

The Jhumuras in Assamese

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Jhumurā is a form of Aṅkīyā drama in Assamese, which latter was introduced and staged by the great Vaisnava reformer Śrī Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568 AD) in order to propagate his faith of Bhakti, called eka-śaraṇa-nām-dharma of bhāgavatī-dharma. Aṅkīyā proved to be a very successful vehicle for spreading the message of Bhakti, and with its appearance drama appeared for the first time in the history of Assamese literature. Prior to Śaṅkaradeva, there was no written form of dramatic literature although some local and folk entertainments with dramatic elements in them existed from very ancient times. It was Śaṅkaradeva who first composed and staged Aṅkīyā drama in Assamese. That led critics to confer on him the epithet of father of Assamese drama and stage.

The dramas of Śaṅkaradeva are generally called Aṅkīyā Nāṭ which, however, seems tautological since both the terms Aṅkīyā and Nāṭ bear the same meaning. The term Aṅka is sufficient to denote drama; likewise Nāṭ also means what is understood by the term drama in English. But somehow the two terms conjoined and came to be used together after the originator of the form left the scene to mean a particular type of dramatic composition. This class of writing was never called Aṅkīyā Nāṭ during the period of Śaṅkaradeva. He himself used words like Yātrā, Nāṭa, Nāṭaka, etc., for his plays.

The enactment of these plays is called Bhāonā (from the word Bhāva. The verb Bhāo means 'to pretend', 'to act'. etc.). We have now six such plays written by Śaṅkaradeva. After him, his able successor Mādhavadeva also composed a few works. But in some vital matters, Mādhavadeva departed from the principles and theory of Śaṅkaradeva's Aṅkīyā dramas.

There are altogether eight compositions ascribed to Mādhavadeva. Barring *Arjuna-bhāṇana* (also called *Dadhi mathana*), these are of a form and technique different from earlier Aṅkīyā. There is no large plot to these small plays, the Jhumuras; only some situations are given dramatic form. These situations centre on the child Kṛṣṇa

and the Gopīs of Vraja. Kṛṣṇa is always the hero of the Jhumuras, portrayed as an embodiment of the Divine and the human.

There is no complexity to the subject or action of these plays. The Sanskrit dramaturgists prohibit the introduction of certain episodes and incidents as detrimental and offensive to the sentiment of the audience. They hold it improper to show on the stage such events as battle, killing or death, marriage, domestic details such as eating, sleeping, etc. In Aṅkīyā drama, many of these rules are not followed.

Sometimes in Mādhavadeva's work we come across event following event in quick succession. Elsewhere, there are interludes between one event and another filled up with directions of the Sūtradhāra and songs. Sometimes in a song, a long description of the activities of Kṛṣṇa is given. 'Inter-interludes' occur in such songs and the characters featured (Kṛṣṇa, a Gopī or Yaśodā, as the case may be) in the song appear on the stage to dance or converse. The song resumes, sung by a Gāyan-bāyan musical combine. The phase of the song in resumption is denoted by the term Pad-gīta or Gīt-pada. The hero Kṛṣṇa is divine and is endowed with all good and great qualities, some supernatural. But the music to which the characters move is always light and gay.

The eight plays ascribed to Mādhavadeva are *Arjuna Bhanjanā* or *Dadhi-mathana*, *Bhojan-behār* or *Brahmā-mohana*, *Chor-dharā*, *Pimparā-guchowā*, *Bhūmi-leṭowā*, *Bhūṣaṇ-harana*, *Kotorā-khelowā* and *Rās-jhumurā*. The authorship of the last three works is, however, doubted. Of the eight, all but the first are Jhumuras. As in Śaṅkara-deva's plays, the Prastāvanā and Prarocanā parts in Mādhavadeva's Jhumurās are absent. While these and other distinctive characteristics of Aṅkīyā drama are lacking, the Jhumuras feature some peculiarities of form and technique. There is no benedictory (first) Bhaṭimā in these plays excepting *Bhojan-behār*. Likewise no concluding song or concluding Bhaṭimā (called Mukti-maṅgala Bhaṭimā, which may be equated with Bharata-vākya of Sanskrit drama) is offered in any of the Jhumuras of Mādhavadeva. Ślokas employed are very few and the events unfold through song and dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and a Gopī or Kṛṣṇa and Yaśodā. Sometimes a song is interpolated with dance and dialogue—the 'inter-interludes' mentioned earlier. In such interludes, the Sūtradhāra sometimes explains the situation and gives his directions to the actor and actresses.

There are some peculiarities in the enactment of Jhumurās as well. The Añkīyā dramas are staged at night. The preliminaries are begun in the evening, after sunset, and the play generally goes on all night, concluding next morning. As has been stated earlier, the enactment is called Bhāonā. Bar (greater)-bhāonā is the term for Añkīyā enactment, as opposed to Din (day)-bhāonā for Jhumuras, which are performed even during daytime. Din-bhāonā begins before sunset and lasts only for a few hours. Generally the Sattras on certain occasions arrange two performances on the same day—first a Din-bhāonā and then a Bar-bhāonā. Differences between the two forms are there in the preliminaries—called Yorā or Gāñikā. These preliminaries, equal to the Purvaranga portion of Sanskrit drama, have been compositely termed by some scholars as Dhemālī; but to be precise, the Dhemālī is only a part of all the preliminaries. In Din-bhāonā all the preliminaries are not gone through. As such, they are not of very long duration. Some Dhemālīs, for example, are not played in the preliminaries of Din-bhāonā. Of those omitted may be cited the most attractive of Dhemālīs, the Ghoṣā-dhemālī, in which the main drummer (Bar-bāyan) plays as many as seven drums (Khol or Mṛdaṅga). A Gāyan-bāyan provides the music for Din-bhāonā, which is concluded with a Thelā instead of music and dance in Kharmān-tāla, as in Bar-bhāonā.

The origin of the word Jhumurā or Jhumurā is uncertain. Scholars like to mention in this context the definition of Jhumuri as provided in *Saṅgīta-dāmodara*: “*Ekaiva jhumurir loke varṇādiniyamojjhītā*” (v. 168, Stavaka II). But in some manuscripts the word jhumuri is reported to have been replaced by the word Sumari. The jhumuri by classical definition might have been of erotic subject; Vidyāpati’s mention of “Lori Jhumuri” suggests its amatory character. The Bengali Jhumur is also of the same sentiment. There is further a metre of eight syllables in Assamese called Jhumuri. And in Hindustani classical music, there is a tāla (rhythm) called Jhumra. But all these seem to be far-flung references in the present context. The Jhumuras of Mādhavadeva are not always confined to erotic subject. They are comparatively small plays. Song accompanied by dance always dominates in the Jhumuras and even parts of dialogue are sung.

Child Kṛṣṇa and his playmates the cowherd boys of Vraja, Yaśodā and Gopīs, are the principle characters in Mādhavadeva’s Jhumurās. Vātsalya-rasa is the main sentiment of all these plays, emerging from the filial love of Yaśodā and the Gopīs and Kṛṣṇa’s

childhood pranks. As such, the Jhumurās can be treated as a separate and distinct class by themselves, which have no direct connection with the Jhumuri of either *Saṅgīta-dāmodara* or of *Vidyāpati*.

In the Sattras (Vaiṣṇava monasteries), there is a form of dance called Jhumurā. Dances of the Sattras of Assam are mainly presented as part of Bhāonā performances. There are only a few form of dance performed independently. Jhumurā-nāc (dance) is such a dance, performed by young boys in male or female dress. The songs of the performances are mostly taken from the Jhumurās of Mādhavadeva but songs of Śaṅkaradeva—some from his dramas—are also sung and danced to. Likewise, some Bargītas of Śaṅkaradeva may also be used in Jhumurā-nāc. There is no Abhinaya or acting, only dance gestures are used. These dances have two parts—preliminary and main—called respectively Rāmadāni and Gā-nāc.

The dramatic works of Mādhavadeva, the Jhumurās, differed thus in many aspects from those of his guru Śaṅkaradeva. He followed his own mode of development of plot and sentiment, and such place was occupied in his shorter dramas by “the adventitious attractions of the song and the dance as well as music”. □