



Bhaṭimā: A Unique Creation of Our Saints in Assamese Society

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Abstract

One of the most notable works of literature and devotion produced by the Assamese saint-reformers, especially Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, is Bhaṭimā. It plays a significant role in the area's rich cultural and spiritual legacy. Bhaṭimā, which derives from the Sanskrit term "Bhaṭi," which means "to shine" or "praise," refers to hymns that exalt God or other spiritual beings. These works serve as both literary expression and acts of worship by skillfully fusing poetry, philosophy, and devotion (bhakti). This essay highlights the significance of Bhaṭimā in Assamese literature, religion, and the performing arts by examining its genesis, structure, topics, and cultural influence.

Keywords: Śrīmanta, Legacy, hymns, exalt.

Introduction

The Bhaṭimas are devotional verses that glorify to God, saints, and sacred ideals, composed during the great Neo-Vaiṣṇavite Movement of the 15th–16th centuries. Initiated by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and enriched by his disciple Mādhavadeva, this movement transformed Assamese society through the ideals of equality, morality, and devotion. In this setting, Bhaṭimā became a distinctive kind of poetry that expressed admiration, humility, and divine adulation. In contrast to other devotional texts like Bargīta or Nām, Bhaṭimā frequently extols the virtues of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Guru, or the hallowed Sātra establishments. Bhaṭimā signified lyrical praise, whereas Bargīta stood for commitment to music. It displays the Assamese saints' profound spiritual awareness and inventiveness. In Nāmghars and Satras, these pieces were sung or recited in congregational settings with the intention of exalting God and encouraging moral behavior.

Objectives

- To understand Bhaṭimā's origins and significance in Assamese devotional culture.
- To examine the literary and musical aspects of it.
- To evaluate how it affects Assamese society on a cultural and religious level.

Methodology

Secondary method is adopted for preparing this paper.

Bhaṭimā:

Bhaṭimā is another form of Śaṅkarī music. Bhaṭimā is a song with a devotional tone, eulogising God or a person of high rank ^[1]. This is Bhaṭa's music; they are excellent actors and singers. The idea of composing this particular type of poetry

might have Śaṅkaradeva's meeting some wandering minstrels during his pilgrimage ^[2]. In Assam, the *nāṭ* and *bhaṭa* were mentioned in Vaiṣṇavite/pre-Vaiṣṇavite literature. During his pilgrimage, Śaṅkaradeva met many bhaṭas that was known from the *Katha-Guru-Charita*. Śaṅkaradeva created two character of bhaṭa in Rukmini-Haran drama *Surabhī* and *Haridas* ^[3] another two in Ramvijaya drama *Vishwamitra* and *Kanakavati* ^[4]. This was a new form of musical aspects which created a land mark in cultural history of Assam.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva' composed three classes of Bhaṭimā like *Nāṭa Bhaṭimā* (Dramatic Bhaṭimā), *Deva Bhaṭimā* (eulogy of god) and *Raja Bhaṭimā* (panegyrics of the king) and in latter period Mādhavadeva added the fourth one named *Guru Bhaṭimā* (panegyrics of the preceptor). In three of dramas viz. *Patnī-prasāda*, *Rukmini-haran* and *Śrīrāma-vijaya* Śaṅkaradeva' inserted bhaṭimās in the middle of the texts also ^[5]. The two Mahāpuruṣas (saints) composed a total of thirty Bhaṭimās ^[6]. Śaṅkaradeva' wrote three Devabhaṭimās, sixteen Nāṭbhaṭimās and two Rājābhaṭimās. There are seven Devabhaṭimās, one Gūrubhaṭimā and one Nāṭabhaṭimā. So, we get a total of ten Devabhaṭimās, one Gūrubhaṭimās, seventeen Nāṭabhaṭimās and ten Rājābhaṭimās ^[7]. The total number of bhaṭimās of Śaṅkaradeva' and Mādhavadeva are tried to show through the following table ^[8]—

Bhaṭimā		
	Sankaradeva	Madhavadeva
Nāt-Bhaṭimā	16	1
Deva-Bhaṭimā	3	7
Rāj Bhaṭimā	2	x
Guru-Bhaṭimā	x	1

In Nāṭ or drama which bhaṭimā is included known as *Nāṭa-bhaṭimā* or *dramatic bhaṭimā* it can be categorized into three parts like—

- a) **Maṅgalacaraṇ bhaṭimā or Initial Bhaṭimā:** It is basically eulogizes songs of Śrī Kṛṣṇa or Śrī Rāma, singing like Nandi śloka.

Jay Jay Raghukul
(Kamal Prakash)

Dask Nashak Bhiti I
Jay Jay Nijajan
(Jatan Ghatan)

Patan Patak Rīti I
(Ram-Vijaya Nat)

- b) **Puwar Bhaṭimā (Morning Bhaṭimā):** It is singing in the morning time that is why it is known as Puwar *bhaṭimā* and included in morning Prasaṅga.

Pratas Samaye
(Jashuwa Janani Mukha)

Chumbita Śyama Jogawanaku I
Utha Mere Lal
(Madana Gopala)

Aye Teri Guwal Bulabanku I
(Bhujana Bihar-Madhavadeva)

- c) **Naṭuwār Bhaṭimā:** It is recited by the dancers in the drama, that's why known as *Naṭuwar bhaṭimā*, such type of bhaṭimā is taken from Rukmiṇī -Haran dramā is mentioned at below—

Pari Punu Bhaṭ Capaya Kaho Bānī I
Kṛṣṇak Agu Rupa Guṇa Bokhani II
Jaya jadunandan devak deva I
Tuhari caraṇe korohu bohu sewā II
Tuhi mohimak kahat nōhi anta I
Pural param kīriti diganta II
Tuhu sam puruṣa katihu nōhi pōi I
Śuna maha bosanek buluhu gusai II

- d) **The Muktimāṅgala Bhaṭimā** (bhaṭimā wishing welfare and final emancipation) also known as *bhārata-vākya* in Sanskrit drama is sung by the sūtradhara along with all the actors in the end of the drama. Śaṅkaradeva composed three deva bhaṭimā, two composed in Brajāvalī and another one is composed in Sanskrit language, *Madhu Dānava Dāraṇa Deva Baraṇ* was performed in Naranārāyān's courtier^[9] was written in *toṭak metre*. Mādhavadeva has composed seven Deva-Bhaṭimās, Śaṅkaradeva composed two *raja-bhaṭimās* addressing to *Naranārāyāna* and recited them on his visit to the royal court. The first one. *Jaya jaya malla nrpati rasajana* (victory unto the king *Malladeva*, the appreciator of fine sentiments), another one is *hasi sabhasada karu vahu thiya* (Happy to confirm the learned assembly). Mādhavadeva composed only one Guru Bhaṭimā to eulogizing his Guru Śaṅkaradeva...*Jaya Guru Śaṅkara Sarva Guṇakara Jākeri Nāhike Upama*. Brajāvalī language was used for the composition of Bargīta and *Bhaṭimā*.

Nāṭ Bhaṭimās (dramatic Bhaṭimā) are divided into three category: Prarmbhik *Bhaṭimā*, Madhya *Bhaṭimā* and Antrya or Muktimāṅgal *Bhaṭimā*^[10]—

Naṭ or Drama	Prarambhik or Pramary	Middle or Madhya Bhaṭimā	Antya/Muktimāṅgal Bhatima or Ending Bhaṭimā
Patniprasad	a) Jaya Jaya Jadukula Kamal Prakashak(Kaliya Daman) or b) Jaya Jaya Jadava Daitya parabha— (Ramacharanar Kansabadha)	Aśoka Banamoha rahal murary	----
Parijatharan	Jaya Jaya kṛṣṇadeva nija anka	-----	Jaya jaya jaga Jeevan murary
Kaliya daman	Jaya jaya Jadukula kamal prakashak	-----	Daivaki udare bekat suhideva.
Rukmini-Haran	Jaya jaya Jadhava deva	a) Pari punu bhaṭ capaya kaha bani, b) Śuna śuna Rukamini māi	Jaya jaya Jagatjanak Jadudeva
Keligopal	Param puruṣa purūtana--ishwaradeva	-----	Minarupe pralaya payasi---
Sriramavijaya	Jayajaya raghukula kamal prakasha	a) Ki kahabu rupa kumarika rama b) Suna khashi basan swarupa	Jayajaya iswara raghaba rama
Bhujanabihar	Pratasa samaya jashuwa janani	-----	-----

Deva Bhaṭimās (*panegyrics of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa*) —Deva-bhaṭimās or panegyrics to God are of an independent class, not generally

included in the dramas. Śaṅkaradeva wrote a few such bhaṭimās with the early life of Kṛṣṇa as their themes^[11].

Deva Bhaṭimās Composed by our saints^[12]----

S. No.	Śaṅkaradeva	Total	Mādhavadeva	Total Number
1	Madhudanava dāraṇa devsa barang(toṭak metre)	3	Jaya jaya jagjivan jadava	7
2	Bando Gubinda: Gupi janamananda.		Jaya jagajiva sanatana śiva	
3	Jaya Jagadish iswar bhayahari		Jaya jaya Kṛṣṇa karahu bohu seva	
4	xxx		Jaya jaya jagat janak	
5	xxx		Jaya jaya jagat jeevan	
6	xxx		Jaya jagajiva sanatana deva	
7	xxxx		Jaya jaya kṛṣṇadeva adimula	

Rājhaṭimās (panegyrics of the King)-These are panegyrics to the king. Śaṅkaradeva composed two such bhaṭimās in honour of king Naranārāyaṇa when he was at Kocbehār. When Śaṅkaradeva went to rajdarbar of Naranārāyaṇa, first day he sang *jaya jaya malla nṛpati rasajan* and third day had sung *hasi sabhasad koru bohu thir*.

Guru-Bhaṭimā (panegyrics of the Guru) Mādhavadeva's whole hearted dedication to the service of his Guru Śaṅkaradeva has raised him to the status of an exemplar (ādarśa-vigraha) in this respect ^[13]. In his magnum opus, Nāma-ghoṣā, Mādhavadeva has declared decisively that in the order of Bhakti, there is no other parama guru (supreme-preceptor) than Śaṅkaradeva. He has composed only one Guru-bhaṭimā eulogizing his Guru Śaṅkaradeva. The text runs thus ^[14]--

Jaya guru śaṅkara
Sarva gunākara
Jākeri nāhike upāma I
Tohāri caraṇaku
Reṇu śata koṭi
Bareka karoho praṇama II

Out of eighteen (18) kuṭ or paragraph only one kuṭ or paragraph is mentioned here. Without resorting to a *Guru*, attempt at treading along the path of *Bhakti* proves abortive. So Mādhavadeva exhorts people to accept Śaṅkaradeva as *Guru* and sing along the names of God ^[15]. The main characteristics of the bhaṭimās are the use of rhyme, rhythm and cleverness and seriousness of word combination. The language of bhaṭimā is as artificial as that of bargīta Brājawali language.

Features

Literature and Music

Brājāvali or early Assamese combined with Sanskrit is frequently used in the rhythmic and lyrical poem styles of the Bhaṭimās. Every Bhaṭimā has a tone of exaltation, a melodic cadence, and repetition. In Satras, they are occasionally sung during festivals, Nām-Prasaṅga, or ceremonies.

Bhaṭimā and Śaṅkarī Sangīta have similar musical styles. It may not adhere to bargīta's rigid rāga-tāla patterns, but it nevertheless retains emotional intensity and rhythmic fluidity. An environment of reverence and devotion is created by the chanting of Bhaṭimā. Symbolism and Themes--Bhaṭimā's main focus is praise, whether it be of God, the Guru, or holy deeds. It was a way for the saints to show their appreciation and awe at God.

Some Bhaṭimās Praise Lord Kṛṣṇa's Qualities.

Others see Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva as celestial incarnations who brought wisdom and piety to Assam, praising their spiritual brilliance. Some Bhaṭimās honor the principles of *eka-śarana-hari-dharma* and the spiritual strength of Nām (chanting the name of God). Bhaṭimā is a symbol for the holy light (Bhati) that shines in people's hearts and leads them from ignorance to wisdom.

Religious and Cultural Relevance

In Assamese culture, Bhaṭimā holds a unique position. It creates a link between literature, art, and religion. Bhaṭimā is recited at the start or conclusion of religious sessions in Nāmghars and Satras to symbolize respect and spiritual closure. Bhaṭimā is used as an invocation or prologue in

Sattṛiyā Dance, Āṅkīyā Nāt, and other devotional events. Bhaṭimā also promoted social cohesion. It spread the egalitarian ideals of the Vaiṣṇavite movement by reaching all segments of society, regardless of caste or class, with its straightforward language and devotional message.

Findings and Discussion

- The lyrical pinnacle of knowledge and devotion (bhakti and jnana) is represented by Bhaṭimā.
- It serves as a vehicle for moral and spiritual instruction, with a focus on faith and humility.
- Its rhythmic patterns and lyrical beauty aided in the development of Assamese literary aesthetics.
- By integrating religion into everyday life, it was crucial in forming Assamese cultural identity.

Conclusion

Bhaṭimā is a brilliant gem in the crown of Assamese cultural heritage, a singular creation of our saints. It combines poetry, devotion, and philosophy into a single, harmonious shape, embodying Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva's spiritual vision. Generations have been inspired by its teachings of humility, gratitude, and divine love. The Bhaṭimās serves as a reminder of the beauty of faith, reverence, and simplicity in a society when materialism frequently eclipses spirituality. Both the Assamese identity and universal human ideals depend on the preservation and advancement of this heritage maintain this form.

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