
Origin of Jatra-Pala and Its Evolution and Circulation in Bengal

Budhan Murmu

Research Scholar, Department of English, The Sanskrit College and University, Kolkata, PIN-700073, West Bengal, India. Email: budhanmurmum17@gmail.com

Abstract

Jatra-Pala is an indigenous dramatic art of Bengal. The factual emergence of Jatra-Pala happened in the sixteenth century. Then the theme of Jatra was religion-centred. It used to depict the stories of Hindu god and goddess. Initially, the main component of Jatra was devotional song (gaan) for entertaining the audience all the night. Jatra assembly used to be enjoyable presenting with songs followed by the various types of musical instruments such as, dhol, mandira (cymbals) and kansi(bell-metal instrument). Even, after the initiation of theatre in Bengal, some Vaishnava Scholars started to write dramas in Sanskrit being influenced by the Jatrपाला. Jatra is called by various names in different times in undivided Bengal. These are 'Kaliyodaman Jatra', 'Nath Jatra', 'Pal Jatra', 'Chaitanya Jatra', 'Ram Jatra', 'Shakti Jatra', 'Nal-Damayanti Jatra', 'Nandaviday Jatra', 'Kamarup Jatra', 'Chandi Jatra', and 'Vidyasundar Jatra' etc. In the nineteenth century, dramatic elements were included in the Jatra song gradually. Jatra excluded the gods and goddesses' stories and adopted the stories of men and women of down to earth. Elements of song were decreased and elements of dialogue were increased in the jatra-art from the end of the nineteenth century.

KEYWORDS: Drama, Dramatic Art, Gaan, Gitavinoy, Jatra Pala, Music, Opera, Religion, Song.

Ancient dramatic art of India was as enriched as Greece and Rome. The drama was written in Sanskrit and staged then. This Sanskrit drama originated and manifested in the first century. The objectives of the drama were entertainment and advice bestowal. 'Natyashashtra' of Bharat Muni is the foremost scripture of dramatic art among all appreciated dramatic scriptures. "The glorious development of drama has been seen till eleventh century in India. Thereafter, Sanskrit dramatic art and literature were obliterated after the invasion of India by the Muslim rulers.....They were extremely opponent of dramatic art and acting-tradition" (Ghosh, Dr. Ajit Kumar, 3). But the perpetual desire of enjoying dramatic essence is prevailing in human mind. So, 'Jatra', a kind of dramatic art is invented especially in Bengal for common people in the sixteenth century. They enjoyed the essence of drama through the 'Jatra-Pala' very easily and inexpensively. 'Krishnaleela' is the primary form of 'Jatra-Gaan' (jatra-song). Mahaprabhu Chaitanyadeva himself used to perform 'Jatra-Gaan' with his companions. But the origin of 'Yatra' (Journey) was a celebration of folk religion of ancient Bengal. It was commenced thousands of years ago. The descendents of Proto-Australoids used to organize programmes, such as

travelling, singing and dancing parties in the social religious ceremony. All these were Aryanized later in Bengal. "Like the ceremonies of the emblems or banners various kinds of yatras were another major type of celebration among the aboriginal tribes of Bengal" (Hood, John W. 390).

However, the Bengali word "Yatra" (Journey) was originated in ancient age. People used to travel from one place to another with dancing expressing the magnanimity of deities. This was named as Yatra. These deities' yatra is transformed into as "Dramatic Jatra" later. "The form of jatra originated from the ritual of songs and dances which formed the religious festivals in villages." (Banerjee, Sumanta, 103)

No sooner had the Vaishnava religion uprised than the 'Krishnajatra' extended all over the Bengal. These 'Krishnajatra' assimilated with the essence of common people and assumed a form of national celebration. Jatra was nourished with lyrical and essenceful with devotion. So, it was closely observed with excessive devotional songs. This kind of jatra celebration by Mahaprabhu Chaitanyadeva influenced some Vaishnava religious perceptrs to write Sanskrit dramas. On the other hand, nineteenth century jatra (Bengali folk theatre) flourished from the root of sixteenth century devotional jatra tradition. "Chaitanya Leela (Chaitanya Recreation) was dialogoue-based; similarly there is a subjugation of dialogues in today's jatra pala. There are proprietors of today's jatra party; similarly there were Unitarian Scholars in the 16th century naatgeet, a devotional dancing and singing performance " (Ghosh , Gouraga Prasad , 38).

"Impulse of Jatra Song came from Jayadeva's 'Gitagovindam' and Bodu Chandi Das's Sree-Krisnakirtana" (Ghosh, Dr. Ajit Kumar, 6). The poetry 'Shree Krishnakirtana' is divided into few sections and entitled with particular serial order for indicating differences in dramatic presentation. On the other hand, 'Gita Govindam' is a poetry with a sum of dramatic statements and counter-statements. Apart from this, there are dialogues between Radha Krishna, Radha-Sakhi (lady Intimate friend) and Krishna-sakhi. Jhumur Song and Dhamali Song with regard to the *Krihna Leela* are also influenced by customary dancing and singing of Bengal. All these influences were amplified on Jatra pala.

Jatra of 'Krishnaleela' is called 'Kaliyodamana' after Chaitanyadeva. All people perceive that the 'Kaliyodamana' means subdual of 'Kaliyo Naga' by lord Krishna in the water of river Yamuna. But in that time all sections of Krishnaleela were included of Kaliyodaman Jatra. Then Kaliyodamana meant Gostho, Manbhanjana, Kangshobadha (slaughter of Kangsha), Milana (union), etc. After that, Panchaligaan (Bengali Ballad song) is introduced in Bengal. The embodiment of Jatra is changed

during the reign of King Krishnachandra. In this time 'Kothokata' (the reading and exposition of mythological stories) and 'Torjagaan' (a kind of contest by composing songs by two parties) are also initiated. The Torjagaan was full of eroticism. Through this dramatic evolution 'Kabigana' (a kind of song tournament where rival poets sing extemporaneous songs) is introduced. This song is founded and extended from the battle of Plassey to 1859.

Various types of Bengali songs were introduced in 18th century undivided Bengal. These were Goranhati, Ranihati, Ramayanagaan, akhrai, Jhumur, Bhasangaan (immersion song), Monosargaan, Malsi, Gangageeti, Bijoyageeti, Govidamangala, Chaitanya Charitamrita and Rasachandi etc. All these were full of dramatic elements. Side by side, there were also musical plays (jatra gaan) like Nathajatra, Palajatra, Shaktijatra and Chaitanyajatra etc. in that time.

The theme of the jatratala was mythological stories and various types of deities. But, the inception of modern Bengali dramatic art begins by Roy Gunakar Bharat Chandra, a court poet of King Krishna Chandra. "...the arrival of Bharatchandra's *Vidya-Sundar* on the cultural scene in the mid-eighteenth century encouraged the composition of jatra on this secular romance." (Banerjee, Sumanta, 104). Bharatchandra's remarkable works are- 'Bidyasundar', 'Rasamanjari', 'Satyapirer Kotha' and 'Nagastok' etc. Many versions of *Vidyasundar* were published at the end of the 18th century. Instrumental music was used in the eighteenth century musical plays. 'Dholak' was the main instrument of this century. Bharat Chandra also used classical music in his musical plays. After his death (1760) *Kabigaan*, *Torjagaan* and *Kheur* became the main elements of entertainment in Bengal for one hundred year. All these musical plays were full of vulgarity and obscenity. However, famous poet Dasharathi Roy of Panchaligaan came into view in first of the nineteenth century. In this time some types of Jatra acting were also introduced. These are 'Nandaviday', 'Kamarupa', and 'Naladamayanti Jatra' etc. During this time people of Kolkata were played drunken pranks with these vulgar musical plays as an addicted entertainment. "It was considered as a sin to watch these musical plays by women. People thought that it was a profanation of women who used to go for enjoying a musical play show" (Ghosh, Gourangaprasad, 83).

The rich people of Kolkata patronized these *jatra gaan* contaminated with vulgarity and obscenity extremely. On the other hand, Bishnupur, Bardhaman, Birbhum, Jashore, Khulna, Barishal, Nadia and Hoogly became tumult with the newly appearance of Jatra proprietors.

However, 'Kaliyodaman Jatra' came into existence at the time of Chaitanyadeva and lasted for many years after the death of Raja Rammohan Roy (1833). Nilakanta

Mukhyopadhyay, an intimate disciple of Sri Ramakrishna was renowned with *Kaliyodaman palagaan*. In this estimation longevity of Kaliyodaman jatra was four hundred years.

At the beginning of nineteenth century, Shishuram Adhikary initiated the high quality of Jatra song by repressing the tide of vulgar jatra song. After Shishuram Adhikary, two brothers named Sreedam and Subal made presents of refined jatra gaan. They were renowned in acting 'Kaliyodaman Jatra' before the battle of Plassey. During this time other renowned personalities were Lalu Nandalal (poet and singer), Banchharam Bairagi (Kirtan singer) and Godadhar Shiromoni (reciter and interpreter of Purana)

After Shreedam-Subal, Paramananda Das came into the view of jatra-pala. His genre of jatra was in the role of a 'Dyuti' (Panderess). He disguised himself as a panderess and entertained the audience by singing at the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He firstly added dialogues in prose form in the song of 'Kaliyodaman' pala and brought diversity in the Jatra. Other two proprietors are Premchand and Badan Adhikary of this time.

After the death of Badan Adhikary, the old genre of Kaliyodaman Jatra was almost eradicated. Govinda Adhikary initiated new form of jatra to keep pace with the audience of that time. He inaugurated the Kaliyodaman Jatra party and dismantled on the stage. He himself acted the role of a panderess. He composed some lyrics and anthology of songs for the party which patronized the thriving of Bengali language. His notable jatra palas are 'Shuksarir Pala' and 'Chura Nupurer Dwanda'. During the time of Govinda Adhikary there was another jatra song writer. He is Lochan Adhikary. His famous musical plays are 'Akrur Sambad' and 'Nimai Sanyas'. His jatras were mainly full of pathetic sentiment.

Following the paths of 'Kaliyodaman' there introduced 'Chandi-Jatra', and 'Manasar Vasanjatra'. Lausen Baral of Bardhaman was famous for Manasar Vasanjatra.. Premchand Adhikary, Ananda Adhikary and Joy Chandra Adhikary of Paraihata were popular for 'Ram Jatra'.

"A diverse-natured *Shokher Jatra* (Amateur Jatra) was spread over the Bengal when Kaliyodaman Jatra were affluence at the beginning of nineteenth century" (Ghosh, Dr. Ajit Kumar, 9). There imputed the 'Vidyasundar Jatra', the similar kind of Kaliyodaman jatra. This became very popular to the people of Bengal. Parimohan of Baranagar played violin in the jatra party. He organized a jatra party at Bhabanipur. In this party 'Vidyasundar' and 'Nal-damayanti' jatra became very popular. Jagamohan Basu, an aristocratic and rich man of Bhabanipur acted in 'Kamrup Jatra

Pala' in 1822. The story of 'Kamrup' was adopted from an English book named 'Kamrup' by Lieutenant William Franklin.

Bhairab Halder, Birsingha Mallick and Radhamadhab Sarkar were notable palakars (writers of musical plays). They took preparation for circulating and spreading the jatra in all corner of Bengal. Birsingha Mallick of Jorasanko had an amateur jatra party. Bhairab Chandra halder, a resident of singur wrote 'Vidyasundar' jatragaan for Birsingha mallicks' jatra party. Ramchandra Mukhyopadhyay was a steward of Ashutosh Dev, a notable rich man of Kolkata. He established a jatra party in Jorasanko. This party staged 'Nanda Viday' pala. Even women acted in this pala in female characters.

King Prasanna Narayan Dev of Shovabazar Rajbari arranged a 'Gitavinoy' (Opera, a musical drama) 'Savitri Satyaban' in his royal palace in 1865. This amateur party was called 'Krishnakumari Natok Dal'. Moreover, a woman, named Trailokyotarini established a jatra party in Shovabazar. Women acted in her party in the female characters. '*Babhrubahan*', '*Naladamayanti*', '*Abhimanyu Badh*', Aghor Chandra Chottopadhyay's '*Annapurna*' palas were performed on the stage with great reputation. This party also changed into an opera party.

A jatra party was introduced in Bagbazar in 1867 with the help of great poet Girish Chandra Ghosh. Shihir Kumar Ghosh, a founder and editor of Amrit Bazar Patrika established a jatra party. 'Krishnajatra' was staged there. Shishir Kumar himself wrote devotional palas of shree Chaitanyadeva.

The king of Belgachhia introduced an amateur theatre in 1858 in the royal palace. A theatre was also built there. In this way drama show in theatre hall was spread all over the country. But the expenditure of theatre based dramatic performance was costly. Therefore the production of drama was not affluent in Kolkata. Enjoying the drama show was expensive to the common people of the town. On the other hand it was not possible to organize an amateur theatre in the rural areas of Bengal.

Nevertheless, so called jatra was not properly accomplished till then. People were really looking for new way of entertainment. As a result, 'Gitavinoy' (Opera) was introduced. This was a new jatra, completely another form. "Gitavinoy is the middle form of drama and the jartra. As the Gitavinoy has the dominance of music, Gitavinoy and Jatra became synonymous in meaning" (Ghosh, Gouranga Prasad, 158). Ananda Prasad Bandyopadhyay's '*Sakuntala*' is the first opera or gitavinoy of Bengali literature. It was published in 1865. Although modern jatra party takes the names of 'opera', but the dominance of music was decreased in the jatra and gitavinoy also became dialogue-based and full of dramatic impulse.

Madan Mohan Chottopadhyay, a professor of Hoogly College established a jatra party. This party was transformed into a professional one in 1870. "Khemta Naach (dance) with fascinating and light tune was used during the second half of the 19th century for fulfilling the demands of the audience." (Das, Prabhat Kumar, 9). Therefore, he tried to reform the Jatra art and invented some novelty. He increased the dialogues and decreased the songs in the jatra. He firstly introduced the 'Jurir Gaan' in the jatra for overcoming the boredom of same tune. His popular palas are, "Pralhad Charitra", "Dhruba Charitra", "Durga Mangal", "Gangabhakti Tarangini", "Rambanabas" and "Harishchandra" etc.

Motilal Roy brought renaissance in the history of Bengali jatra. He not only made the jatra for entertainment for the people but also upheld it as a vehicle of mass communication. He established a jatra party, named 'Nabadwip Banga Gitavinoy Sampraday' in 1873. His popular jatra palas are, "Ram Banabas or Ram Biday", "Kaliyo Sarpa Daman", "Sita Horon", "Dropadi's Bostro Horon", "Nimai Sanyas", "Vismer Sharashashya", "Karna Bodh" and "Brajaleela" etc.

Mukunda Das (1878- 1934) was a patriotic minstrel singer. He sang a song of renaissance for Bengal. His jatra and palagaans aroused the patriotism in the mind of urban and rural people of Bengal. His plays also influenced the "Banga-Bhanga Movement" of Bengal in 1905.

After Motilal Roy, Ahibhusan Bhattacharya introduced a jatra party, named 'Santara and Company'. His party's director was Bibhutibhusan Bhattacharya. Ahibhusan's popular palas are- 'Bodhane Bisarjan', 'Suroth Uddhar' (both published in 1901). He expressed modernism and synchronism through the pala 'Bodhane Bisarjan'. He wrote 'Dharma Leela', a gitavinoy which was published in 1929.

"Story of jatra was based on the glory of god and goddess of *Mangal Kabyo*. But the story of nineteenth century jatra became historical, psychological, political and social base" (Ghosh Dr. Jagannath, 188). Brajendra kumar De introduced himself as a Jatra playwright in 1932. Before his emergence Jatra lost its lively flow. The jatra-dialogues were long and the number of songs was much and more. The audience was not enough interested with the chorus song, duet song and *Shakirgaan*. He tried to reform these problematic sides and could bring the diversity in the jatra. So he was called as *Jatra-Samrat*. In the twentieth century theme of the jatra centred around Netaji Subhas Chandra Basu, Sri Sri Ramakrishnadev, Titumir, Lenin, Hitler and many other Indian and foreign characters. Popular artists of Bengali society were denominated as 'Jatra Shilpi' (jatra artist). Boro Rani, Chhoto Rani, Bholanath, Rajendra Kumar and Bina Dasgupta were worthily mentioned among these. An eminent dramatic person Prabodh Bandhu Adhikary took several agendas for the

development of jatra-art. Therefore, he is called as *Jatra-Bondhu*. Even, famous film actor Utpal Dutta joined in a jatraparty as a writer and director in 1968. Later he himself established a professional jatra party. Another popular jatra actor and writer Nirmal Mukhyopadhyay was entitled as '*Jatra-Sharat*' for his notable contribution in the field of jatra. Legendary personality of jatra is Bhairab Gongopadhyay. After the era of Brajendra Kumar, he reached the peak of jatra industry. He wrote many jatrapalas as well as directed the pala (plays) and composed the music. West Bengal Government awarded him as the best jatra writer and director respectively in 1983 and 1986. This Bengali-jatra is being presented in the twenty first century also. Anal Chakraborty is one of the most popular jatra writer, director and actor in the modern jatra industry. The jatra played the role for public education besides entertainment. In this way, the programme of beneficial to the people is being gone on keeping the rhythm of trends century after century. The song of renaissance is playing with the cognition incitement for cultural education.

REFERENCES:

1. Ghosh, G. P. (2023). *Tinsho Bachharer Jatra Shilper Itihas*. Dey Book Store, Kolkata.
2. Ghosh, Dr. A. K. (2018). *Bangla Natoker Itihas*. (6th ed.). Dey's Publishing, Kolkata.
3. Ghosh, Dr. J. (2020). *Bangla Rangamancher Sankshipto Itihas O Natya Tattwa*. (4th ed). Projna Bikash, Kolkata.
4. Hood, J. W. (1994). *History of the Bengali People*. Orient Blackswan Private Limited, Hyderabad.
5. Das, P. K. (2014). *Bangla Jatrapalar Gan*. Sahitya Academy, New Delhi.
6. Banerjee, S. (1989). *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth-Century Calcutta*. Seagull Books, Calcutta.