

A PERFORMANCE STUDY OF THE RAAS LEELA IN MANIPUR

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Abstract:

The present study is focuses on ‘‘A Performance Study of the Raas Leela in Manipur’’. The literal meaning of raas is pleasure, the blending of all the delicious taste (ras). The dance containing all the ras (taste) performed by Shri Krishna with Gopies at Vrindavana is called Raas Leela. Maharaj Rajarshi Bhagyachandra for the conceived designed and introduced Manipuri Raas Leela. During his reign in between 1762-1794, as he adopted the sermons of Vaishnavite religion, the cult of Gouriya Vaishnav which spread all over the Kingdom of Manipur but it was successful mainly in its valley area. There is legend explaining the reason why Maharaj Bhagyachandra dedication to lord Krishna who was affectionately entitled Govindaji in Manipuri tradition. Our Raas Leela is quite different from the Raas Leela played at the rest of India. The costume worn, form of dance and song of sankirtana, are entirely based on Bhakti, Innocent but the typical body movements of our Raas Leela do express many meanings heavenly and earthly manifestation.

Key words: Pleasure, Gouriya Vaishnav, Tradition, Raas Leela, Bhakti, Sankirtana.

Hypotheses of the Study

Methodology of the study of the Manipuri Raas is highly impressive with incorporation of different interesting areas of study. The strict rules and regulations associating with the various parts of performing the Raas including the rupa ideals and the rasas are all conveying the inward values with the outward gestures. By the ‘‘Raas Leela’’ it is to be meant by the sacred plays of Shri Krishna with the Gopie’s accompanied by the ‘‘Madura Rasa’’ the beauty of the performance of the rasa is manifested by the fact that the performers in the Ras are all taken as the blessed persons and given honour similitude the god and goddesses. And sponsoring of a raas performance is again accepted as freeing from all kinds of sins and omens and anybody who becomes suspicious of being sinner knowingly or unknowingly is regarded to be freed from the sins by praying with taking the self as Gopi performing with Krishna. With strictly believing in the faith that all the performers and the audience of the Raas Leela can achieve the praying wishes during the play and so indicate the values of the Raas Leela.

Methodology

Coming to the methodology of the present study used several methods to earn the first hand knowledge of the Raas Leela the past and present history, personally visiting to the Raas Leela play at temple performance, Govindaji Performance, and other part of the Manipur and its Raas Leela performances etc. while collecting information and materials particularly interviewing with the Dance teacher, Guru, took videos, photos, and reports and research articles on those events to the best of ability to substantiate the research activity. Apart from

going through the available books and documents, has personally met many eminent scholars and gurus and discussed with them their experiences.

Introduction

The union of all divine pleasure is called Ras. One can also get many meanings to it. Humans do believe that the play of Shri Krishna along with Gopis is called Ras. In the dream of King Shrijut Bhagyachandra he found the image of Lord Shri Krishna and established ShriGovindaji Temple in 1776. And in the year 1779, November, Friday, Ras was played for 5 days. This Ras which was devoted by Shrijut Bhagyachandra Maharaj was known as the first Ras of Manipur.

Most importantly with the passage of time Prabhajatra Mahosabat Ras Lila is dedicated. The reason was that, the day which Shri Krishna along with Gopis played was chosen selected

1. In Bhagavat, during November full moon day Maharas is performed in Manipur during October Full moon day it's performed.
2. Kunjaras – The reason for devoting during October is because King Bhagyachandra played Raas during full moon day at the palace of Bishwanath Chakrabarti. This very idea is concerned and at October full moon day Kunjaras is devoted at Govindaji.
3. In the full moon day of April, Basanta Raas is devoted. This Raas is performed in summer full moon day and is played for a month. Sometimes it's delayed till July.
4. Nityaras- Except the month of November and April, it can be played in all the remaining months.
5. Dibaras – It's a kind of Raas which is performed during daytime. In most of the time Nitya Rajkut played it.

In a book named Shri Krishnaras Sangriti Snagraha, there is a part called Basanta Dibaras. In this part, the readers are made to think that a specific thing is needed to do during spring season. The above mentioned five Ras are performed and dedicated without breaking any rules at present in Manipur. The so called Maharas is played without breaking any rhythm of the songs depending on Shri Madhyabat. Basanta ras is made by mixing mainly from Brahmabeibarta and Partly from Jaidev's Geet Govind. The songs were even selected from Padakalpataru, Sangeet Madhab, Ras Ulastantra etc. Nityaras means the divine play of rituals which is the idea of Govind Lila Mart. One of the significant features of Nityaras is that Shri Krishna along with Brinda made a garland of flower and wait for the consort. This is not the concept of Govinda Lilamrit. In this part, it's stayed in such a way that in the palace of King Shrijut Chandrakkriti, the consort approach first in Niti Lila and came the king with a worry heart. Contrasts to this, with the acceptance that the word of Shrijut is the command of God. The concept turned in a way that the king wait for the consort. In this way Govinda Lilamrit concept is totally different. Kujaras and Dibaras has the concept of Nityara Govind and Lilamrit yet has some difference. During the time of Shrijut Bhagyachandra, three kinds of

Ras were dedicated- ‘Maharas’, ‘Kunjaras’, and ‘Basantaras’. And during the reign of Shrijut Chandrakriti, Nityaras and Gopi, brindavan Pareng and Khurumba Pareng were also dedicated. In the reign of king Churachand, Dibras was dedicated.

Types of Ras in Manipur

The Ras dance of Manipur is divided into five parts. The parts are –

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| (1) Maharas, | (2) Kunjaras, |
| (3) Basantaras, | (4) Nityaras, |
| (5) Dibras. | |

Among the given Ras, the first three i.e., Maharas, Kujaras and Basantaras were of Shrijut Bhagyachandra Maharaj. And Nityaras was originated during the reign of Chandrakriti Maharaj. And the last one Dibras was originated during the reign of Shrijut Churachand Maharaj. The given 5 kinds of Ras has different time/period to play/perform.

Maharas is played on the full moon day of October and Kunjaras is played on the full moon day of November. And the third one Basantaras is played beginning from the full moon day of April to the full moon day of May.

Nityaras can be played on any auspicious day of ten months except November and April. The last one Dibras is a kind of Raas which is played during daytime. The mentioned Dibras, like Nityaras is played at most of the time except November and April.

Maharas- The Ras dance, Maharas was taken out from the 29th to 33rd chapter of Shrimad Bhagavata. It uses only Shrimad Bhagavata Raspanchadhyaya. The reason for naming as Maharas is because the mentioned Raas has more qualities compared to other Raas. Today in Manipur, Maharas is played without breaking the concept of Shrimad Bagavata Raspanchadhyaya.

According to Shrimad Bhagavata, Maharas is played during the full moon day of October. During the beautiful midnight of October full moon Shri Krishana enchanting thought of playing Raslila played the tune on his flute and attract Braja Gopis with the melodious sound.

Gopis wishes to get Krishna as their husband and they performed Katyayani puja and skipped a meal. After hearing the sound of the flute they leave behind everything and ran towards Shri Krishna. Then Shri Krishna and Gopis started to play Ras. Gopis have started to think that they have played together with Shri Krishna. A feeling of ego began to creep in the minds of Gopis because of Shri Krishna’s closeness. To remove the ego of Gopis, Shri Krishna being the incarnation of Lord, disappeared. After Shri Krihsna’s disappearance at nowhere and Gopis useless attempts to search for Shri Krishna; Gopis got disappointed as they couldn’t see the image of Shri Krishna. They started to think their life got useless for being alive. They stood at the bank of Yamuna and thought of giving up their lives. At this time, Shri Krishna after being tested that the ego of Gopis were removed, Shri Krishan appeared nears Gopis and continued playing Ras. In the full moon day of October, Shri Krishna along with Gopis played near the bank of Yamuna and this is called as Maharas Lila. The so called Maharas use two Bhangi i.e., Bhangi Pareng Achouba and Gopi Brindavan Pareng.

Kunjaras

During the reign of Maharaj Bhagyachandra, Kunjaras was originated. This Ras is played during Kunja so it's called Kunjaras. Though Kunjaras is seen as a simple one, it has its own significant qualities. For e.g., in other Ras like Nityaras, the one who has the capability to help approach the palace of Shri Krishna but in Kunjaras, Gopis are not allowed to enter towards Shri Krishna is done and an enter only by consort Radha Kunjaras has also specific period to perform like Maharas i.e., according to Shrimad Bhagavata; it's played during the full moon day of October i.e., on the day of Mera Wafukpa.

Viswanat Chakrabati's idea of playing Ras at Ashvani Purnima (full moon days was taken by Maharaj. Though the Ras is devoted during October full moon day, and by taking the idea of Biswanath in Manipur Kunjaras is devoted on the day of Mera Wakhinba. In Kunjaras only Bhangi Pareng Achouba is performed.

Basantar

Basantar was first devoted during the reign of Shrijut Maharaj Bhagyachandra. Basantar is played on the full moon day of April at Shri govinda. Basantar is played during Basanta (the Spring Season). The most beautiful time of spring season is that plants and trees begin to grow and flower and the wind blows slowly. It's at this time that Basantar is played.

In Basantar there is a past of AbhersKehl were there is a game or play of colours. This is a celebration of red colours. After Abherkehl, the dance of Chandrabali and Krishna was seen by Radha displaying feelings of longing and dejection. At last Shri Krishna devoted flute to Radhika. Krishna's sole devote Jaradeva has a named Geetagovinda and from this Shri Krishna devoted few words of Radha i.e., '*Sanaragaral khandaraga Mun Sinabi Mandanang Dehi Padapalabamudaram*'. This part is different in other Ras Basnataras is compiled with Brahma Vaivarta Parana and Jaidev's Gita Govinda's few parts of the book. The mentioned Ras is sometimes devoted in few areas during full moon day of summer season. In this Ras, Bhangi Achouba Pareng and Khurumba Pareng Bangiis danced/performed.

Nityaras

Nityaras was for the first time originated by ShrijutChandrakritiMaharaj. The mentioned Ras is made based on the concept of Govinda Lila mart. Some portions of the songs were taken from Padkalpabari. Though the Ras is based on Govinda Lilamart, some concepts are seen to be different i.e., Shri Krishna along with Brinda wait for the consort Radha. The reason is, in most of the Ras the consort Radha worry, the act of crying was totally seen hurt by Shrijut. The worrisome nature of the consort for the non- availability of Krishna was seen disappeared by Shrijut Chandrakriti. The reason for making this scene in Nityaras is that the gurus of that time felt that the order of Shrijut is like order of God. So, Radha was made to wait for Shri Krishna instead of Shri Krishna waiting for Radha and thus the scene was made. In Nityaras, the part where Krishna got worried is the only theme followed in Manipur. In Nityaras, three Bangi can be performed i.e. Bhangi Achouba Pareng, Bhangi Brindavan Pareng and Bhangi KhurumbaPareng. One can stop after performing Bhangi Achouba Pareng, are need not play all the three Bhangi.

Dibaras

Dibaras was performed for the first time at Sagolband during the reign of Shrijut Churachand. Dibaras is included in Basanta Lila. The so called Dibaras is different compared to other Ras. Dibaras is performed during daytime and gets over before sunset. Dibaras can be played in any month. Dibaras is based mainly on ShriNarayana on Thakur where there are also songs of Govinda Lila Mart, Shri Krishna sangeet Sangraha. Dibaras was devoted for the first time at Sagolband Hidangmayum Mandap. In Dibaras, Bhangi Preng Achouba is performed.

One of the followed trends was that in every Raas, Bhangi Pareng Achouba must be performed. The other remaining Raas has no particular fix rules. Bhangi Achouba was the first Ras which is accompanied by Bhangi of King Bhagyachandra. Bhangi Pareng Achouba is followed as Sambhog, Brindavan Pareng as Brindavan Barna and Khurumba Pareng as Yugal Parthna. In Kunjaras only Bhangi Pareng is performed. In Maharas, Bhangi Achouba and Brindavan Pareng is performed. In Basantaras, Bhangi Achouba and Khurumba Pareng is performed.

Difference performance in Raas Leela

The mentioned danced Raas can be divided into two- one dedicated the dance to Govinda Palace and the other to Bijoygovinda Khulak. Jagoi Ras which is performed at palace and Govinda idol is placed at the centre and Gopis goes round to the idol and dance. This is the reason one need not act as Krishna and Radha.

In Khulak dance Raas, small boys and girls act like Radha and Krishna and they dance together and sometimes separately. In the beginning of every dance Raas, men group always starts first. With flower and sandalwood paste and cloth, men group at first begins with double headed drum, Ras Achouba and the singers begins with song Ras and next they all sing till Krishna Roop of Gouranga Bhavi. After the male group singers completed singing, the teacher who taught Raas stayed as Sutradhar double headed drum player and Sutradhari female singer's along with the instrument players bow to Radha Govinda who is in the North Eastern side.

After bowing to them, they remain seated with their instruments. The follower of the head of the double headed drum player sits at the right side. Both face at the Eastern side. At the right side of the follower of the head of the double headed drum player, there is conch blower (Moibung Khongba). At the left heading to the Southern side lies the head of Sutradhari female singers with her followers. In this way invoking with flowers, sandalwood paste and clothes, they start the Raas. In dedicating one dance Raas, male group oratorio (Snakritana) must be available. To make the Ras go smoothly throughout the play, they pray to God which known as Purbarnga. The Raas devoted to the palace of Shri Govindaji temple is done in such a way that after Purbarnanga, Brahman perform Kunjarati and Gopis sang songs of prayers and the steps of Ras goes by. In early days, while offering Raas to Govindaji Palace, small girls and Princess were only allowed and married women and ladies were excluded. So, in Raas, small girls, Gopis and the one who act as Krishna plays the role. For each Gopi there is pairing with Krishna and dance bed in palace, Raas in played when Radha and Govinda appear.

Conclusion

In such course, during the reign of Rajarshri Bhagyachandra, the highly articulated dance forms have been infused to expose off the innate beauty of the highly impressive forms of the Raas. Because of addressing all values of living being including human establishments, the Raas and its underlying values are widely accepted in the world. In short it is to aptly place that one who can enjoy the true parts of the Raasa performance with fully understanding the meanings are but the fully leading a Devine life and fullness of one's life is measured by the level of understanding the sacred parts of the Raasa Leela.

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