

Gayan-Bayan of the Mayamara Satra

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ABSTRACT

The origin of the *Gayan-Bayan* in the Mayamara Satra might be traced back to its founder Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva (1553-1626), who composed more than one hundred and eighty two *gits* (lyrics) giving for each of them the particular *raga* or melody in which it is to be performed. But the present form of performing the *gits* through dance and playing of Mridarga' (a kind of drum), and Bhortal (cymbal) is said to have been introduced by the second *Adhikar* Sri Sri Krishnadeva. This saint founded a religious establishment popularly known as *Phulam Namghar* within the campus of his Khutiapota Satra near Jorhat. After a few years, the *Phulam Namghar* became famous as the centre of learning of Mayamara *Gayan-Bayan*. In course of time, this type of *Satriya* music and dance began to spread to all Mayamara societies consisting of different castes, communities and tribes of Assam. So, it can be assumed that the *Gayan Bayan* had originally started in *Satra* and hence it can be accepted as an element of *Satriya* culture of Assam.

1. Introduction

The orchestral band or *Gayan-Bayan* of the Mayamara Satra performed in certain religious functions of the Mayamara Vaishnava societies has its own importance in the field of traditional music and dance of Assam. The origin of the *Gayan-Bayan* in the Mayamara Satra might be traced back to its founder Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva (1553-1626), who composed more than one hundred and eighty two *gits* (lyrics) giving for each of them the particular *raga* or melody in which it is to be performed. But the present form of performing the *gits* through dance and playing of Mridarga' (a kind of drum), and Bhortal (cymbal) is said to have been introduced by the second *Adhikar* Sri Sri Krishnadeva. This saint founded a religious establishment popularly known as *Phulam Namghar* within the campus of his Khutiapota Satra near Jorhat. After a few years, the *Phulam Namghar* became famous as the centre of learning of Mayamara *Gayan-Bayan*. In course of time, this type of *Satriya* music and dance began to spread to all Mayamara societies consisting of different castes, communities and tribes of Assam. So, it can be assumed that the *Gayan Bayan* had originally started in *Satra* and hence it can be accepted as an element of *Satriya* culture of Assam.

As stated, Aniruddhadeva composed nearly two hundred *gits* in different *ragas* of Indian classical music. Although these *gits* are religious in content and devotional in purpose, they are not called *Bargits* in Assam, because in Assamese music only the hymns composed by Sankardeva and Madhavdeva are called *Bargit*. Not only the *gits* of the primal preacher of Mayamara Vaishnavism are presented in Mayamara *Gayan-Bayan* but also those composed by his successors, like Nityanandadeva and Hariramdeva, and occasionally the *Bargits* of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva too. The style of singing and also of playing of musical instruments in Mayamara *Gayan- Bayan* differs from that of other *Satras* introduced by the two leading Neo-Vaishavite preceptors. As the *gits* are to be performed in the specified *ragas* with different

tals (rhythms) and *mats* (tone), it is not easy to participate in the *Gayan- Bayan* of Mayamara Satra without proper knowledge and practice under the full guidance of a well experienced *oja*. The 'mpdanga' has been regarded as the most important musical instrument in some of the classical music and dances in India. In the *Gayan-Bayan* of the Mayamara Satra also instrument has a great importance like the cymbals (Bhortal) in respect of performance of devotional songs. But there is no use of *Khol*. The *Gayan-Bayan* of the Mayamara Satra like those in other *Satras* is performed by a group of *Gayans* (singers) and two or three *Bayans* (players of *mrdahgas*). The subordinate *Gayans* are called *Palis*, while the *Gayan* who leads the choral singing is called *Oja*. The *Oja* along with his companions lays prayer before the *Bhaktas* (Votaries) for permission of a *Git* to be performed in the *Gayan-Bayan*. After getting the formal permission, the participants get ready to sing the selected *Git*. The singing of *raga* with its *Alapa* of a selected *Git* is the primary stage of the *Gayan-Bayan*. There are three stages of singing a *raga* in this system and each of the three stages has some religious beliefs. In the first stage, the *Oja* commences his performances beginning with such syllables as "aa..... aa.....aa....ha....ha....ha" with a view to inviting God to the assembly of the *Bhaktas*. The *Palis* simply respond to him by uttering another syllable "O.....rama". In this stage, the *Bayans* also welcome God by creating a sound "Gur — Gur ---- Gur" on their *mrdahgas*. In the second stage, the two musical words *Vrindavane Harirame* refer to the existence of God in Vrindavan. In the third and last stage of the *raga*, the *Gayans* with their choral singing narrate the divine power of God on earth. It is worth mentioning that the *mat* (tone) of the *raga* in this stage gradually comes to lower scale and this style of singing *raga* hints the end of the principal stage of the *Gayan-Bayan*. Finally the *raga* comes to an end when the *Bayans* play *Chotkala ghat* or "Jorani ghat" on their *mrdahgas*. Of course, no *Man* (an attractive item of supplementary *Gayan- Bayan*) will be exhibited, if the *Chotkala ghat* is played on the

mrdaugas at the time of ending of the *raga*. On the other hand, if the *Joranighat* is employed, one *Man* will be presented in the middle part of the *Gayan-Bayan*.

Three main points are to be noted regarding the *Tals* in the *Gayan-Bayan* of Mayamara Satra. These are (a) the *Tal* may be long or short in proportion to the syllables of the words, (b) The specified *Tals* are used only at the time of playing *Tals*. (c) There is one *Tal* for each stanza in every song. Though the *Tal* of the *mdarigas* commonly known as *Jyoti* or *Jeoti*, are generally applied in the first stanza of a hymn, some differences are noticed in respect of certain *Gits*. Specially the *Gits* associated with *Ramdhanasri* and *Belovar ragas* are sung firstly with *Olota - bar bisam tal*, and the other *Tals* are used according to the directions of the *Ojas* in the remaining verses. Therefore it is seen that the *Tals* are played in the specified lines meant for *Tal* playing.

The main characteristic of *Gayan-Bayan* of Mayamara Satra is that there are eight *Mats*, eight *Ghats* and eight *Tals*. One *pada* (verse) of a *git* is said to be ended when the performance of eight *mats*, eight *ghats* and eight *tals* is finished. Every *Mat* comes to an end along with the *ghats* of *Mridangas* and so eight *ghats* and eight *tals* are required for closing of eight *Mats*.

After finishing *Tal-diya*, the *Chak-diya* (striking of cymbals rapidly) is played with a *thekechani mat* (a tone with violent striking of cymbals). The *Athuvani jat* begins just after *Chak diya* is over. The *Athuvani jat* is presented in both sitting and standing positions. In this stage, all the *Gayans* and *Bayans* bend their heads to the *Bhaktas* and get ready to sing standing. For this reason, this system of singing is known as *Athuvani jat*. In this way, the motion of *Gayan* and *Bayan* is being carried on with its various tones, steps and gesture of bodies till the first *pada* is over.

The eight *Mats* in the *Gayan -Bayan* of Mayamara Satra are -

- 1) *Ek-capariya (Ecapariya) guri mat* (a tone with one strike). In this system in each pressure of tone, there falls a strike of cymbal and the speed of singing is very slow and lengthy, So the initial portion of the music goes on in slow tempo.
- 2) *Ducapariya guri mat* (a tone with two strikes in middle speed of singing).
- 3) *Tulidiya mat* ; a tone with one strike. The scale of singing in this tone is raised to high scale.
- 4) *Tal-bhahgani mat*: It is a tone which is employed in the choral singing by revolving one cymbal with the right hand of the *Gayan*. In this tone also the scale of singing is raised to high scale and the tone is changed.
- 5) *Ducapariyd tuli-dlyd mat* : This tone begins with two strikes very slowly. There falls two strikes in every pressure of the tone and the singing of scale is raised to high scale. The *(Ihcils)* played on the *mrdaugas* are called *Duovani Ghat* and the provision of raising *Mat* (tone) does not come after playing this *Duovani ghat*,

- 6) *Ducdpari ya Khar Mat* or *Kechiya Mat* : It is a fast tone with two strikes. Here the *Gayans* slowly begin to proceed nearer to the *Ojas* with their steps of right feet by turning slightly to the right side.
- 7) *Tini-Cdpariya Khar Mat* : In this tone there fall three strikes and the *Gayans* and *Bayans* proceed forward and backward with three steps of their feet.
- 8) *Ekcpariya (Ecapariya) Khar Mat* or *Ses (last) Mat* :In this last tone with one strike, the song is sung in such a manner that it reaches the highest tempo and then the *Pada* comes to an end. The *Mrdauga* has a separate rhythm for each of the tone of a song. As soon as the tone ends, the rhythm of the *Mrdauga* also ends. The changing process of tune depends upon the rhythm of *Mrdaugas*. Thus it takes forty to sixty minutes for conclusion of a *Pada*. The song which commences from evening may come to end at mid-night. Thereafter another *Git* is given for presentation so as to cover the remaining part of the night. The *Gits* of the *ragas* such as, *Kalyan*, *Kao-kalyan-Sindhura*, *Ahira*, *Lalita* etc. are regarded as *Prabhati Git* and these are sung in the last part of the night.

The *Oja* being the leader of the *Gdyan-Bayan* initiates the changing process of this classical type of music. The striking of cymbals also begins according to the directions of the *Oja*. Of course, the *Palis* are not allowed in singing to repeat the same line.

In the concluding stage of singing the last *Mat*, the *Oja* and the *Bayans* make a circle by moving round which is known as "*Marana Pak*", which indicates the fall of *Bhaiita* of the *Git*. The final stage is the performance of *Samidhani*. When the singing of all *Padas* of the *Git* is over, the *Oja* will have to inform the *bhaktas* the end of the *Git*. The *bhaktas* will direct the *Gayans* to bring *Samidhani*. At the time of singing *Samidhani* there is no need of *Bayans*. Only the *Oja* will lead the *Samidhani Git* with their subordinates by playing cymbals. The last stage of singing *Samidhani* is the expression of four words viz "*Rama Rama*" and "*Hari Hari*". The ending of these devotional words in the mode of prayer will lead to the conclusion of *Gayan-Bayan* presented in the religious functions of Mayamara societies. The *Bhaktas* will pay their obeisance to the Supreme Deity by taking *Ndm-Smaran*. Thus the process of this choral singing takes a long period of five to six hours. In addition to the *Gayan-Bayan*, there is a provision for exhibition of attractive items of supplementary *Gayan-Bayan* known as *Man* and *Dhemali*. The four *Mans* prevalent in Mayamara societies are (i) *Jyoti*, (ii) *Melan*, (iii) *Mao-Muri* and (iv) *Vidyapati*. The *Dhemalis* are (1) *Pajikata* (2) *Bar-dhemali* (3) *Cutkala Bhumi* (4) *Actola Bhumi* and (5) *Jeoti Cakra*.

In playing *Man* and exhibiting *Dhemali*, the main role will be played by the *Bayans*. The *Bayans* along with their *Ghats* on *mrdaugas* will go on showing the different steps of feet and

mode of dancing and the *Gayans* will follow them accordingly by striking their cymbals. There are six *Ghats* in *Jyoti Man*, nine *Ghats* in *Melan Man*, three in *Mou-Muri* and eight in *Vidyapati*. There is a custom of singing *Ghosa* before the conclusion of *Gayan-Bayan* particularly in the morning time. The singing of *ghosa* is called *Pada-hat diya*. In this process of singing *Ghosa*, some ancient stories are narrated by one or two *Ojas* with the gesture of their fingers. The *Ojas* use an elaborate code of *hastas* to indicate the different events and sentiments of the king or heroes of the stories. The exhibition of different *hastas* of the *Ojas* signify the subject matter of the verses of the *Ghosa pada*. There is no need of playing 'mndangas' in this style of singing. The striking of cymbals will serve the purpose. *Saranga*, *Sydma* and *Desdgar ragas* are used for presentation of *Pada Hat Diya*.

2. Conclusion

From the above it is seen that in all respects of the performance of *Gayan Bayan* in Mayamara societies, such as, singing, playing of musical instruments, gesture of hands and bodies, steps of feet etc., certain codes are to be strictly followed by the participants for its perfect presentation. Wrong tuning of any song will cause much inconvenience to the participants in playing the musical instruments. There must therefore be complete harmony among the three fine arts - singing, playing of musical instruments and dancing. This type of musical performance among the Mayamara devotees exist only in the districts of Tinisukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar and in a few places of Nagaon and Sonitpur districts. An indepth study on the *Gayan-Bayan* of the Mayamara *satra* and its comparison with those of other *satras* would bring to light some new elements of *satriya* music and dance of Assam.

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