PREFACE

This dissertation presents the results of a critico-analytical study of a Sanskrit drama, entitled Śaṅkhaćūḍavadha. The present study is carried on by me under the guidance of Professor (Dr.) Lakṣahira Gogoi-Chutia in the Department of Sanskrit, Gauhati University.

The Śaṅkhaćūḍavadha is a Sanskrit drama written by Dīna Dvija in early 19th century A.D. It consists of three Acts. The materials of this play are culled from the Prakṛti-khaṇḍa of the Brahmavaivartapatraṇa. The text of the Nāṭaka is available so far in two forms, viz., (i) a lone sānci-leaf manuscript preserved in the library of the Department of Historical and Aniquarian Studies, Assam, Guwahati. This manuscript,(No. 62 in the official catalogue), contains thirty-six finely polished folios of sānci-bark. It is written in old Assamese script and at places have become worn out. The work was composed in the Śaka year 1724 (A.D. 1802) towards the end of the Ahom rule in Assam. (ii) The other is a printed edition based on the same sañci-leaf manuscript. The printed edition is included in the compilation christened
Rūpakatrayam along with other two plays—Kāmakumāraharaṇa by Kavicandra Dvija and Vīghneśa-janmodaya of Gaurīkānta Dvija, and were edited by Professor Satyendranath Sarma, and published by the Asom Sahitya Sabha in 1962.

The play Śv is composed in the admixture of dramatic techniques of both Sanskrit and Āṅkīyā-नāṭas of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva (A.D. 1449-1568), the great Vaiṣṇavite saint-poet as well as the reformer of 15th to 16th century A.D. The style of the Āṅkīyā-nāṭas of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva has a unique method. Written in Assamese-Brajāvalī language, the plays (popularly also called Jhumura) are full of songs and music set in classical tone and tenor, interpersed by Sanskrit ślokas composed by the author himself in varied meters. The materials of these Assamese medieval plays are culled from the epics and purāṇas, more particularly from the Rāmāyanā and the Bhāgavatapurāṇa. The stories / dramatic themes dealt with in the plays relates to Krṣṇa, Rāma and Viṣṇu. Like the followers of Śaṅkaradeva, our poet, Dīna Dvija, also makes his play with the same new technique of medieval Vaiṣṇavite plays. The principal aim of Śaṅkaradeva’s plays was to propagate the neo-Vaiṣṇava
faith. Though the style and diction of the Śaṅkhaçudāvadha is that of the classical Sanskrit dramas, yet it is composed in an amalgamation of dramatic techniques of both classical Sanskrit dramas and the Aṅkīyā-nāṭas.

The poet, besides adopting the Sanskrit dramaturgic codes generally, follows the techniques of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva’s Aṅkīya-nāṭas as well. Besides, Sanskrit metres, the playwright incorporated Assamese metres, also, particularly in respect of songs and music. The songs expressing the moods and emotions of characters are set into classical rāga and tāla. The descriptive payārās are used to describe the beauty of the heroes and heroines and as well as to depict scenes of lamentation. Following the style of the Aṅkīyā-nāṭas, which is aimed at popularising the Vaiṣṇava faith among the masses, our drama is concluded with an appeal, similar to that of these dramas, made to the people to worship Viṣṇu with devotion. He profusely used in the play the highly devotional prayer songs, called Bhātimā. The Bhātimās are dedicated to Lord Viṣṇu as prayers. The songs, as in the Aṅkīya-nāṭas, are set into classical rāga and tāla. Moreover, the influence of Aṅkīyā-nāṭas are noticed in other respects, also, which include the role of the
Sūtradhāra. The Sūtradhāra of our drama also plays the same role as does the Sūtradhāra of the Aṅkīyā-nāṭas. He remains in the stage from the prologue to the end of the play and conducts the dramatic activities. The narratives and explanatory notes of the Sūtradhāra are seemed to be more than the dialogues of the characters of the play.

After critically analysing the unique techniques and characteristics of the play, it may be observed that our drama is an admixture of both Sanskrit and Assamese-Brajāvalī dramatic techniques. It may also be observed that our poet-playwright by blending his style and technique seems to have made an attempt to bring about a change in the established codes of Sanskrit dramaturgy. It indeed is a very bold attempt, there can be no doubt about it. Notwithstanding, it occupies a significant position in the Indian dramatic literature, because of this bold attempt in the matter dramatic technique of this 19th cen. Assamese Poet. As has been already pointed out, the play has a Vaiṣṇavite leaning similar to the Aṅkīyā-nāṭas, it adds to the popularity of the play among the mass of Assamese people.
This work has been taken up for its remarkably unique features to draw the attention of the students of Sanskrit dramaturgy. But, the present work may not be claimed to be wholesomely authentic.

The results of our study are presented in this dissertation into two parts, viz., PART-I and PART-II. The Part-I contains a general discussion on and about the drama, while Part-II is a critical appreciation of the Šaṅkhacūḍavādha, dealing detail its various aspect.

In fine, I take the opportunity of presenting this dissertation to the students of Sanskrit literature humbly inviting their attention to the tradition of Sanskrit learning in this part of the country, Assam, thus making significant contribution to the development of Indian culture and civilization.

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