

Geetabhinoy: An Analytical Study of Modified Form of Musical Jatra-Pala**Budhan Murmu**

Research Scholar

Department of English

The Sanskrit College and University, Kolkata

West Bengal

budhanmurmum17@gmail.com

Abstract

Bengali Jatragaan (Jatra-Song) initiated in the 16th century by Lord Chaitanyadeva. He performed this song-based dramatic art presenting the devotional song filled with Vaisnavism. Since then this kind of dramatic art was denominated as 'Krishna-Jatra'. The theme of the Krishna-Jatra was about amorous and devotional love story of Lord Krishna and his consort Radha. Side by side there were 'Torjagaan' (a kind of song contest), 'Kothokata' (the reading and exposition of mythology), 'Kavi-Song' (an episode on the life of Shri Krishna and Gopi), 'Akhrai' and 'Half-Akhrai' (songs and musical interludes) and 'Panchaligaan' (a song contained a long narrative). All these were musical dramatic arts known as 'Geetinatya' (a musical drama or lyrical drama). The only common thing was that in all cases the characters of the lyrical drama were god and goddess. Moreover these arts were full of eroticism. Motilal Roy (1843-1908), an exponent of modern Jatra-Pala transformed the 'Geetinatya' into 'Geetabhinoy'. He excluded the eroticism of Geetinatya and included the devotional theme in the Geetabhinoy. The characters of the Geetinatya were all mythological deities. But the characters of Geetabhinoy became men and women who were devoted to god and goddess. According to *Unique Oxford Dictionary, Bengali to English*, 'Geet' is meant a song or lyric and 'Abhinoy' is meant acting. So the 'Geetabhinoy' can be defined as "An acting performance through singing". It is a new form of Jatra after the introduction of theatre in Calcutta. Actually the Geetabhinoy is a combination of rural Jatra-Pala and urban Theatre.

Keywords: Drama, Geetinatya, Geetabhinoy, Jatragaan, Lyrical, Musical

According to Hansanarayan Bhattacharya the meaning of 'Jatra' is a procession on the occasion of Hindu deities' festivals. Gradually the word 'Jatra' meant a dramatic acting performance. Jatra was combined with the word 'Gaan'(Song) as there were lots of songs in the dramatic Jatra acting. So the Jatra was called as Jatragaan. (17). On the other hand Ashutosh Bhattacharya states that less dramatic elements were used including dialogues in this dramatic performance. It was through music and dance that the subject was contextualised. Krishna consciousness that were preached by Lord Chaitanyadeva influenced the life style and thought process of the entire Bengali community. So the Jatragaan was known as Krishna Jatra. It was also known as 'Natageeta' or 'Geetinatya' which meant dance accompanied by music. (30). Narendra Krishna

Sinha argues that Krishna-Jatra was a popular musical sketch essence with devotion.(445) Mahaprabhu Chaitanyadeva used to perform 'Krishnajatra' with his disciples. As a result 'Kishnajatra' was spread all over Bengal. This kind of folk-drama was openly performed in the meadows and courtyards of countryside. Vaisnavism influenced the people as the Krishnajatra contained the devotional song of Lord Krishna and his consort Radha. According to Jagannath Ghosh Jatra can be compared with Italian Opera as the Jatra is song and music based. (187). There was a character named 'Vivek'(Conscience) in the dramatic Jatra for making solution of the complex and serious problems of the plot. Similarly there was a character named 'Ensemble' in the Italian Opera. Narendra Krishna Sinha states that Padavali Kirtan established by Thakur Narottam Das in the Vaisnava festival at Khetari (Rajshahi District). (542).This was also an act of singing in praise of Lord Krishna and Radha. Padavali Kirtan also spread the Vaishnav cult among the people of Bengal.

On the other hand Hansanarayan Bhattacharya states that Bodu Chandidas's *Srikrishnakirtan* and Poet Jayadeva's *Geetavindam* are the initial form of Bengali Jatragaan.(20). Among the many Krishnajatras 'Kaliyodamana Jatra' became popular. Later *Chandi Jatra*, *Manasar Bhasan Jatra*, *Rama Jatra*, *Chaitanya Jatra* and *Vidyasundar Jatra* were produced imitating the dramatic Krishnajatra. Brajendra Kumar De states that there initiated thousands of Bengali 'Geetinatya' (Musical Drama) and performed as Jatragaan in Bengal.(7). Background scenery was not used in this musical drama. Conversational songs were sung for fulfilling the lack of background scenery. However Bengal could retain its pristine musical drama for the development of Western Indian Music. Narendra Krishna Sinha argues that certain form of western Indian music influenced the music of Bengal. Moreover the Nawabi rule in Bengal from Murshid Quali (1717-1727) and Alivardi Khan (1740-1756) brought internal peace. During this time Bengal made a head way as against the old and static classical form. (543).The remarkable lyrical drama of this age is 'Kabi-gaan' (Kavi Song). In the Kavi Songs an episode of Lord Krishna and Gopi was described. Two parties of singer were the artists. One party raised the issue through singing while the other party gave a fitting reply with the beautiful tune. Both the parties' songs possessed love song of Lord Krishna. Krishna-Jatra became a low taste entertainment with the influence of Kabi-gaan.

Side by side 'Torjagaan' was initiated. It was another form of a lyrical drama. Torjagaan was modelled on the lines of Urdu and Persian song which was much popular at the end of the Mughal rule. An eminent poet Dasharathi Roy (1806-1857) introduced the 'Panchaligaan' in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was a form of 'Ksudragiti' sung sometimes in solo or sometimes in chorus. Narendra Krishna Sinha states that 'Panchaligaan' contained a long narrative.(543). Ramnidhi Gupta (Nidhu Babu), a talented composer of lyrical song developed a form known as 'Akhrai'. Actually Akhrai originated from the 'Akhara Class' prevalent in the Mughal aristocratic family. Akhrai consisted of songs and musical interludes. Narendra Krishna Sinha also argues that Akhrai songs were first introduced in Santipur. The concept of

orchestration initiated in the Akhrai soirees. Later Mohan Chand Basu modified the Akhrai Songs and introduced 'Half-Akhrai' in 1832 in Baghbazar, Calcutta.

Sumanta Banerjee mentioned a series of 'Mangal- Kavya' would perform in the rural Bengal. It was a most popular entertainment form at the end of the Mughal rule. These were poetical narratives in praise of Chandi (another form of goddess Kali), 'Manasa' (a local Bengali goddess of serpents). All these musical narratives depicted the realistic pictures of daily life in the Bengal countryside. (79). He also gave the information of 'Khemta Walis', female dancers who belonged to society's lower order. They were looked down upon by the educated Bengali gentry as obscene. (89). Ajit Kumar Ghosh states that the people of Bengal liked to enjoy folk song and dramatic performance. The theme of these performances adapted from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. 'Ramajatra' was popular among these lyrical dramas. (6).

According to Brajendra Kumar De all these entertainments were 'Geetinatya' (a musical drama or lyrical drama). In course of time Geetinatya took the form of eroticism and obscenity. These vulgar lyrical dramas were performed everywhere in Bengal. The cultured Bengali people looked down upon these kinds of performance.(7). He also states that all these lyrical dramas had comedian characters. Their dialogues were also full of vulgarity for attracting audience. (18).

Bharatchandra Roy (1712-1760) composed *Vidyasundar*, a narrative poem of secular love story. The story revolves round the love of Vidya (literally 'knowledge'), a daughter of the king of Bardhaman and Sundar (literally 'beautiful'), son of the king of the Kanchi, with Malini (an elderly woman flower seller) acting as a sort of go-between in arranging secret rendezvous for the lovers. Sumanta Banerjee argues that Bharatchandra set the pace in classical Bengali literature through the *Vidyasundar* poetry. Even 'Vidyasundar Jatra' was created adapting the *Vidyasundar* poetry in the third decade of the nineteenth century and was immensely popular. So novelties were created in the dramatic Jatragaan. From this time Jatragaan began to socialize having a pleasing appeal to the audience. (546). Gopal Udiya (1817-1857) organised a *Vidyasundar* Jatra troupe and his Jatra performance became popular in urban Calcutta area because of his ability to make the characters in the Jatra narrate their loves and woes in the familiar terms of the social lives of the poor people. Bhairab Halder of Singur was the songwriter and music composer of Gopal's troupe. A dancer named Kashi would perform the role of Malini. Kashi produced a popular dance which was known as 'Khemta Dance'. This kind of dramatic performance gave a new impetus for creating the reformation of Jatragaan. *Vidyasundar* Jatra was popular until seventh decade of the nineteenth century. Bhawanipur's Umesh Mitra performed *Vidyasundar* Jatra. His troupe gained glorification for *Vidyasundar*-Jatra. Govida Adhikary and Dasharath Roy (1896-18560) developed this kind of dramatic Jatra. Later Mimicry, obscene gestures and dialogues, clown's dance and the dance of Kalua-Bhulua were widely prevalent in the amateur Jatragaan. Even low taste was circulated in the devotional Krishna-Jatra. Therefore Hansanarayan Bhattacharya states that educated and elegant people of Bengal became sullen to the Jatragaan. (29)

Krishnakamal Goswami (1810-1888) of Nadia, in order to rescue the public from the grip of this polluted taste and satisfied it with the pure taste of devotion, gave a new form to Krishna-Jatra by refining it. He composed some Geeti-Natok (Lyrical Drama), such as – *Swarnabilas*, *Rai Ummadini* and *Bichitrabilas*. After the death of Krishnakamal, Nilkanata Mukhyopadhyay gained more popularity in the field of Krishna-Jatra or Kaliyodaman-Jatra. But Krishna-Jatra did not give entertainment as earlier. Amateur theatres were performed in the residences of elite people in Calcutta. Prasanna Kumar Thakur established a theatre at Shunra area in Calcutta in 1831. A theatre was established in the villa of Belgachhia's King in 1858. In this way drama became popular in Calcutta. But theatre was expensive, out of reach of the common people, while Jatragaan was against the taste of the educated people. Therefore, a new type of Jatra acting was introduced for the entertainment of the common people since 1864-65. This new Jatra was known as 'Geetabhinoy'. Shishuram Adhikary performed Geetabhinoy Jatra with great success.

'Geetabhinoy' is a modification of Bengali Jatragaan. According to Gourangaprasad Ghosh, the 'Geetabhinoy' is the amalgamation of Jatragaan and Bengali Theatre. (158). There were no need of theatre-hall and scenery in the Geetabhinoy performance. Actors and musicians performed in the open stage. The nineteenth century Bengali educated people breathed a sigh of relief at the introduction of Geetabhinoy Jatra. *Shakuntala* was the first geetabhinoy-play which was written by Annadaprasad published in 1864. Sudipta Chatterjee states that Girish Chandra Ghosh performed Madhusudan Dutta's *Sharmistha* amalgamating elements of Jatra with the theatre. Therefore he organised a jatra troupe named 'Baghbazarer Amateur Theatre'. (125)

During this time Motilal Roy (1843-1908) of Nabadwip took a part in the field of Geetabhinoy Jatra performance. He freed Geetabhinoy from all kinds of inertia and transcended the degradation of vulgarity. His Geetabhinoy-Jatra became universally popular and enjoyable for everyone, regardless of high or low, male or female. He not only popularised Geetabhinoy, but also made it the main vehicle of public education.

Actually, Motilal Roy was an eminent writer, director, producer and actor of 'Geetabhinoy-Jatra'. Gouranga Prasad Ghosh argues that Motilal Roy brought the renaissance to the Jatragaan in Bengal. He was a legend of Geetabhinoy-Jatra which changed the pace and nature of mass awakening and social culture. He not only kept the level of people's entertainment, but also made the jatra vehicle of folk education by conducting an extreme experiment on how to spread mass education through it. (163). He established a jatra-troupe named 'Nabadwip Banga Geetabhinoy' for performing geetabhinoy-plays in 1873. Motilal Roy's first geetabhinoy play was *Taranisen Bodh*. His other geetabhinoy-plays are *Ram Banabas*, *Ram Biday*, *Kaliyo Sarpa Daman*, *Sita Horon*, *Droupadi's Bostrohoron*, *Nimai Sanyas*, *Vismar Sharashashya*, *Karna Bodh and Brajaleela* etc. Motilal Roy showed his geetabhinoy-jatra all over Bengal during that time. He went to perform his geetabhinoy-jatra to the far of Panchakote kingdom, Temple of Jogadaya Devi in Burdwan, Palace of Maliara king of Bankura, Zamindar family of Andal and undivided

Dinajpur. Even the king of Mohishur (Mysore) kingdom rewarded Motilal Roy with the gold medal. The English rulers awarded him more than one time. He visited South India also for performing geetabhinoy-jatra. He transformed the Jatragaan into a theatrical Jatra party. He invented various techniques and elements for making the Jatragaan popular to the audience.

Brajendra Kumar De states that there was excessive song in the Jatrapala of Motilal Roy. But the main element was prose dialogue. Moreover, there were extempore lecture and Jurigaan (a type of chorus song) (9). Hanganarayan Bhattacharya also states that Motilal Roy not only gave Jatragaan glory and dignity, but he even changed the taste of the audience. He possessed sophisticated taste. Being a disciple of Iswar Gupta, he showed a sense of elegance. His aim was not only to satisfy audience's thirst; his aim was to promote social and moral values. (257). Brajendra kumar De states that Motilal Roy is the father of modern Jatra-Pala. He transformed the Geetinatya into Geetabhinoy excluding the eroticism and vulgarity and he included the devotional song in the geetabhinoy-jatra. (8). Side by side Ahibhusan Bhattacharya, Aghorchandra Kabyathirtho and Keshab Bandyopadhyay started to write geetabhinoy-jatra imitating the style of Motilal Roy. Gradually the Geetabhinoy turned into Jatra-Pala. According to Gouranga Prasad Ghosh, Bengali Jatra-Pala was called as 'Bengali Opera' in the twentieth century. (158). Tune, dance, acting and dialogues of Jatra-Pala were changed imitating the theatre of Calcutta. Therefore all geetabhinoy troupes turned into Opera-Parties in the twentieth century. In the twenty first century Bengali jatra-troupe is called as opera-party. Even today, Kolkata's opera-party continues to perform Bengali Jatra-Palas throughout Bengal.

Works cited

- Bhattacharya, Ashutosh. *Folklore of Bengal*. National Book Trust, New Delhi.1978.
- Ghosh, Gourangaprasad. *Tinsho Bachharer Jatra Shilper Itihas*. Dey Book Store, Kolkata. 2023.
- Ghosh, Dr. Ajit Kumar. *Bangla Natoker Itihas*. Dey's Publishing, Kolkata. 2018.
- Banerjee, Sumanta. *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*. Seagull Books, Calcutta. 1989.
- Bhattacharya, Hansanarayan. *Jatragane Motilal Roy O Tnahar Sampraday*. Suprakash, Kolkata. 2018.
- Majumdar, Dr. Dilip. *Unique Oxford Dictionary, Bengali to English*. The Unique Book Centre, Kolkata. 2008.
- De, Brajendrakumar. *Banglar Jatra Natok*. Dishani Prakashani, Kolkata. 2011.
- Sinha, Narendra Krishna. *The History of Bengal (1757-1905)*. University of Calcutta, 1967.
- Chatterjee, Sudipto. *The Colonial Staged: Theatre in Colonial Calcutta*. Kolkata: Seagull, 2007. 119-25 Print