Sāstra, (b) elements derived from the Cultural centre in the
different parts of India during his pilgrimage, (c) elements
derived from the indigenous semi-dramatic institutions (folk
plays) like Ojā-pūli-party, the party of drummer (Dhuliya), Puppet
dance, etc.

No doubt Sankaradeva was a devout scholar of Sanskrit litera­
ture. During his study at the tol of Kāhendra Kandali, Sankardeva
studied the different scriptures of Sanskrit literature and wrote
some sloks in Sanskrit. He was nicely acquainted with the Sanskrit
dramas. Secondly, during his pilgrimage, Sankardeva visited several
cultural centres and religious places all over the country and he
might have seen dramatic performances in some places. Git-Govinda
of Jayadeva was popular in all over India.85 Git-Govinda seems to
lend materials in some respects of the Ankiya Nāts especially in
some songs and Bhatimas.86 N. L. Varadpande thinks that Sankardeva
has influenced deeply by the Kāthiālī drama and Git-Govinda of
Jayadeva.87 In the fourteenth century, the famous lyrics in Kāthiālī
written by Vidyāpati was very much popular throughout the Northern
and Eastern parts of India. Sankardeva followed to Vidyāpati.88
Vidyāpati appears to have exercised some influence upon the language
(Brajāvali-Maithili mixed Assamese) of Sankardeva's dramas.89 Sankar-
deva may be inspired by his predecessors and contemporaries. His

85. Sinha, Rina : Indian Dances, Their History and Growth
 & Messi, Regiland. p. 85
86. Bhattacharyya, H. : Origin and the Development of the Assamese
 Assamese Drama, and the Stage, p. 6
87. Jarna, R. (ed.) : Sankardeva : Harold of New Vaishnavism,
 pp. 30-31
88. Raghavan, V. : The Great Integrators : The Saint Singers
 of India, p. 16
89. Shattacharjee, K. : Origin and the Development of Assamese
 Drama and the Stage, p. 16
contemporaries were Kabir (1399), Chandidas (1418), Surdas (1483), Chaitanyaadev (1485–86), Mirabai (1491) and Ramananda Ray (middle of the fifteenth century). K. Medhi in his preface to Ankabali remarks that Jankardeva might have derived some elements for the construction of his Ankiyā Nāt from the Pārijāt-Haran written by poet Umāpati of Haithili. Indian folk and traditional theatre is extremely rich. From the pre-historic period several folk-dramatic forms were popular in India. Among these Yakshagana of Karnataka, the famous dance-drama of Keralā - Kathā Kali, Therukoothu (way side drama), and Bhagavatamalā of Tāmil Nadu, Rāma Leelā and Nāsa Leelā of Rājasthān, Lalita of Māhārāstra, Bhāwānī of Gujrat, Jātra of Bengal etc. are very significant. We find so many dramatic elements of the earliest type in these folk-theatre. Jankardeva may be inspired from these popular folk-theatre.

Thirdly, before Jankardeva in Assam, various indigenous semi-dramatic folk-institutions was prevailed. For example, Ṫājā-pāli, Ḍutā nās, Ḍhuḷiā party, Khuliā party etc. Hence, in the conclusion we may say that Jankardeva combines various native folk-forms and the elements of classical Sanskrit dramas and through the process of synthesis he has created his own unique dramatic form.

K. Medhi also gives a similar view. 91

90. Tarlekar, G.H.: Studies in the Nātya Jāstra, p. 44
91. Influence of Sanskrit drama is indeed great. It is also possible though not probable, that the Sanskrit Maithili drama of Umāpati exercised some indirect influence on minor points. But the ultimate source of Assamese drama, disvested of the outward form, is most probably the choral performance of the Assamese Ṫājā-pāli. Jhāpurusa Jankardeva appears to have improved this kind of performance and to have given birth to the Assamese drama -

Studies in the Vaisnava Literature and Culture of Assam, K.R. Medhi, p. 69
Objectives of Ankiyā Nāt:

The fifteenth and sixteenth century has marked as a very significant period in the cultural history of India. Because during this period the Neo-Vaisnava Bhakti Movement inspired immensely on the common folk. Like Martin Luther introduced a new type of religion which is known as 'Protastan dharma' and early Greek-Latin classical literature and arts revived in Europe by the impact of Renaissance, similarly, in India, specially in Assam, the revival of art and culture was possible during the last part of the fifteenth century under the leadership of Mahāpurash Sankardeva. The socio-political, cultural and religious conditions of pre-Vaisnavite period of Assam were full of conflict and chaos. People of Assam were morally degraded by the influence of Bajrajān when Buddhism was prevailed. Saktism was very strong during this period. As a result the ritual of human sacrifice, Kumāri puja etc. was introduced and the society had badly affected by these superstitious belief. Mādhavadeva, the Vaisnava saint comments that at that time people violated the teachings of Vedas, they do not obey any social norms, rather they used some harmful goods and performed bad actions. Under this circumstances Sankardeva decided to propagate the early eternal ideal of Hinduism in the heart of the

92. Choudhury, P.C.: The History of the Civilization of the People of Assam to the twelfth century, p. 422
93. Sankardeva: Kirtan-Ghosa Āru Nām-Ghosā (ed. M. Neog) p. 6
   'Buddha avatāre veda-path karicān/
94. Kākati, B.K.: Purani Kāmrupar Dharmar Dhārā, p. 136
   'Aṇa joni kichu nakare bicār, jāt-kul vailā-vrasta. Vaisnavar Besh, dhariā furayā, veda path kari Nasta'
people. Sankardeva’s new cult of Vaisnavism is popularly known as 
ēka sarana nām dharma (devotion to One God) the religion of supreme 
surrender to One. He based his teachings on the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, 
and hence his creed is known as Bhāgavabī Dharma. The central 
force of Neo-Vaisnavism is the Śrīkṛṣṇa. He is the source of all 
gods and goddesses and He is the fundamental entity of the universe. 
He is Causasai, Omnipotent, Omnipresence and Self-sufficient. Sankar-
devasa and Madhavadeva conceived Śrīkṛṣṇa as the central figure of 
Vaisnāvite Movement for the making the contemporary society as a new 
model which has vitiated politically, spiritually and economically. 
Sankardeva noticed that there is a sufficient potentiality in the 
character of Kṛṣṇa. Śrīkṛṣṇa destroyed the evil force by his Sudar-
san Cakra, like that Sankardeva and Madhavadeva used the character 
of Kṛṣṇa for both the destruction of evil spirit and the formation 
of a new society. Therefore, his main business is to express the 
greatness and glory of God to the common people of Assam.

In order to propagate this new type of religion, Sankardeva 
has taken the help of literature and culture as a medium. Sankardeva 
thought that poetry and bardits (devotional songs) were not the only 
medium to propagate the Vaisnava cult. He believed that performing 
art form i.e., his Ankiyā Nāts is the strongest effective media to 
preach his religion. Hence, he decided to done this work and accord-
ingly the Vaisnava literature of Assam is idealistic in tone. The 
subjectmatter of the Ankiyā Nāt is mostly taken from the Bhāgavata-
purāṇa. The Rāmāyana also provides material for one of Sankardeva’s

drama, namely, Rāma Vijaya. The plays of Śankardeva and Nādhavadeva were written to further the cause of Vaisnavism and they therefore mainly aimed at creating devotional sentiments in the hearts of the audience. The purpose of Vaisnava drama was education of a religio-ethical type. The Ankiyā Nāts were written more with a religious motive than for secular enjoyment. The purpose of Ankiyā Nāts was not so much to create dramatic effect but religious impact. So the main objective of Ankiyā Nāt is to create devotional sentiment (Bhaktirasa) rather than to create dramatic effect. A complete effect is attained in arousing a sense of devotion not only by narration and characterisation but also through song, dance and dialogue. According to Bhāmaha, a Sanskrit rhetorician the chief aim of poetry is to attainment of 'Caturvarga-phala-prāptih' (Dharma, Artha, Kām, Mokṣa). The aim of Ankiyā Nāt as a drsyā kāvyā is similar to the aim of poetry (sravyā-kāvyā). The frequent uses of the following expressions will show objectives of Ankiyā Nāts.

(a) 'Ihāk je sab loke Bhaktibhāwbe gāwe, Je bhāwānā karya, tārā sabar Krsna carane, Parama Bhakti bharaya/ Ihā jāni Krsna carane saran sār ko kahō, nirantare haribol hari/
   - 'Patni Prasad' - Sankaradeva.


98. Barua, H. : Assamese Literature, p. 86

99. Ibid, p. 93
Nevertheless, it would not correct to say that dramatic effect did not exist at all. It existed at least in the conflict of interest and emotions. In Ankiyā Nāṭs characterisation and creation of conflict are secondary aims. The characters of Ankiyā Nāts are not dynamic, they are static. This is evident from the plays like Rukmini Haran, Pārijāt Harana, Rāma Vijaya of Sankaradeva and Gondhorā, Pimparāguchoā etc. of Mādhavadeva. These are the dramas of conflict in the external sense; but this is not the principal theme of these plays. However, it does not mean that the Vaisnava drama was aesthetically in sipid. Most of the plays like Pārijāt Harana, Rukmini Harana, Rāma Vijaya of Sankaradeva and Ārjunbhanjana, Gondhorā of Mādhavadeva are artistically and technically landmarks.

Contributions of Ankiyā Nāṭ in the Development of Modern Assamese Drama:

Since the birth of Ankiyā Nāṭ up to the last part of eighteenth century the Ankiyā Bhāvanā performance was very popular in the different section of people. The ordinary common people took part played in the Ankiyā Bhāvanā. The plays of Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva could be able to satisfy in the minds of audience. The Vaisnavite
monasteries or Satra and the Nam-Ghar were the centers of Bhāvanā performance. The popularity of Bhāvanā performances was not only confined in the Satra or the Nam-Ghar, but also it covers the Royal Court.

The creation of Ankīya Nat and its performance spread over specially within the boundary of Ahom kingdom. The Ahom kings patronised Bhāvanā or the Vaisnava theatre for the growth and development in the post-Sankardeva period. It was accepted as an item on the agenda of court entertainment. There are evidences of dramas like Rāvana Vadha, Rukmini harana, Padmāvatī harana etc. being performed in the courts of king Rājeswara Singha, Kamāleswara Singha and Gaurināth Singha.

After Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, their successors created a number of dramas mere imitation of their predecessors. In the post-Sankaradeva period the playwrights could not be able to maintain the standard of dramas with their predecessors. Fifteenth and the sixteenth century was the most fruitful period of Vaisnavite drama. After sixteenth century the popularity of Ankīya Nat decreased and gradually the process of decline has started. Because the playwrights of this period were lack of artistic qualities, as a result the drama became a mere amusement and it has lost its classic spirit. Moreover, during this period the social and political instability also hampered to maintain the rich tradition of Ankīya Nat. Lastly, the strong impact of Jātrā of Bengal on Assam, the

100. Ibid, p. 109
The new era of Assamese drama begins with Râm-Nayāmi, a social drama written by Gunābhīrām Baruā and published in 1856 and Hem Chandra Baruā's Kāniyār Kirta (1861) laid the foundation of modern Assamese drama, though the plays of Ankiya type were still kept alive in the Satra or the Vaisnavite monasteries. In the context of Indian theatre, modern Assamese drama also said to be an outcome of the influence of two streams of sources, i.e., Sanskrit drama and Western drama. In Europe social drama has growth and developed from the germs of Mystery, Miracle, Morality and Interludes. But in Assam the case is quite different. In Assam, Ankiyā Nāt has been maintaining the tradition of its own. Hence, the relation between modern Assamese drama and Ankiyā Nāt is not sharp. However, the long heritage of Ankiyā Nāts helps to the growth and development of modern Assamese drama. This form of classical drama indirectly helps to the modern dramatists for psychological preparation to create a new type of plays.