



‘Bokaakhecha Bhaona’ in Jamugurihat(Assam) and It’s Tradition

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Synopsis :

Bhaona is one of the folk performing arts prevalent in Assam. There are many different types of ceremonies and rituals that are performed by the Vaishnava Guru Mahapurusha Sankardeva of Assam. The event is held in all rural and urban areas but its impact is widespread in rural areas. One such event is the ‘Bokaakhecha Bhaona’, which is held according to the initial customs in the Paatalarchuk Gaon in Jamugurihat area of Sonitpur District from Assam. The village has been holding the Bhaona continuously for about 275 years. The Bhaona is based on the first tenth part of the ‘Tenth Skanda’ of *Bhagavad* called ‘Nandotsav’. In this discussion we will try to discuss the origin, tradition and performance style of this Bhaona. Field Study methods have been used to discuss the issue.

Key Words : Paatalarchuk Village, Bokaakhecha Bhaona, Tradition.

Introduction :

Culture is the mirror of a society. Culture reflects every aspect of a society. Bhaona is an old cultural and religious ceremony in Assam. There are different types of Bhaonas, which are primarily performed by the people of Assam in every ‘Satra’ and ‘Namghar’ since the times of Sankardeva. There are also other traditions associated with Bhaona in some parts of Assam. One of such significant events is ‘Bokakhesa Bhaona’ of Jamugurihat.

The original tenth Skanda of the *Bhagavad* contains a total of ninety chapters. Of these ninety chapters, the fifty-nine chapters translated by Sankardeva are known as ‘Adi Dasham’. This ‘Adi Dashama’ contains beautiful accounts of various stories ranging from the birth and childhood of Krishna to ‘Udhava Sangbad’. The main theme of this section is the ‘Nandotsav’, which describes the birth of Shishu Krishna, his mischief, his play with his peers,

his tricks, the scenes of grazing cows, the motherly behavior of mother Yashoda, the love of Krishna by the Gopis. With this 'Nandotsav' part as the basis, Janmashtami, the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna, is celebrated with great pomp in Assam. There are many types of 'Janmayatra' plays. Among them two significant plays are 'Nandotsav' and 'Bokaakhecha Bhaona', which are held in conjunction with Janmashtami. The festival is celebrated in the village of Paatalchuk in Jamugurihat, Assam without any interruption for the past 275 years. In this paper an attempt has been made to discuss upon various aspects of 'Bokaakhesa Bhaona'.

Discussion :

In 1671, a man named Paatalgiri Bhuyan, a descendant of Sankardev Guru, came from Kujidah area of Nagaon district with a number of families and settled in this area. Paatal Bhuyan was the cousin of Sankaradeva's brother Ramrai. He is one of the grandsons of Rajkhowa Sanatan Bhuyan of Kaliabar area. The name of the neighborhood where Paatal Bhuyan initially settled in was 'Gengani Chowk'. According to some oral accounts, the Bhuiyans, who were devotees of the Guru, established 'Namghar' and filled the area with songs, pads, Bhaonas and *kirtans*. The name of the neighborhood later became 'Gengnichuk', derived from the word 'Gagan'. Later, several clans from different areas settled around Gengni Chuk and at one point it became a crowded village. In time, everyone together named the village 'Paatalchuk' after the first man of the village, Paatal Bhuyan.

In this village the 'Bokaakhesa Bhaona' and 'Nandotsava Play' have been being organised for the last 275 years following the traditional customs. In fact, there is no written record of when the tradition of holding 'Bokaakhesa Bhaona' started in the village. However, its beginning has been determined based on the information passed down from generation to generation of the Paatal dynasty and the Kakati dynasty of the village, which is now in its tenth generation, and the people of the village and the area are likely to believe in this information.

The 'Janma Yatra play' which is staged every year is written by Gopal Ata. The play is performed on the day of Janmashtami. The scene becomes epiphanic with the songs in the play, 'the nama-prasanga' and 'Uruli' perform by women, the mixture of different musical instruments such as Doba, Kaah, Sangkha, Ghanta and Bhurtala.

Nandotsava which is also known as 'Pachati' is held on the following day.

The play is short in content but is lengthened by various satire jokes. In the Nandotsava part of *Adi Dashama*, Garga Muni arrives at Nanda's house to perform the Jatadhama of the newborn Krishna, the joy of the Gopis at the news of the birth of Yashoda's son and their visit to Nanda's house is described. There are many scenes

of the Gopis decorating the calves along with themselves, going to Nanda's house with a lot of yogurt, milk, sweets etc. and blessing Krishna and singing his praises. The subject-matter of the play is brief but the performances like satire and practical jokes adds more to the beauty of the script. The language of this bhaona is 'Brajavali'.

The most interesting event of this day is the 'Bokaakhecha Bhaona'. The gopis brought yogurt, milk, sandesh, ghee, honey, bananas, etc. to Nanda's house and the place fell to the ground making it untidy. There, the gopas slip and grab each other and fall to the ground. As a symbol of this, a wide hole is made about 8/10 inches deep in a piece of land near the Namghar. It is filled with mud and butter, honey, Curd, milk, etc., which are poured over the hole and a beautiful Daul is constructed of palm leaves and bamboo and beautifully decorated with various kinds of flowers and fruits etc.. They start singing -

"Aaji Nandor Ghore

Dharani tol bol kore....."

"Aaji ki Gokulot aanondo milise

Gupone ki O' Hari Ram....."

-In this way they made the environment lively. There are attempts to jump from the mud to fetch bananas and various fruits attached to the Daul. Some can bring it and some cannot. It is not easy to climb the poles of the Daul with muddy slippery feet to fetch bananas and other fruits! This is a very beautiful scene from the event. This is how this event has been celebrated for the past 275 years. After the 'Bokaakhesa Bhaona', the spectators flock to take home some of the mud chewed by the gops and gopis of Brajadhama. The spectators go home with a mark on their forehead with the mud with great devotion. This is where the Bhaona ends.

Once upon a time, everyone in the village was skilled in acting. The bhaona featured full-length masks made by the village craftsmen and *Choon*-masks worn on the masks. People were entertained very much by the use of masks during Nandotsava. Nowadays, it has disappeared and there is no use of masks in Bhaonas. New techniques have been adopted with modern thinking in this regard. However, this event has been organized with traditional faith, devotion and sincerity.

There are many beliefs behind the birthday of Lord Krishna and the 'Bokaakhecha Bhaona' celebrated by the people of this village with great sincerity and devotion. The whole village is cleansed on the day before the Bhaona and the Bhaona is performed following all the traditional customs. It can be said that people celebrate 'Bokaakhecha Bhaona' following that traditional rituals, sometimes with a few modifications. Therefore, it is

important to understand the importance of these issues. In this context, there is a belief among the villagers that not organizing the Bhaona every year would give way to misfortune. Ironically, whenever the Bhaona couldn't be organised, the villagers had to undergo bad times. Therefore, every year the people of Paatalchuk village celebrate Nandotsav and Bokaakhecha Bhaona on the occasion of Krishna Janmashtami.

Conclusion :

To conclude, it can be said that the 'Bokaakhecha Bhaona' at Paatalchuk village in Jamugurihat may not be known to all in Assam; but, it has been contributing a lot in regard to the national unity and also playing a great role in popularizing the Bhaona culture of Assam.

Reference Book :

Bhuyan, Himanshu Ranjan: *Jia Bhorolir Palas*, 1st edition, January 2017, p.68

