CHAPTER-III

SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS AS DEPICTED IN THE DRAMA

A literary product of a particular territory is bound to reflect the cultural and social aspects of the land concerned. The Śaṅkhaṇcūḍavādha is a dramatic composition by Dīna Dvija written in Assam during the medieval period of our era. It bears the stamp of both the Brahmanical as well as the neo-Vaiṣṇava culture cultivated in this land.

So far as the Sanskrit Brahmanical culture is concerned, this land of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, as Assam was anciently known, is a great centre of Sanskrit learning since very early times. The literary and archaeological evidences testifies to the fact that both Vidyā and Kalā, including the vedic studies, were being cultured here with great enthusiasm. The existence of large number of inscriptions and handwritten manuscripts, scattered throughout the various corners of the state, bear testimony to the flourishing Sanskrit learning in Assam since very early times. It was mainly under the patronage of the rulers of this land that Brahmanical culture
and Sanskrit learning expanded and reached even the far corners of the land. The rulers took personal interest in the matter of diffusion of Sanskrit learning and for that purpose were created *agrahāras*¹ in different localities to settle the men of learning.

Side by side with Sanskrit literature, Assamese language and literature were also flourished. Assam's ancient literary history can broadly be divided into two stages: (i) Pre-Vaiṣṇava, from 1200 A.D. to 1450 A.D., and (ii) Vaiṣṇava, from 1450 to 1650 A.D. The Vaiṣṇava period is the golden age of Assamese literature. The principal inspiration, for this age, like any other Indian literature, was religion. This, and the thematic inspiration drawn mainly from Sanskrit sources, show that our ancient literature was essentially pan-Indian in character.

The centre nerve of the Vaiṣṇava period is Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, who propagated the neo-Vaiṣṇava faith in

¹ For an instance, the readers may be referred to the Nidhanpur copper plate grant of Bhāskaravarman, (594-650 A.D.) the most illustrious ruler of ancient Assam (sic. Prīyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa), a contemporary and friend of emporor Harṣvardhana of Thānesvara. The record states that his great-great grandfather Bhūtivarman (c. 6th cen. A.D.) created an *agrahāra*, Mayūra-sāmalāgrahāra, in the Chandrapuri-ṇaṣaya, supposed to be located in and around Puṅḍravardhana-bhukti, and settled around three hundred brāhmaṇa-families following different Veda-śākhās. There are other land-grant records also of subsequent times testifying to the creation of *agrahāras* in different parts of this ancient land to settle brāhmaṇa scholars for the spread of spread of Sanskrit learning and Brahmnic culture.
Assam. He was not merely a religious leader, but an institution by himself, the harbinger of a total revolution in the social, religious and cultural areas. He was a successful litterateur and a linguist, an artist-musician and painter, a successful dramatist and a prominent actor—all combined in one, which is a very rare and distinguished character.

So far as the dramatic literature is concerned, Śaṅkarađēva composed six one Act. plays, called Aūkiyā-nāṭas. The language of these plays is Assamese Brajāvalī. The saint poet has established some new dramatic codes in his plays. There is no Act division although the bare framework of these plays is modelled on Sanskrit dramas. These Brajāvalī dramas contain the usual Nāndī-ślokas apart from a number of Sanskrit ślokas in the body of the text. The preponderance of music, lyrical verses and prose narratives of the Sūtradhāra at the cost of dialogue is a marked feature of these plays. Songs inserted in these plays are set into classical Rāgas and Tālas. The comprehensive role of a Sūtradhāra is

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2. The six Aūkiyā-Nāṭas composed by Śaṅkarađēva are :
   (i) Ṣutniprasāda (ii) Keli-Gopāla
   (iii) Rukmīniharāṇa (iv) Kāliyadāmanā
   (v) Pārijāta-harāṇa (vi) Śrīrāma-vijaya

3. Songs of the Brajāvalī dramas are called Aūkar-gīta. Śrīmanta Śaṅkarađēva and his chief apostle, Mādhavadeva have composed two types of classical songs, viz, Bargīta and Aūkar-gīta. Bargītas are (sung as a part) of congregational recitation (nāma-prasānga) whereas Aūkar-gītas are contextual to a particular drama.
introduced. The Sūtradhāra remains as a permanent character from the prologue to the Bharata-vākyā (muktimaṅgala-bhaṭimā) accompanied by gāyanas and bāyanas. Thus Śaṅkaradeva introduced new dramatic codes in his Brajāvalī plays.

The people in general and literature in particular were very much influenced by the innovations of Śaṅkaradeva’s art and culture. Later poets followed the Vaiṣṇavite trend and used to produce dramatic compositions, both in Sanskrit and Assamese languages, incorporating the new dicta introduced by the Saint poet. It may be noted here that our poet, Dīna Dvija, is also adept to this trend. He amalgamates the Sanskrit dramaturgic rules and the codes of Śaṅkarite plays. So, inspite of being a classical Sanskrit drama, it bears most of the characteristic features of Assamese Brajāvalī dramas; and as a result, there are possibilities of reflection of the social and cultural images of this locality; i.e., the Vaiṣṇava faith. Along with the Vaiṣṇavite faiths, puranic culture is also reflected in the play, since it is based purely on puranic stories.

Being based on puranic stories the Śv bears the puranic beliefs on human behaviour, fourfold goals of human life,
viz, dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa. Divine and semi-divine figures are present here and their super-human activities are also depicted. As a result, an impact of the worship of Tulasī and Śālagrāma, is noticed in the socio-cultural life of the Assamese people.

As a product of post-Śaṅkaradeva period, our play bears most of the essentials of an Aṅkiyā-nāṭa. As in the Aṅkiyā-nāṭas our play contains songs and music set into classical Rāgas and Tālas to be sung along with the musical instruments like drums and cymbals. An overbearing role of the Sūtradhāra is depicted. Payāras and Lechāries are also incorporated to express the intensity of sorrows. The final aim, i.e., to sing the glory of Viṣṇu or Hari, and generate Bhakti to Hari is fully maintained in the Śv. All these socio-cultural aspects are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs under the sub-sections (i) Social aspects and (ii) Cultural aspects. Under sub-section (i) i.e., Social aspects, we have discussed the position of woman in the society, while under sub-section (ii) i.e., Cultural aspects come songs and music, Bhaṭimā and the role of the

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4. For the edification of the illiterate mass Śaṅkaradeva composed and enacted the Aṅkiyā-nāṭas. He also introduced Kholā, (a variety drum like the mṛdanga, but quite distinct from the latter in respect of certain details), Tāla (cymbal) for maintaining the Rhythm of songs and dance he had created.
Sūtradhāra and religious practices.

I. Social aspects:

Position of Men and Women

The social scene is best reflected through the depiction of the dramatic scenes and the characterization in our drama. The dramatic scenes and the behavioural performance more particularly of the female characters well expose the social condition as well as man-woman relations in the society. In this respect, polygamy appears to be way of life more particularly among the elite section of the society. Kings and high officials of medieval period, generally, used to keep more than one wife. Emphasis is given on the upholding the chastity, however laxity in the sex-morality is not unknown.

Most of the women characters, depicted in the play, are divine and semi-divine nature. These characters play important role in the development of the plot. The three consorts of Viṣṇu, viz, Lākṣmī, Sarasvatī and Gaṅgā are attributed with humanly desires and jealousy for which they are said to have suffered from the pangs of separation from their Lord. The poet has successfully depicted the womanly behaviour and jealousy of co-wives in the form of Gaṅgā.
and Sarasvatī. It reflects the social condition of polygamy in the upper class of society, and one can imagine the position of a husband with more than one wife.

Our poet has depicted the mutual curses of the deities very successfully. Gaṅgā and Sarasvatī are painted as quarrelsome ladies and Lakṣmī, being a *sattvapradhānā* (having the quality of *sattva*) one, had to suffer from descending down to earth in the form of a river and a plant not due to her own fault. She only tried to dissuade Gaṅgā and Sarasvatī from quarrelling, and as a result she was cursed by Sarasvatī to be transformed into a river. As a result of the mutual curses, all the three deities had to come down to this mortal world as sanctifying rivers (*punyasalilā saritrūpā*). However, this incident is regarded as the cause of well being of the mortal world (*lokopāvanāya*). Another probable meaning of the rivers is *rasa*, i.e., the unending flow of love for the devotees.

Dīna Dvija depicts the miserable plight of a husband, dominated by his wives, and also the miserable condition of the mediator, like one standing between two fighting bulls. It reminds us of the *apavacana* prevalent in the Assamese society, viz, "dui mahar yu; majat virinar maran," i.e., the pitiable condition of a shrub wherein two buffaloes fight.

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5. So far as the position of Lakṣmī is concerned, she suffered the fate of the mediator, like one standing between two fighting bulls. It reminds us of the *apavacana* prevalent in the Assamese society, viz, "dui mahar yu; majat virinar maran," i.e., the pitiable condition of a shrub wherein two buffaloes fight.
of a family wherein quarrelsome women reside. It is expressed through the words of Hari. cf,

“yatra gehe striṣṭpumāṇaḥ vartate, yo hi puruṣaḥ striṣṭaḥ syāt
tasya jīvanam dhik // tasya striṣṭtasya pade pade asubhameva
bhavati.” —Act I,

It is observed here that our poet does not hide the feeling of man-dominated society about women. Women are blamed for unhappy situations of a family, inspite of their sacrifice for the well being of the family members. Hari’s speech seems to be the reflection of social belief. cf,

“bhāvaduṣṭā yonipuṣṭā sadākalaharatā ca yasya striḥ bhavati
tad grhaḥ mahāranyameva sreyastaram.......apica yatra grha duṣṭā
striḥ tiṣṭhati tatkriḥ yat karmaṁ karoti tacca niṣphalam.”

Like everywhere and all the time, the women of this play appear not to be safe. Vedavatī was outraged by Rāvaṇa while she was practising penance. However, Rāvaṇa was cursed for his misbehaviour and had to suffer for his deeds.6 Even Tulasī, the queen of Śaṅkhaçūḍa, was not safe. Her chastity was violated by Hari himself in her husband’s absence. Hari was also cursed to be a stone (tvam śilāsvarūpo

6. cf. rāvaṇasya karasparśat kuśadhvajasutā satī /
    niścarapatim dagdham sakrodhamavalokayat //
    —Act I, 64.

7. cf. “he nātha sattvasvarupastvāṁ pāṣāṇādapi kathinahṛdayayāḥ. āvayoḥ
    patipatnyoḥ tavacaraṇāravindacintancena kālo gataḥ. tathāpi svāmino
bhava) by Tulasī.7

II. CULTURAL ASPECTS:

A SONGS AND MUSIC

The speciality of the Śaṅkhacūḍavadha lies at the incorporation of songs and music. Songs are marked by sweetness and assonance. They are set into classical Rāgas and Tālas. Dīna Dvija has composed about twenty songs to express the feelings and emotions of different characters in different situations. Assamese is the sole medium of expression of these songs and they are composed in typical Assamese metres. Payāra and Tripādi metres are utilised in these songs.

The practice of incorporating songs set into classical Rāgas and Tālas is noticed in other Sanskrit plays composed in medieval Assam. The Kāmākumāraharaṇa of Kavicandra Dvija and the present play contain abundance of songs—all set into Rāgas and Tālas. The Kāmākumāraharaṇa contains nineteen songs set into Rāgas and Tālas. However, all these songs are composed in Sanskrit verses. It also contains eight Assamese songs termed as maṅgala-gīta which bear the

\[ \text{mṛtyunimmittām tadṛṣṭeṇa mama pativrāṭbhāvo nāśītah. he prabho} \\
\text{tvāṁ dayāśindhum ye vaddanti te bhrānta eva. atāḥ tvāmādaya pratikārāṁ} \\
\text{śāparn dadāmi. tvāṁ śīlāsvarūpo bhava'.} \]

stamp of Assamese nuptial songs sung in a marriage ceremony by the womenfolk.

The trend of rāga-music in dramatic composition in Assam is set by Śaṅkaradeva, the great propagator of neo-Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. Śaṅkaradeva composed Brajāvalī nāṭakas for propagating his teachings. In these nāṭakas Śaṅkaradeva incorporated ślokas as well as rāga-music. Songs are called Aṅkar-gīta. These are musical execution accompanied with the rhythmic beats. The rhythmic beat or tāla of a song is indicated along with the particular rāga. Śaṅkaradeva composed 111 (hundred and eleven) Aṅkar-gīta in his six dramas (aṅkīyā-nāṭa).

Dīna Dvija composed his Śaṅkhaçūḍavadha in the light of Brajāvalī Nāṭakas. The rāga-music is taken as one of the componants of the play, besides the extensive use of the role of Sūtradhāra.

The insertion of rāga-music in this play appears to be the influence of the tradition of rāga-music in Assam. Indian music was fully developed in the early sixteenth century and it flooded the shores of the Brahmaputra and the Barāka, too. The Kālikāpurāṇa (dated c. 9th-10th cen.) has referred to Rāgas like Varāḍi, Vasanta, Mālava, Lalita, Vibhāsa,
Bhairava, Kedāra and Dhanāśi in the context of Kendukalāi, the chief priest of the Kāmākhyā temple during the days of Koch King Naranārāyaṇa.

Rāgas (Melodies):

Śaṅkaradeva and his chief apostle Mādhavadeva composed rāga-music in the form of Bargīta and Aṅkar-gīta. One hundred and ninety one Bargitas are available so far. Thirty four of these are ascribed to Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva while the rest are ascribed to Mādhavadeva. It may be mentioned here that each Bargīta is tuned to a particular melody. Śaṅkaradeva composed 128 lyrics in his Brajvalī dramas, and each of them is set to a particular rāga and tāla. Mādhavadeva also composed twenty three lyrics set into rāgas and tālas. A tentative list of melodies employed by the Saint poets is as follows: (1) Ahira, (2) Āsowari, (3) Kalyāṇa, (4) Kānāḍā, (5) Kāmoda, (6) Kedāra, (7) Kau, (8) Gaurī, (9) Tuḍa, (10) Tuḍa-Vasanta, (11) Tuḍa-bhāṭiyāli, (12) Dhanaśrī, (13) Nāṭa, (14) Nāṭa-mallāḍa, (15) Payārgīta, (16) Pūrvī, (17) Varāḍ (rī), (18) Vasanta, (19) Belowāra, (20) Bhūpāli, (21) Bhāṭiyāli, (22) Mallāḍa, (23) Māhura, (24) Māhura-dhanaśrī, (25) Rāmagiri, (26) Lalita, (27) Śyāma, (28) Śyāmagaḍā, (29) Śrī-Gāndhāra, (30) Śrī-Gaurī,
(31) Sāreṇg, (32) Sindhurā, (33) Suhāi and (34) Śrī.

Of these thirty four melodies, Śaṅkaradeva utilized thirty and Mādhavadeva twenty nine. The four melodicsthat Śaṅkaradeva did not employ are Varāḍī (ri), Mallāḍa (ra), Rāmagiri and Syāmagadā; and five melodies that Mādhavadeva did not employ are Tuḍā, Payāragīta, Pūrvī, Bhūpāli and Sāreṇgī.


Śukladhvaja, alias Cilārāi, the younger brother of Koch King Naranārāyaṇa and a contemporary of Śaṅkaradeva, proves his depth of studies of Saṅgītaśāstra by citing the

8. vide, Neog, M., VFMA, p.280
verses on personification of Rāgas (melodies) in his *Sāravatī*, a commentary on the *Gitagavinda* of Jayadeva. The rāgalakṣaṇas, i.e., the visualisation of rāgas, given by Subhaṅkara Kavi in his *Saṅgita-dāmodara*, are quoted by Śukladhvaja in the context of the melodies used in the *Gitagovinda*. However, he quotes the definitions without any comment. Mention of one rāgalakṣaṇa would suffice to determine the position of Śukladhvaja:

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"gurjarīrāgaḥ pratimaṭatalah rāgalakṣaṇam—
śyāmā sukeśī malayadrumāṇām mṛdullasaṭapallavalatalpajātā’ /
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Dinā Dvija has composed twenty songs and employed eight kinds of rāgas. These rāgas are—Calengi, Barāṛ, Kāphir, Tura, Deśākha, Śrī, Mālasi and Kalyāṇa.

The following are the distribution of Rāga and Tāla employed in the songs of the *Śaṅkhacūḍavadha*. However, some of these songs have no rāga and tāla and a song of only with rāga but no mention of tāla.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Rāga</th>
<th>Tāla</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V. 18</td>
<td>Cāleńgi</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VV.22-25</td>
<td>Barāṛi</td>
<td>Ektāla</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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9. S. N. Sarma & S. Borah,(ed.) *Sāravatī*, p. 10
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Rāga</th>
<th>Tala</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VV.41-43</td>
<td>Kāphir</td>
<td>Cuṭā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VV.47-49</td>
<td>Tura</td>
<td>Cuṭā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VV.56-58</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VV.65-67</td>
<td>Deśākha</td>
<td>Cuṭā</td>
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<tr>
<td>VV.68-71</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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**Act II:**

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<tr>
<th>VV.4-8</th>
<th>Barārī</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VV.14-17</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>VV.21-23</td>
<td>Šrī</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>VV.26-39</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>VV.36-38</td>
<td>Kāphir</td>
<td>Ektāla</td>
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<tr>
<td>VV.42-44</td>
<td>Mālacī</td>
<td>Paritāla</td>
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**Act III:**

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<tr>
<th>VV.4-6</th>
<th>Kalyāṇa</th>
<th>Ektāla</th>
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<tr>
<td>VV.9-11</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>VV.14-16</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VV.19-22</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VV.23-26</td>
<td>Šrī</td>
<td>Yati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VV.27-32</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>VV.36-38</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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B. **BHAṬIMA**

The prologue of the *Śaṅkhacūḍavadha* contains a lyrical composition on the top of which the caption ‘Bhaṭṭimā’ is written. cf.

"*alamati vistareṇa! atha bhaṭṭimā*"

(Enough of proximity! Now, the Bhaṭṭimā)

This Bhaṭṭimā is the Sanskritised form of Assamese Bhaṭimā, which is a kind of prayer song or eulogy. The word *bhaṭṭimā* is derived from the Sanskrit word *bhaṭṭa*: *bhaṭṭa > bhaṭṭiman > bhaṭṭimā > bhaṭimā*. The songs sung by the *bhāṭas* are known as Bhaṭimā. Bhāṭas are generally a class of professional singers or minstrels. In course of time the songs sung in praise or condemnation came to be called *bhaṭimā* after the term *bhāṭa*. It is a kind of song which may be compared with the English ‘Ode’-type of poems.

Looking back to the cultural history of India, one may find that during the time of the Rājputs, the *cāraṇas* used to sing in praise of the kings and the high officials. The *bharata* songs of Gujarat are of this type. In the Vaiṣṇava literature of Assam, the *bhāṭa* is found to be frequently mentioned.

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10. Sharma, H. K., *Asomiyā Sāhityat Drṣṭipāt*, p. 79
In the Kirtana-ghosa of Śrimanta Śaṅkaradeva, particularly in the Veda-stuti section, wherein Nārāyaṇa is being woke up by the Vedas with proper eulogy, the term *bhāta* is used, cf.

\[
jagata samhari šuti āchā nārāyaṇa /
prothama niśvāse vāja bhailā vedagaṇa //
jagāilā viṣṇuka stuti kari bhaktibhāve /
yena naṭa bhāṭe cakravartīka jagāve // —v. 1684
\]

In the present context, *bhaftimā* is used in praise of Viṣṇu, which is a follow-up of the Nandi verses and forms part of Prarocana (laudation). The Prastāvanā of Sanskrit Nāṭaka is consisted of the Nandi ślokas and the Prarocana. The Nandi verses are usually addressed to a deity, depending on the personal deity of the author. In the case of our playwright, Viṣṇu is his personal deity. Thus, he glorifies the manifestations of Viṣṇu. Like the Vaiṣṇava playwrights of Assam, Dīna Dvija sought to universalise his deity through stage representation. Nandi verses are composed in the Śārdulavikriḍita metre., (which is supposed to be a Aṣṭapadā Nandi).

In addition to the Nandi verses, the poet has composed a cluster of Sanskrit verses, termed as Bhaftimā, for
eulogising Viṣṇu. These verses are composed in moric metre.

The Bhaṭṭimā in the Śv, reflects the cultural impact of the Brajāvalī dramas. In a Brajāvalī drama, Nāndī verses are usually followed by a Bhaṭṭimā. Śaṅkaradeva creates two characters of bhāṭa in his Rukmiṇīharana-nāṭa, viz, Surabhī and Haridāsa. The former is from the city Kuṇḍīna and the latter from Dvārakā. Śaṅkaradeva, perhaps, happened to meet such bhāṭas in different places which he was visiting—during his long sojourn. He seems to have been impressed by these wandering ministrels and inspired him to introduce such characters in his plays.

In Assamese literature four classes of Bhaṭimā are found. Those are Guru-bhaṭimā, Deva-bhaṭimā, Rāja-bhaṭimā and Nāṭakīya-bhaṭimā. Śaṅkaradeva is the mastermind behind introducing bhaṭimā compositions in Assamese literature. He composed three types of Bhaṭimā viz, Deva-bhaṭimā, Rāja-bhaṭimā, and Nāṭakīya-bhaṭimā, while his chief disciple, Mādhavadeva composed one more Bhaṭimā, viz, Guru-bhaṭimā, in praise of his Guru, i.e., Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva.

(i) Guru-bhaṭimā:

The Guru-bhaṭimā is the creation of Mahāpuruṣa
Madhavadeva, the chief apostle of Śaṅkaradeva. It is a penegyric composed in praise of his preceptor as a token of love and gratitude conveyed by a disciple to his preceptor. There is no doubt about Mādhavadeva’s unstinted devotion towards his Guru. But, it is also a fact that, whatever is known about the personal qualities of Śaṅkaradeva, it is only from this penegyric, and it remains the first-hand source of information about the personality the saint poet for the later generations. Because, Śaṅkaradeva nowhere in his writings glorifies his personal abilities, except repeatedly calling himself ‘a servant of Kṛṣṇa’ (kṛṣṇara kinka). In fact, Śaṅkaradeva was the abode of ‘mani-fold qualities’ (sarvagunākāra), a versatile genius, uncomparable, and one can easily visualise Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva’s personality attributes and versatile qualities only through this eulogy by his disciple.

Mādhavadeva writes:

\[
\begin{align*}
jaya \; guru \; saṅkara & \quad sarvva \; guṇākāra \\
yākerya \; nāhike \; upāmā & \\
tohāri \; caraṇaku & \quad reṇu \; šatakoṭi \\
bāreka \; karoho \; praṇāma & \//\ldots\ldots\text{etc.}
\end{align*}
\]
(ii) **Deva-bhaṭimā:**

In the Vaiṣṇava literature of Assam, Deva-bhaṭimās were composed in praise of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa or Rāma. These were independent compositions which are meant for glorifying Viṣṇu in His various manifestations. The best specimen of Deva-bhaṭimā composed by Śaṅkaradeva is the one which is in Sanskrit verses. The song is in the Tōṭaka metre. The song runs as follows:

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madhuvānava dāraṇa deva varāṁ /
vara-vārijalocana cakra dharam //
dharaṇidharadhāraṇa dhyeya param /
paramārthavidyāśubhanāśakaram //.... etc.
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(iii) **Rāja-bhaṭimā:**

Rāj-bhaṭimās were composed ineulogy of kings or royal personages. Śaṅkaradeva composed two Rāja-bhaṭimās in praise of the Koch king Naranarāyaṇa. It is said that he composed his first Rāja-bhaṭimā when he came to the court of the king Naranarāyaṇa for the first time. It is said that as he stepped up the stairs to the king’s court, Śaṅkaradeva recited the Bhaṭimā in praise of the king in the following words:

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jaya jaya malla-nṛpati rasawāna /
yākeriguna-gāṇasa nama nāhi āna //....etc.
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The Nāṭakīya-bhaṭṭimās were meant only for the Nāṭakas. There are three types of Bhaṭṭimā in Brajāvalī dramas. Two of them are compulsory in a Nāṭaka,—one at the beginning and other at the end. The Bhaṭṭimā, to be sung at the end, is called Muktiṃgaḷabhaṭṭimā. The third type of Nāṭakīya-bhaṭṭimā is given in the middle of a play. It is sung by the dramatic characters like Bhaṭas. This type of Bhaṭṭimā contains the description of the beauty or quality of the heroine or the hero. The Bhaṭṭimās recited at the beginning and at the end are meant for eulogising Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa or Rāma or any other incarnation of Viṣṇu and are sung by the Sūtradhāra.

The Muktiṃgaḷa-bhaṭṭimā may be compared with the Bharaṭa-vākya of Sanskrit dramas. At the end of a play the hero or a religious person prays God seeking welfare of all,—the audience as well as all those participating in the performance. An example of Muktiṃgaḷa-bhaṭṭimā of Śaṅkaradeva’s nāṭakas is given below:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mīna-rūpe : pralaya-payasi : satyavrata yo tārile} \\
\text{kūruma-rūpe : ksīra-sāgara : mathane mandara dharile/}
\end{align*}
\]

śūkara-rūpe : hiraṇya-vīdāri : deva-bhaya kaya trāṇa/
sohi hari teri : karatu nitya : mukti-maṅgala vidhāna/

The purpose of this bhaṭimā is to wish the welfare of the audience.¹¹

Thus, Bhaṭimā remains as an integral part of a Brajāvali Nāṭaka, so does in our play. The beauty of Bhaṭimā lies in its word formations. Other characteristics are, —as H. C. Bhaṭṭacharya observes: “Abundant use of puns and alliterations form almost a common characteristic of the Bhaṭimās, while metaphors and similies also occur here and there.”¹²

Like the Brajāvalī dramas, the Śv contains a Bhaṭimā in the Prastāvanā itself. It glorifies Lord Viṣṇu in His various manifestations. The verses are mid-rhyming as well as end-rhyming. It is sung by the Sutrādhāra. The Bhaṭimā runs as follows:

jayaghanasundara syāmakalevara pitavasanayugadhārī /
mastakaraṇījita kīrtisuvesīta munimanamohanakārī //
cāru caturbhuya karatalanīruya vidhīta astraiviśeṣa /
kuṇḍalalolita gaṇḍaprabhakāsīta śaśādhararucirāsuvesa //

¹².Bhattacharyya, H. C., Origin and Development of the Assamese Drama and Stage, (from the Earliest Times upto 1940), pp. 12-14
A comprehensive role of the Sūtradhāra is presented in our drama. The Sūtradhāra of the Sv enjoys the flexibility of the dicta of the Sanskrit Dramaturgy. While his presence
in a classical Sanskrit drama remains limited in the Prastāvanā alone, in our play, the Sūtradhāra remains dynamic during the entire performance. The Sūtradhāra is assigned with the responsibility of performing preliminaries, i.e., the recitation of Nāndi\(^\text{13}\) as well as making Prarocanā,\(^\text{14}\) i.e., to make the audience attentive through laudation. He sings the songs and introduced the actors to the audience. Thus Sūtradhāra of Śv. remains dynamic from the beginning to the end of the performance.

Unlike a classical Sanskrit drama, the Śv. does not bear a clear cut demarcation between the Prastāvanā and the actual play. The narratives of the Sūtradhāra in the form of conversation with his assistant Mādaṅgika,\(^\text{15}\) (i.e., drummer)

\begin{quote}
Nāndi is defined as—
\text{āśīrVacanaśaṁyuktā śūtīṛyaśmatprayuyate/}
\text{devadvijanpaṁśaṁtasvāṁnānditaṁ saniśytaṁ/}
—SD. VI. 24
\text{'nandantī kāvyāni kavindravargāh}
\text{kusilavāḥ pāriśadāh santah/}
\text{yasmādālāṁ sajanasindhuḥmaṇḍol/}
\text{tasmaid i yāṁ sā kathitehā nāndi \//}
—Natyapradipa-
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
unmukhikāraḥ prasāṁśatāḥ prarocanā
—SD.VI.30
\end{quote}

13. cf. \text{naṭi vidūṣakāvāpi pāripārvikā eva vā /}
\text{sūtradhārāna saḥitaḥ saṁśāman yatra kurvate //}
\text{citrairvākyānāḥ svakāryotthāṁ prastutākṣepibhiḥmīthāḥ /}
\text{āmukham tattu viṣṇeyahāṁ nāṁ prastāvanāpi sū //}
—SD., VI. 31,32
follow down to the actual arrival of the actors. The actual play, herein, begins with the entrance of Lord Hari to His assembly hall along with His three consorts, viz, Lakṣmī and Sarasvāī and Gaṅgā, besides the courtiers. cf.

"etasmin antare lakṣmīsarvasvataīgābhiḥ saha nānā-pāṛṣadagaṇaiḥ parivṛto bhagavān hariḥ sabhām praviveśa. tatpaśyata, śṛṇuta nirantare jaya jaya kṛṣneti vadata."16

The unity of time and place of Aristotalian plays is not maintained in the Śv. However, the overbearing role of Sūtradhāra helps the playwright to do away with this difficulty. Being present on the stage throughout the performance, he keeps the audience informed about the change of place or laps of time whenever and wherever necessary. He describes the events beforehand and hence the audience do not feel the difficulty in understanding the changes. He appears to be the master of the whole show, because other characters speak and act according to his biddings and, thus, they appear to be more or less puppets in his hands.17.

16. Śv. Act I
17. The term Sūtradhāra was originally applied perhaps to the exhibitors of puppet shows, who used to sit behind the curtain and made the puppets move as he moved the strings. The critics think that the Sanskrit play in
Like ankar-giṭas of an Ańkiyā-nāṭa the songs of the Śv. are set into classical Rāgas and Tālas, and are supposed to be sung in chorus. Because, the Sūtradhāra of an Ańkiyā-nāṭa usually participates with other musicians in the chorus; the counterpart of our play is also supposed to do the same. According to some scholars, the Ańkiyā-nāṭas are said to have been fed with the histrionic representation available in the reservoir of people's art. As Hem Barua, in his Assamese Literature, observes, "What Śaṅkaradeva possibly did was to borrow the outline frame of his dramas from Sanskrit sources and fill it up with traditions of histrionic representation available in the existing reservoir of people's art." It may be mentioned here that the traditional people's art may include (a) Ojāpāli, i.e., the popular miniature plays with songs, dialogue and body-movements, (b) yātrās, (c) puppet shows and (d) the story telling literature of Śaṅkaradeva’s period. So, the Sūtradhāra of Śaṅkarite plays supposed to know all the arts like singing, dancing, acting etc. The Sūtradhāra is meant for introducing the characters, speak their thoughts aloud and interpreting their moods, 

its present form is a development of such show and hence the stage-manager is called Sūtradhāra as in the case of the string holder.

18. Assamese Literature, p. 87
singing songs as well as for explaining the situations through verse narration. Thus, the “Sūtradhāra,” remarks Hem Baruah, “becomes an institution by itself.”

The Sūtradhāra of the Śv also must be a highly cultured man. He must be proficient in music and dance—both vocal and instrumental, and the histrionic art (nāṅgatiprasārajño), should have command over language etc. These qualities of the Sūtradhāra of our play may tally with the qualities of the Sūtradhāra enumerated by Māṛguptācārya (in his lost work). The metrical enumeration of the Sūtradhāra’s qualities given by Māṛguptācārya, as cited by Rāghavabhaṭṭa, is quoted below:

\[
\begin{align*}
caturātodyanisnāto nekahūṣasamāvṛtaḥ & / \\
nāṅbhāṣaṭattvajño nītiśāstrārthatattvavit & // \\
nāṅgatipracārajño rasabhāvaviśāradaḥ & / \\
nātyaprayoganiyuṇa nānāsilpakhānāvitaḥ & / \\
chandovidhānataattvajño sarvaśāstrāvivakṣaṇaḥ & / \\
tattva-gitānugalaya-kalātālavadhāraṇaḥ & //
\end{align*}
\]

19. ibid.
20. Māṛguptācārya is a authority in Dramaturgy. His original work is not extant. But his writings are lying scattered in many works. Rāghavabhaṭṭa quotes his views in his commentary on the Abhijñāna Śakuntalam, Vāsudeva on the Karpuramaṇjarī, sārādātanaya also quotes him in his Bhāvaprakāsana on Nāṭakavastu. Abhinavagupta also quotes him on music (Ch.XX IX). Thus quotations from Māṛgupta’s work lying here and there are collected and published in JOR, ii, 1928 under the title Fragments of Māṛgupta by T. R. Cintamoni.
With all these qualities, the Sūtradhāra of Aṅkīyā-nāṭas as well as that of the Śv. of Dīna Dvija becomes an integral part of the theatre. He is both an actor and a stage-manager. He is a link character between the dramatic persons and the audience. One of the notable features of Brajāvali dramas is that these defy certain codes of Nātyaśāstra, e.g., the scenes depicting eating, adultery and death or conveying any such impressions, which were not aesthetically right, are prohibited. It was done in order to offer entertainment to the people, and in the process stimulate education on the Viṣṇu worship. This aspect is fully reflected in the Śv. of Dīna Dvija. The Sūtradhāra of this play smoothly relates these situations to the audience.

D. Religious Aspects: Rites and Rituals:

(i) Worship of Tulasī

Rites and rituals are the offshoots of popular practices in terms of religious beliefs, and there is no man who is absolutely free from such sort of religious beliefs and practices. The Brahmanical rituals relating to the
worshipping of Tulasī and Sālagrāma are found mentioned in the Śv. In the third Act of our drama, there is the episode relating to the violation of the chastity of Tulasī by Hari disguising as Śaṅkhacūḍa. Realising the cheating, Tulasī cursed Hari to turn into a stone. Honouring Tulasī’s curse, Hari graces Tulasī by allowing her mortal body to turn into a river, called Gaṇḍakī, where He would stay lying as a stone at the bed. Further, Hari blessed Tulasī by causing her hairs turn into the sacred plant, called Tulasī.

"he tulasī, mama prasādāt idam mānava śarīrameva loka- puṇyadāyinī gaṇḍakī nāmnī nādi bhavatu /

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{tatsāpena tasyāmeva nadyāṁ} & \text{ śilāsvarūpena utpasyato mama pritikāriṇastava ime keśāḥ anyadevānāmapi} \\
\text{prītidāta vrkṣapraravaraḥ tulaśīnāmī bhaviṣyati} & \text{ /}
\end{align*} \]

Tulasī plant is sacred to Viṣṇu worship. Hari emphasised the sacredness of the Tulasī-plant by saying in form of a prediction that its base will be the seat of all the tīrthas (tanmūlataevā arvatīrthānāmadhiśṭhānām bhaviṣyati).

Eventually, Tulasī is regarded as a very sacred plant even today. It occupies a special position in the minds of the Indian people, whoever believe in ritualistic religion. In Assam, plantation of Tulasī seedlings in the Kārttika
Saṅkranti is a common feature. Every household possesses a Tulasī plant in their yards. Some people use to lit earthen lamp in front of the newly planted Tulasī plant during the entire month of Karttika; there is a belief that whoever maintains this process, i.e., lighting lamp, would get his or her wish fulfilled.

(ii) Worship of Śālagrāma :

Śālagrāma, also known as Gaṅḍakī-śilā, is a sort of black stone which contains a fossil ammonite and is chiefly found at the bed of the river Gaṅḍakī, which flows from the Himalayas into the Ganges. The Śālagrāma-stone is found in abundance in the bed of this river, more particularly near the village, called Śālagrāma, situated on its bank. It appears that the name Śālagrāma, actually Gaṅḍakī-śilā, is so called after the name of its find place, that is the village Śālagrāma, which again seems to have derived its name from the Sāl-tree forest where the village is located.

Be that as it may, as in the case of Tulasī, Śālagrāma is also regarded as very sacred and held in high esteem by the Hindus, more particularly by the Vaiṣṇavas. The Śālagrāma-stone is highly extolled in the puranic texts, and, as just cited in the episode relating to the sacred origin of Tulasī, it is the representation of Viṣṇu Himself. The Śālagrāma-
stone, thus, is typical of the Lord, Viṣṇu, as the phallus (liṅga) to Śiva. Every brāhmaṇa house-hold with Vaiṣṇavite leanings used to keep a Śalagrāma-stone and offers daily worship to Viṣṇu in the form Śalagrāma (sic. Gaṇḍakī-śilā). As Hari Himself declares—'If the stones (śalagrāma) found in the Gaṇḍakī river is worshipped with the leaves of Tulasī, one may obtain the results of the performing of crores of sacrifices (yajnas). cf.

“tatsāpena tasyāmeva nadyāṁ śilāsvarūpeṇa utpasyato mama pritikārinastava ime keśāḥ tulasīnāmni bhaviṣyati /.....
tatpatraikamapi bhaktyā mayi yaḥ pumaṁarpayet koṭiyajñāḍikāṁ mama pritikara phalaṁprāṇpuyat /

Again Hari says that if a person grind Tulasī on the Śalagrāma stone or on a conch-shell, that person would become a widower in his next birth. cf.

apica ca śalagrāme śaṅkhe ca yaḥ tulasīvichhedaṁ karoti ca janmāntare bhāryāhīno bhavet /

Thus, the status, i.e., the sacredness of both the Tulasī-plant and the Śalagrāma-stone is highlighted in our drama in the light of the purānic tradition.