

Asom Bhaona Somaroh -2018
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Auniati Satra, Majuli

Introduction:

Situated on the bosom of the mighty Brahmaputra with bounteous blessings of Mother Nature. Majuli is acclaimed worldwide as the most populous river island of the world. Since time immemorial, Majuli has been a subject of curious investigation for scores of geographers, historians, environmentalists, geologists and the like. This focus that the island has received in the number of tourists, both foreign and national, visiting the island. What adds glitter to gold in respect of the island is its multi-coloured cultural heritage mostly represented by the Vaishnavite monasteries called satras scattered across the length and breadth of the island. In addition, Majuli prides itself on the multi-faceted cultures of a galaxy of a tribes and castes which are contributing in a massive way to the diversity of cultural heritage possessed by the island. It is because of this cultural diversity that Majuli is called the cultural capital of Assam.

Cultural Heritage of the satras of Majuli :

The cultural heritage of the satras of Majuli dates back to the 15th and 16th centuries A.D. when Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva and his chief disciple Madhabdeva had met here at a place called Dhuwahat Belaguri, and both of them devoted themselves whole-heartedly to spreading and propagating Neo-Vaishnavism from here. Since then Majuli became the chief centre for religion and culture in Assam. In the subsequent times, innumerable satras were established in the Majuli and many of them exist here carrying forward the legacy. The satras are the centres of diverse cultural as well as religious activities, the most important of which is the recital of devotional songs on a daily basis in some special ragas to the accompaniment of cymbals and khols (Drums). There are many other cultural festivals and functions performed at regular intervals in the satras. The satras exert a profound influence on the common masses of the island as they have unflinching faith in and allegiance to them in every walk of their lives.

Bhaona

Bhaona is a traditional dramatic performance in Assam. It was introduced by Sankardev in the Sixteenth Century. The Bhaona is the most spectacular, popular and instructive of all the performing arts in Assam. Bhaona has a religious origin and Sankardev found it a convenient medium to instruct the religion he preached was bhakti, i.e., great regards and obedience to the Supreme being. The

supreme being is Lord Krishna or Vishnu. The Bhaona proved to be very successful weapon for Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva to instruct the masses on the worship of the Lord.

The Namghar i.e. the community prayer hall in a village, is usually the stage for the performance of the Bhaona. The audience of the Bhaona sit on either side of the hall leaving a passage in between for the actors and the sutradhar to pass. Before the unfolding of the story of the Bhaona, the Gayan-Bayans go on dancing.

Masks are an integral part of the performance of Bhaona. The Performers wear large, colourful masks of gods, goddesses, demons and animals.

The Sutradhar continues to explain the story along with the Gayan- Bayan in between the play so that the audience understands the enactment. Thus, the Bhaona is the presentation of a mythological story interspersed with narration, songs, music and dance. The presentation, therefore, are worthy situation for direct learning and observation of moral behaviour. Moral values may thus develop through identification with the Hero of the major good characters that vanquish evil and epitomise “goodness”.

These satras are still practicing this art-form and are encouraging the villagers to carry on this practice at their village namghars (prayer halls). But owing to the advent of issues related globalization, this tradition is suffering a jolt, and a need is felt to provide a boost to this age-old practice by taking it out of the confines of the satras and the villages to the open field with a view to making it more attractive and interesting. With that purpose in mind, Auniati Satra, Majuli organized a Bhaona competition in 2006 at all Assam level which proved to be an overwhelming success. Since then the Satra has been organizing this competition every alternate year with great success. The Satra is going to organize this competition for the fifth time in January, 2018 and the arrangements for the same are in the making.