

Folk Theatre of India: Ankiya Naat



Assam has been a pioneer and the forefront leader in the evolution and development of dramatic traditions and rituals in the northeastern states of India. One such form of folk theatre that has emerged from Assam is Ankiya Naat, which is a collection of single act plays.

The history of Ankiya Naat goes way back into medieval times. It is widely believed that saint and social reformer Srimata Sankardeva was the brain behind these beautiful and intricate one-act plays. The language used in the plays is a careful blend of the Assamese poetic language dominant in medieval times, which is formally called Brajavali. The plays find Lord Krishna as a thematic centre.

There exists a special presentation of the plays in the backdrop of rich melodious music. This is called Bhoana. The

play performance comprises dances, live instruments, singers and performers dressed in elaborate costumes.

Ankiya Naat performance begins with an invocation and a benediction in the Sanskrit language which is followed by presenting encomium to the Assamese Gods. The language of the encomium is Brajavali. After this, the performance moves into a prelude which is called Purvaranga. The backdrop of the performance is set up and enriched by the playing of traditional percussion instruments. These instruments are backed up by cymbals. The singers and the musician duo which is called the Gayan and the Bayan work together to produce a rich interactive musical experience.



The music is played in the performance is played at two paces namely the Bor-Dhemali and the Saru-Dhemali. The instruments used in the performance are played with hand movements that are of exaggerated nature. A central point of all the Ankiya naat performances is the Sutradhaar which essentially is the producer and the commentator. The Sutradhaar is omnipresent during the entire presentation keeping the audience affixed. The Sutradhaar enters after the end of the prelude, and from this point onward the actual play performance begins.

The main aim behind the invention of the Ankiya Naat was that

the art and the stories should be accessible to the common folks in medieval Assam, wherein a majority of the population had very little literacy. To further assist the audience an explanation was added after each scene of the performance ended

Ankiya Naat is the representation of the fine heritage of art and drama that has been endowed from the medieval Assamese period. It incorporates a passion for people and the praise for Lord Krishna.

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Guide ⇒ Prof. Manohar Khushalani

References

1. Ankiya Naat – One India One People
2. Ankiya Naat – Abhipedia