

ORIGIN OF THE RAS–KRIRA IN ASSAM: AN INTRODUCTION

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Ras-Krira – The Divine Display of Love have a grave and profound spiritual significance. It has been assumed from the historical point of view that Lord Krishna was born during the first decade of sixteenth century B.C. and the last decade of fifteenth century B.C. (Assumable 1510 B.C.- 1490 B.C.). Again according to Indian astronomy Lord Krishna was born in the *Dwapar Yuga* (the third of the four yugas or ages). As the Ras-Krira or Ras-Leela connected with Lord Krishna it says that it was the creation of Dwapar Yuga. In the *Harivansha, Srimadbhagavata, Kirttana-Ghosa, Bishnupurana, Brahmavoivarta Purana, Geeta Govinda, Keli Gopal Nat* etc. Lord Krishna has been accepted as the „Purnabrahma“(complete incarnation of God) of Dwapar Yuga. Therefore all the peoples have been worshipping Lord Krishna as Omnipotent and „*Krishna Eka Deva Dukhahari*“i.e. Krishna is the only destroyer of all troubles in the *KaliYuga* (the Fourth Age). In the round of the division of the yuga or era the Ras-Krira or Ras-Leela has been formed in various structure according to area, atmosphere and mankind.

The Ras-Leela or Ras-Yatra which raised in the Dwapar Yuga at holy Vrindavana where Krishna sported with Gopys" (the female milk-maids) in the autumnal season, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva describes as „Ras-Krira“. Ras-Krira means the circular dance of Lord Krishna with the cowherdesses of Vraja on the bank of the river Yamuna in the clear autumnal night. Though erotic in appearance, the Ras-Krira is highly spiritual, delineating the relation between the individual and the Soul Supreme. The description of Ras-Leela of Srimadbhagavata has been found in *Adi Dasama, Kirttana-Ghosa and the Keli Gopal Nat* composed by Srimanta Sankaradeva. In the Ras-Leela section of *Dasama* he describes attractively –

puspara surabhi gandhe amoda manata /

gunjare bhramare madhupane huya matta //

hena bitopana bane bhrami bhagavanta /

gopisava same kririlanta aparjanta //^A

Means getting smelt of flowers (His) mind becomes highly joyous. Having got enchant by sucking honey the Black Bees made humming noise. The God moving like this beautiful jungle did Divine Sports of Love with Gopys" abundant.

Almost 177 *slokas* (verses) of Ras-Krira of origin Bhagavata have been slight elaborately explained by Sankaradeva in the *Kirttana-Ghosa and Adi Dasama*. There are 18 *Ghosas* and 218 *padas* (verses) in the Ras-Krira section of *Kirttana-Ghosa*. Like this in the Ras-Krira of *Adi Dasama* there are 23 chapters and 421

padas (verses). The *Keli GopalNat* of Brajavali language is the brief form of Ras-Krira of *Kirttana* and *Dasama*. The description of Ras-Krira has been given in the *Kirttana-Ghosa* in such a way –

ito ras-krira katha krishnara/

ekanta cite sune jito nara //

krishnata bhakati barhibe tara /

sukhe hoibe kama-sagara para //²

Refrain:

This Rasa-Krira is Krishna's tale, If a person listens with purpose soul, His devotion to Krishna shall increase; Happily shall he overcome sea of lust.³

Again...

ito ras-krira keli name kama-jaya /

karila bhrittara pade Krishna kripamaya //

aka sune bhane jitojane abishrama /

barhibe bhakati ati jinibeka kama //⁴

Refrain:

This sport Rasa-Krira is the conquest of lust, Gracious Lord Krishna performed it to devotee's trust. The person who sings it or listens to without break, With the conquest of lust shall proceeds more in devotional trek.⁵

It is not known whether Ras-Yatra was observed or not in Pre – Sankararite Era in Assam. But it can be claimed that for the first time Ras-Yatra was observed in Assam during the time of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva. Because on request of his brother Ramrai composing the drama „Keli Gopal” Sankaradeva acted thereon. Since then Ras-Yatra or Ras-Utsav has been observing in the Satras of Assam. The „Keli Gopal” drama was composed when Mahapurusha Sankaradeva was at Patbausi. „Keli Gopal” drama is the origin foundation of the Ras-Utsav of Assam. The description of Ras-Krira has been beautifully presented in the drama „Keli Gopal” –

“ jamunaka bali nami : rasakrira karite arambhala. Gopisaba biraha tapa tejiye : Krishna bakyamrite tripiti huya : parama utsuke kriraka pravesala. Hari kahuka sumbai : kahuka hasye nirikhaya : kahuka nakhe stana parasaya : kahuka alingaya. ebambidha nana ananga khelaye : gopika citta ranji : srigopale krira kayala. Gopisabo krishnaka sanmana pai : jaise parama utsuke keli kayala : ta dekhaha : sunaha.”⁶

Means “arrived on the sand of Yamuna: (He) started Ras-Krira. Gopys” have forsaking the pang of separation: pleased with the nectar words of Krishna: they started loving sport with great enthusiasm. Hari kissed someone: looked with laughing someone: touched with nails someone’s breasts: embraced someone. Like this various sport played by Krishna: giving full of bliss to the Gopys”: Srigopal did amorous sport. Gopys” getting great regards from Krishna: how they did loving sport with great enthusiasm: look that: listen”.

Hereafter so many playwrights have acted many dramas and *bhaonas* on the stage composing in the ideal of *Keli Gopal Nat* in Assamese Language. Majuli is the original centre place of Ras-Utsav of Assam. Though *Keli Gopal Nat* was composed when Sankaradeva was at Patbausi that *Keli Gopal Nat* was acted only at Majuli for the first time. The *Keli Gopal Nat* was acted for the first time at Kamalabari Satra of Majuli.⁷ Moreover, at various times on composing drama or *Bhauna* in Brajvali-Assamese mixed language or complete Assamese have been acted at Kamalabari Satra.

Ras-leele or Ras-Utsav is a very holy festival in upper Assam especially in the Majuli-Centric Satras. This festival is observed in the full moon day of „*Kati*” (Oct.-Nov.) or „*Aghon*” (Nov.-Dec.) month of Assamese calander. This is the „Ras-Purnima” (full moon day). As the soul center of the Satra culture, the Satras of Majuli in Ras-Utsav delights mainly on dance, song and acting. Observing by complete Mahapurusiya custom this festival has been began with songs and *Nam-Prasangas* in the morning of the day of full moon. On being sung the *Ghosa* heading „*dina dayasila deva damodara hari damodara*”, sings three *Ghosas* from the chapter of Ras-Krira of *Kirttana-Ghosa* like „*kare rasa keli Gopala gopi sange*” etc. Afterwards bowing down on the feet of Lord Srikrishna with humble salutation takes *prasada* (offerings). Simultaneously the reciting and explanation commence from „Ras-Panchadhyaya” of the Bhagavata. After the explanation of Bhagavata the „*carit-tola*” (a narrative of the doings of the Guru) customs have completed. Some parts recites from the „*Madhyalila*” (middle part) of the biography of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva. After the completion of the „*carit-tola*” dancing also exhibited at times. The „Maharas-Yatra” occurs in the night of „Ras-Purnima”. AS a matter of fact, Ras-Yatra begins before the night of „Ras-Purnima”. It ends in the third day. In this Ras-Utsav dance of „*Dasavatara*” (Ten Incarnations of Vishnu), Ananta Sayana (endless sleeping) of Narayana, Maharas (great Ras), Birth of Krishna, Asur Badh (killing of demon), Kaliya Daman Nat, Sankhasur Badh Nat and at last reconciliation of Radha-Krishna have been exhibited. Ras-Bhauna has been performed inside the Kirttanaghara of Satra within the fixed exrimity. The devotees and watchers take the seat neatly and systematically both side of the floor inside the Kirttanaghara and actors, singers and musicians perform Ras-Bhauna with devotion. Of course, in course of time this Ras-Bhauna programme coming out from the inside of Satra stand on the „*sabhathali*” or „*sabhagriha*” or „*natyamandir*”. Even its extensive area reaches Guwahati, the soul centre of Assam. In different parts of Guwahati the Ras-Yatra performed in the stage acted by man is a noticeable matter.

It has been admitted that the devotees became busy with the preparation of dance and *bhauna*, rehearsals in the Satras before one or one and half month of Ras-Festival. This Ras-festival has been observed with three days celebration in some Satras. In the night of Ras-Purnima in the midst of Ras-Leela at the time of Maharas the disappearance of Srikrishna among the Gopys” and the re-visible of Lord Krishna by the earnest flattery entreaty of Gopys” is a spellbound and enamored scene. The immersion of devotees with

the pleasing appearance of Srikrishna and the creation of heavenly spiritual concept is also one of the most important characteristic of the Satra-Ras.

The remarkable thing is that though idol has no place in the Ras-Utsav of Satras, worshipping of idol in the Ras-Utsav has held on Dakshinpat Satra. It has been known from a fact that since 1840 A.D. Ras-festival has been observing with idol worshipping in Dakshinpat Satra. It is known that the „Salagram” was established at Dakshinpat Satra bringing from Brindavana and taking the name „Brindavana Chandra” the idol of Srikrishna has been established. Surrounding the main alter of the Ras-Utsav the idol of „Garura” (a gigantic mythical bird on which Vishnu used to ride) has also been present with the idol of Krishna. Of course, there is no place of Radha here. But it is significant that there is no splendor of Ras-Utsav in the Satras of Lower Assam. It is not known about the dramatic performance of *Keli GopalNat* or any other Bhauna in the Ras-Utsav of Lower Assam. From this it has been undoubtedly known that in the Satras of Lower Assam especially in South Kamrup Ras-Festival is not observed. Of course, in Barpeta and Barpeta centric Satras the „Ai-Sakal” (female devotees) singing Nam-Kirtana for a number of days from „Hati” to „Hati” (devotees” residential area) admiring Lord Krishna early in the morning from the day of Ras-Purnima.

Of course, besides Satras in various places of Lower Assam with immense pomp and magnificence Ras-Festival has been performed. The performance custom of Ras-Festival of Lower Assam is a few different from that of Upper Assam. The worshipping of idol has been obtaining supreme position in the Ras-Festival of Lower Assam. Herein the idol takes the place instead of the performance of man. The rooms of idols made with high cost and magnificent and with the technique of modern electrical mechanism can able to attract and console the eyes of lakhs of watchmen. Therefore, the Ras-Utsav (Festival) becomes Ras-Mahotsav (a great rejoicing). It has been assumed that the direct influence of Ras-Yatra of Kochbihar and Brindavan-Mathura can be observed in the priority of idols and the presence of „Jugal-Keli” (amorous sport in a pair) of Radha-Krishna in the Ras-Mahotsav of Lower Assam.

Whatever the Ras-Leela or Ras-Utsav has been performed, the description of Ras-Krira in the „Sastras” (sacred books) have a grave and profound spiritual significance. Following the observation of that significance great scholar Narayan Chandra Goswami says that the highest spiritual truth of this Ras-Leela is the supernatural deeds of the Supreme Spirit with the sentient soul. The Supreme Spirit is Krishna, sentient soul is Gopys”, heart is the amorous sport ground Brindavan, proud or sin is the Sankhasur (a demon killed by Krishna), nature is the flute, the mighty sense is the sound of flute, the delightful power of soul is the Ras. The World is a theatre-stage or house of *Bhauna*. In this house every creature is delivering dialogue on acting. What has been doing by Vishnu staying widely in every hearts is the Ras-Krira. The World is a *Bhouna*-House or Brindavan, the whole creatures or Gopys” are its sentient soul. The Supreme Soul is Srikrishna, Gopys” are character, *Parameswar* (God) is the director. He, being „Sutradhara” (interlocutor of an Assamese drama) controls everybody extensively. It is the true significance of Ras-Krira.⁸

References:

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