

## GAYAN BAYAN OF THE MAYAMARA SATRA



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### Introduction

*The place of Sri Sri Anirudhadeva, a great saint, in the history of Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam is unique. He is the Adyesvar (Primal Guru) of the Mayamara sect which created political upheaval in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Assam by overthrowing the mighty Ahoms temporarily and capturing power in the capital at Rangpur. Aniruddhadeva spread his brand of Vaishnavism amongst the most oppressed and under privileged group of people like the Kaivartas Kacharis, Haris and Brittlials and most of them were like untouchables. The Moran, Mataks and many Kacharies and Chutiyas also came to his religious fold. The different ethnic groups with their respective dialects, culture and tradition when embraced the new faith came within the mayamara Vaishnava community and gradually got themselves completely assimilated with the greater Assamese society. From a state of unsophistication they were uplifted, given status and rights equal with others.*

Aniruddhadeva devised two phases of Bhakti Culture, the first phase being the initial stage of initiation called Sarana, which means submission of one's self with complete devotion to lord Vishnu through the medium of his Guru. The ordination (Sarana) ceremony of a disciple of the Mayamara sect is spiritually the most

significant. It is the spiritual rebirth of a disciple where his parental name is changed to one of the thousand name of Vishnu. From this day his codisciple s will address him as 'Kutum' (kinsman). A sacramental friendship will grow amongst them. To concentrate his mind, he has to fast the night preceding the day he is going to be

initiated. On the scheduled day, he is to wear only a three yard long plain white cloth and be completely bare headed. He is then to take three dips in a river or tank with a packet of eighty number of spotless betel leaves of equal size,, wrapped by a forefront piece of a spotless banana leaf, one and half feet long. Holding the packet with both the hands upward, he is then to dive thrice and then come to the Namghar, where some selected bhakats and the preacher, generally the satradhikar are seated. The Guru offers him Vani or message of initiation and gives a name corresponding to one of the thousand names of Vishnu. The eighty betel leaves and the piece of banana leaf represent eighty one kinds of bhakti, of which only the Nirguna bhakti is offered to him, which is also symbolized by the same given to him and by which he is to be called by co-disciples after the formalities of initiation are over.

Aniruddhadeva was not simply a social organizer; his manifold talents covered his proficiency both as a litterateur and as a musician. Being inspired by the teachings of Sankardeva, Madhadeva and Gopaldeva, Aniruddhadeva also made scholarly translation of a number of chapters of the Bhagawata and composed devotional hymns or lyrics called (gits) vibrating with the tune of Bhakti, for which he is credited as a great poet of the post-Sankardeva era and as one of the prominent carriers of the rich cultural heritage created by the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam.

#### Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the present study are-

1. To examine the traditional religious system of the community and its decline.
2. To examine the religion as a medium of cultural identity of the community and
3. To identify the particular beliefs and practices among the community.

#### Methodology

The study will be based on both historical and anthropological approaches. Besides study and use of historical and related literature, extensive field investigation will be done in the selected villages of the Matak community who predominantly inhabit in the district of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh of Assam.

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, 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 performing the gits through dance and playing of Mridanga (drum) and Bhortal (cymbal) is said to have been introduced by the second Adhikar Sri Sri Krishnadeva.

According to the devotees of Aniruddhadeva, the saint composed more than two hundred gits which appear to be a fact. Structurally, the gits of Aniruddhadeva are divided into two Dhrung and Pada and these are generally in payar and Tripadi meters. Most of his published songs have four or six verses. The musical character of the songs are also to be noted.

Aniruddhadeva uses a total 36 ragas and in each of the gits, he also gives the name of the raga in which it is to be performed.

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-Vaishnavite preceptors. As the gits are to be performed in the specified ragas with different (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.

At last 36 ragas are followed in Gayan Bayan of the Mayamara Satra. Some of them are Vasanta, Asovari, Dhanasri, Belover, Srigauri, Kedara, Bhupali, Srigandhara, Kalyana, Keo-Kalyana Sindhura, Syamat, Ahira, Calengi, Kamgiri and Lalita. The devotional songs written by other Mayamara Saints are also of raga pattern and hence they cannot be presented in any religious performance without employing the defined raga.

It may also be mentioned in this connection that unlike other satras in those of the Mayamara founded by Aniruddhadeva, the songs composed by this saint and his successors are not performed as solo but as Nrtya- kirtan in the pattern of Ojapali dance of ancient times, keeping harmony with musical instruments like Mrdanga and tala. There are also certain codes or rules to be observed in determining the raga, tal-manda and dance performance. The gits are performed in the ragas of the Indian classical music but there are some variations in some tunes. The talas generally used are Yoti, Parital, Rupganjan, Rupak, Athtal, Carimani, Barbisam and Saru-bisam and Olata Saru-

bisam. It may be noted that any gits can be performed in Yoti, Rupganjan, Rupak, Athtal, Barbisam and Saru-bisam.

The Mrdanga 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 Gayan (Singers) and two or three Bayans (players of Mrdanga). The subordinate Gayans are called Palies, while the Gayan who leads the choral singing is called Oja. Oja along with his companions lays prayer before the Bhakatas for permission of a git to be performed in the Gayan Bayan. The singing of raga with his Alapa of a selected git is the primary stage of the Gayan Bayan.

The two local works Jat and Mat prevalent in the Gayan Bayan of the Mayamara Satra have an identical meaning, the Jat is divided into three categories to understand the differences of the various stages of Gayan Bayan. The prevalent three names of the Jat are (1) Dhora Jat (2) Ga-Jat and (3) Athuvani Jat. The Dhara Jat generally refers to a Mat (tone) which is applied in singing Dhrung of the hymn. The Dhrung is to be sung beginning with the last line of the verse and the style of singing Dhrung ends in the last two words of the first line of Dhrung. The next stage to Dhora Jat is ga-jat. In ga-jat the line of the first stanza of the song is sung. Tal of the Mrdanga is applied when the last words of the last line of the verse are sung by the Gayans. Singing of few words of a line from

each verse of the song is called Tal-diya. The name of the tal generally used in the first verse of any hymn is known as Jyoti or Jeoti Tal in the Gayan Bayan of Mayamara Satra.

The main characteristics 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 Mrdangas and so eight ghats and eight tals are required for closing of eight mats.

The Mrdanga has a separate rhythm for each of the tone of a song. As soon as the tone ends, the rhythm of the Mrdanga also ends. The changing process of tune depends upon the rhythm of Mrdangas. Thus it takes 40-60 minutes for conclusion of a pada. The song which commences from evening may come to end at mid-night.

In addition to the Gayan Bayan there is a provision for exhibition of attractive items of supplementary Gayan Bayan known as Mon and Dhemali. There is a custom of singing Ghosa before the conclusion of Gayan Bayan particularly in the morning time. In singing Ghosa some ancient stories are narrated by one or two Ojhas with the gestures of their fingers.

In the performance of Gayan Bayan the social usages and customs prevalent in Mayamara societies shall have to be followed. According to the traditions no Gayan Bayan can be performed without reading the Bhagawat in the very beginning of the religious ceremonies.

The young participants are to show their loyalty by bowing their heads as a mark of respect to their elders in the performance or Gayan Bayan. The Gayan Bayan is commenced simply with a Tal Diya

Mat. Gits with ragas like Basanta, Asovari, Kedara, Sri Gauri, Paona Gauri, etc. are generally sung at day time and in evening time while Prabhati gits namely viz. Ahira, Lalita, Desagar, Kalyan, Keo-kalyan, Sindura etc. are presented in morning time. Similarly some gits associated with Bhupali and Rangiri Ragas are selected for performance on Shradha or funeral occasions like Tilani, Daha and Kaj.

The Ghosas written in metres such as Chabi, Dulari, Lechari, Pada, and Chanda are generally read as “Bhagavata Path” in the form of singing with different Mats in religious ceremonies organized at one’s residence. The Ghosas are enrolled in various sections namely Bhajana, Sarana, Prarthana, Isvar Nirnay, Prasansa Upadesa, Atma-updesa, Samprada, Nam Prasansa etc. in the two Bhagavatas written separately by two great saints of Mayamara Vaisnavism, Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva and Sri Sri Nityanandadeva. No musical instruments are used in Bhagawata Path and only the trained Bhakatas are allowed to sit for reciting their holy scripts. Different Mats applied in Bhagavat reading are vary melodious and the singing process is also very slow.

The dress of the Gayan Bayan of Mayamara Satra consist mainly of white Jama tied to the waist, a shirt a tangoli (waist Coat) with floral design, a caleng chadar with 3 or 4 foldings put across the shoulders making a V- shape on the front side and a white Paguri (turban). In addition to these, Gamocha forms an important part of the dress. There must be a complete harmony among the 3 fine arts – singing, playing of musical instruments and dancing.

This type of musical performance among the Mayamara devotees exist only in

the districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar and in a few places of Nagaon and Sonitpur District. In depth study on the Gayan Bayan of 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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