

# ‘Rajāghariyā Nāc’ Of Dakshinpat Sattrā Quest On The Texts And Contexts In The Light Of Contemporary Factuality’s: With Special Reference To Abhinaya

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## Abstract:

Sankardeva initiated Sattriya culture as a part of the preaching of New- Vaishṇava religion. Sattriya dance is an integrated part of this culture which contain certain characteristics of the classical dance form and hence it is recognized as a classical dance of India. This Sattriya dance was extracted from the dances innovated by Sankardeva. After demises of Sankardeva, the religious tradition was divided into four distinct groups called Sanghati. On the other hand, the number of Sattras (religious institutions established by Sankardeva) also increased in accordance with the diverged ideologies of these four groups. Brahma Sanghati is a group among these four groups that achieved special patronization from the Āhom kingdom. Dakshinpat sattrā is one of the premiere Brahma Sanghati sattras established (1584 AD) under the patronage of the Āhom king Jayadhvaj Singha. This Sattrā started to practice some innovative forms of dances apart from the original Sattriya Dances which deserve special study in reference to its historical and present day context. One of the dances that have been prevalent in this Dakshinpat sattrā is the ‘Rajāghariyā nāc’. This dance is not practiced in any other sattras except Dakshinpat sattrā. This dance was originally performed before the Āhom kings when they visit the sattrā. This study attempts to quest different dimensions of the Abhinaya part of this dance form in the context of contemporary factuality.

**Keywords:** Rajāghariyā nāc, Brahma sanghati, Sattriya music, Dakshinpat sattrā, Classical

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## I. Introduction

The formation and advancement of the New -Vaishṇava religion was a revolutionary addition to the Assamese culture. Dance, songs, instruments and dramas were created to promote and spread the New - Vaishṇava religion introduced by Sankardeva. The disciples of the Sankardeva promoted the religion by following the path shown by Sankardeva. After Sankardeva’s era ‘mahāpurushīa tradition’<sup>1</sup> was divided into four parts. It is called the division of sanghatis. The four division are-brahma sanghati, purush sanghati, kāla sanghati and nikā sanghati. In the sanghatis, several new cultural elements were created, in addition to the innovative creations of Sankardeva. One such cultural element is the dance form, ‘Rajāghariyā nāc’, which has been practicing in the Dakshinpat sattrā of Brahma Sanghati.

After Sankardeva several new dance forms were created among the sattras of Brahma Sanghati due to various influences. During the era of Swargadeu Jayadhvaj Singha, Banamali Deva established Dakshinpat sattrā (1584 AD).<sup>2</sup> Like other sattras of Brahma sanghati, Dakshinpat sattrā also received royal patronization of Ahom kingdom. Being the Sattrā, specially patronized by the king, the ‘bhakats’ (devotees) of the sattras were invited to different events in the palaces. Similarly, the Kings were also invited to various cultural events of the sattras.

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<sup>1</sup>mahāpurushīa tradition: The culture of music and daily rituals prevalent from the days of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva.

<sup>2</sup> Benudhar Sharma, *Dakshinpat Sattrā*, p. 42

All the bhakats of the sattra performed dances and songs to celebrate the king's arrival or the ceremonies at the king's place. Bhakats of the sattra had been performing some special dances to welcome the king. It led to the creation of a few new dance forms. One of these dances is Rajāghariyā nāc. This dance is not found with any other accompaniment except the Dakshinpat sattra. The form of this dance has been in vogue since the beginning. In this paper, an attempt has been made to discuss different internal and external components of Rajāghariyā nāc. Because it is a unique dance form to other sattra, no research has been done on this topic till the present.

## II. Review of Reference Literature

There is no sufficient data in the form of text about the Rajāghariyā nāc in Brahma Sanghati Sattra. Though some books are found regarding the Brahma Sanghati, discussions about dances created in Brahma Sanghati Sattras and contemporary dances are few. These studies are also not composed from a neutral point of view. It is to be noted that G. K Mahanta completed his Ph.D. program by submitting the thesis titled 'Origin and Development of Ankia Drama and Analysis of its language' in 1995. Similarly, Jagannath Mahanta's thesis named 'The Sattriya Dance of Assam (A critical and Analytical Study) for his Ph.D. at the Dibrugarh University in 1997. After that, he extensively studied Sattriya dance and penned several books. In this context, we can quote Jagannath Mahanta's 'Sattriya Nrtiyar Duti Maula: Pada aru Hasta, Sattriya Nrittya Gita Badyar Hatputhi'. Although a few dance forms of Brahma sanghati sattras are mentioned in his thesis, there is no mention of Rajāghariyā nāc. In 1999 Nirupama Mahanta in her Ph.D. thesis named 'Asomor Purush Sanghatir Satra Hamuhar Asar Riti Aru Utsav Anusthan' with Dibrugarh University. Pitambar Dev Goswami wrote his thesis named 'Asomor Sattriya- Utsav Anusthan aru Ebilakor Tatparyya Bisar' in 2000 at Dibrugarh University. He perpetuates studies on Sattriya dance and pens several books on it. One prominent among these is 'Satriya Utsavar Paricoy aru Tatparyya'. Harendranath Phukan in his thesis named 'A Study on King Rudrasingha and Sivasingha and Their times' in 2004 with Dibrugarh University. The thesis reflects how Āhom royal patronage influenced the song and dances of Sattras. In 2006 Nilakhi Phukan Borgohain completed her Ph.D. program by submitting the thesis named 'A Study of the Female Dance Tradition of Assam: Folk and Classical Forms' under Dibrugarh University. The 'Sattriya Nritya aru Sattriya Nrtiyar Tal' penned by Maheswar Neog and Keshav Changkakoti and Narayan Chandra Goswami's 'Satriya Sankriti Swarna Rekha' describes the rhythmical sound of Sattriya dance and different kind of Mati Akhara. In 2008 a Ph.D. thesis was submitted by Tanuja Baruah on 'Ground Exercises (Mati Akhora) & (Bhari-Man) in Satriya Dance.' Arun Kumar Borah completed his Ph.D. program by submitting the thesis titled as 'Golaghat Zilar Satra aru Thanar Aytia: Eiti Adhyayan (Sri Sri Kuruabahi Satra aru Sikan Ata thanar Bisesh Ullikhan Saha)' under Guwahati University has some information on Kuruabahi Sattra but there is no remark on any dance. The thesis of Bani Bora 'Majulir Satranusthan Ek Samajik Sanskritik Adhyayan', under Guwahati University in 2013 has some mentioning about Sattriya culture. But there is no study on the Brahma Sanghati sattras which is the base of the present study.

It can be taken for granted that the Sattriya dance originated from Ankia bhaona. When we study Ankia bhaona, dances come into the picture. A large number of writers penned several books on Sattriya dance and song. Some notable books are Prahlad Kumar Barua's 'Bhowna Samikhya', Karuna Borah's 'Sattriya Nrittyar Rup Darshan', Mallika Kandli's 'Nriyakala Prasanga aru Sattriya Nritya'. Ajit Saikia and Satyakam Borthakur's 'Asomor Loka-Natya aru Ankiya Bhaona'. On the other hand, some writers penned books accumulating dramas of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva. In this context, we can quote the names of Kaliram Medhi's 'Ankawali' and Kesavananda Dev Goswami's 'Ankamala.'

Although several studies have been made on Sattriya dance to date, there are certain aspects of Sattriya culture, which need to be addressed comprehensively. The above reference literature so far has not covered all these aspects. A few books have information on some special dance forms of Brahma Sanhati Sattra like Apsarā and Naṭuā nāc, but Rajāghariyā nāc is mentioned in none. Therefore, the Rajāghariyā nāc needs to be studied in detail.

## III. Objectives of the Study

1. To study the *Rajāghariyā nāc* from the textual perspective.
2. The significance of these dance forms in the current perspective.

## IV. Methodology

Performance theory and descriptive methods are employed in this paper. The performance study method is also employed in this paper. The present study is based on the rules mentioned in the Nāṭyaśāstra.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Nāṭyaśāstra: Is a Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts. The text is attributed to sage Bharata Muni. All classical elements are included in this text. Its time was (1<sup>st</sup> century bce- 3<sup>rd</sup> century ce).

## V. Limitation of the study

The paper is limited within the Abhinaya part of the *Rajāghariyā nāc* form.

## VI. Rajāghariyā Nāc: An introduction

From the days of the establishment of the Dakshinpat sattra number of the Ahom kings' used to frequently visit the Sattra. The Bhakats of the sattra had been organizing some special devotional musical programs to welcome the king. Rajāghariyā nāc is such a dance form that was created to welcome the King. This dance has been practicing only in the Dakshinpat sattra which is belonged to Brahma sanghati. This dance has been prevalent since the establishment of this sattra. The devotees of the sattra informed that this dance was composed during King Jayadvaj Singha. In the course of time, songs written by Bishnu Deva (1702-1742), Nara Deva (1817-1848), etc. got included in the dance.<sup>4</sup> The practice of the dance is still prevailing in the Sattra.



**Figure- 1: Standing position of Rajāghariyā nāc**

This dance seemed to be influenced by the Devadāshī dance. The formation of Devadāshī dance has some similarities with Rajāghariyā nāc. The only difference is that the Devadāshīs perform dances in the temple's yard, while 'natuā's (the dancers) perform the Rajāghariyā nāc before the 'thāpanā'<sup>5</sup> of the 'barnāamghar'.<sup>6</sup> Besides that, the performing style and gestures are similar to Devadāshī dance. Male performers dress as women while performing. The difference can be seen explicitly in the attire of the dance.

In ancient times, this dance was performed on the arrival of king at Dakshinpat sattra. Later, on the arrival of some special guest or on any one of the bihu festivals of Assamese Bohag month, this dance was performed in front of the Sattrādhikāra.

### Abhinaḃa used in Rajāghariyā nāc

Classical rules are relied upon to determine whether a dance or dance form is classical. These features are compared based on Nāṭyaśāstra and Abhinaḃa Darpana<sup>7</sup>. According to the rules of Nāṭyaśāstra dance involves body parts, and limbs. Jagannath Mahanta, in his research thesis 'The Sattriya Dance of Assam (A

<sup>4</sup> Benudhar Sharma, *Dakshinpat Sattra*, p. 111

<sup>5</sup> The thāpanā: An elevated place or structure, as a mound or platform, at which religious rites are performed or on which sacrifices are offered to gods, ancestors, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Barnāamghar: Prayer house and places for congregational worship associated with the entire Assamese community.

<sup>7</sup> Abhinaḃa Darpana: A comprehensive text describing various gestures, postures and movements in dance. Nandikeshvara was the author of the Abhinaya Darpana. This text was written in 5<sup>th</sup> century.

critical and Analytical Study)' presents a comprehensive discussion on the features of sattriya culture based on the Nāṭyaśāstra and Abhinaya Darpana. The Rajāghariyā nāc practiced in Dakshinpat sattrā under Brahma Sanghati has the same elements as the Sattriya dance.

### **Elements of Āṅgika Abhinaya in Rajāghariyā nāc**

The 13 types of 'Śhirakarma' (head gestures) used in Sattriya dance are taken from Nāṭyaśāstra and Abhinaya Darpana. Among those Kampita, Dhuta, Parivāhitam, Udhāhitam, Utkṣiptam, Ancitam and sama śhirakarma is used in the Rajāghariyā nāc. Among the 10 'dṛistikarma' (eye gestures) of sattriya dance, use of sama dṛisti, Kaṭākhyā (Sāchi), Avalukita, prolukita, ullukita, anubṛitta and awolukita dṛisti are seen in Rajāghariyā nāc. Ten types of 'gṛīva karma' (neck gestures) are used in Sattriya dance based on the two śāstras. Among those samā, natā, unnatā, trashyā, resitā, balitā, prakompitā and paribortitā are used in Rajāghariyā nāc. Six types of 'mukhaja karma' (face gestures) are used in sattriya dance. Among those the three types such as, binibṛitta, nirbhugna and bhugna much karma are used frequently in Rajāghariyā nāc. In addition to 'māṭi-ākhorā' (ground exercise) of the Sattriya dance style, Dakshinpat sattrā's own māṭi-ākhorā can be observed in the dance. Among the māṭi-ākhorās the use of sotā, prokṛiti orā, murukā, āthuā, orāt bohā, sottrāwolī, urpāk ṭukurā pāk, solona, haat xolua, pada salonā, kokilā khusā etc are seen. On the other hand, among the 'hastās' (hand gestures) alapadma, potakā, mujurā, sotā, śandangsha etc, are seemed to be used along with folk hasta hāire, bangsī etc. Chinnā, Nivittā, resitā and udwāhitā 'kati karma' is used in the Rajāghariyā nāc. All these hastās are mentioned in Nāṭyaśāstra. The five types mentioned in Nāṭyaśāstra such as ābhugna, nirbhugna, prakampita, oddāhi and sama 'bokhyo karma' (chest gestures) are used in Rajāghariyā nāc.<sup>8</sup> Out of the 'padakarmas' (foot gestures) used in Rajāghariyā nāc sama pada, aindrya sthānak and garura sthānak are included in the 6 pada sthānaks of Abhinaya Darpana.

The application of classical rules seems in this dance form. Although the hasta, māṭi-ākhorā, and other body gestures are known by their indigenous names instead of the classical ones to some extent, in Rajāghariyā nāc there are mostly the classical elements.

**Table-1: Different part of the body movement of Āṅgika Abhinaya**

Śhirakarma' (head gestures)	Kampita, Dhuta, Parivāhitam, Udhāhitam, Utkṣiptam, Ancitam and sama
'dṛistikarma' (eye gestures)	sama dṛisti, Kaṭākhyā (Sāchi), Avalukita, prolukita, ullukita, anubṛitta and awolukita dṛisti
gṛīva karma' (neck gestures)	samā, natā, unnatā, trashyā, resitā, balitā, prakompitā and paribortitā
'mukhaja karma' (face gestures)	binibṛitta, nirbhugna and bhugna
hastās' (hand gestures)	alapadma, potakā, mujurā, sotā, śandangsha, hāire, bangsī
bokhyo karma' (chest gestures)	ābhugna, nirbhugna, prakampita, oddāhi and sama
Kati karma (waist gestures)	Chinnā, Nivittā, resitā and udwāhitā
padakarmas' (foot gestures)	sama pada, aindrya sthānak and garura sthānak
māṭi-ākhorā' (ground exercise)	sotā, prokṛiti orā, murukā, āthuā, orāt bohā, sottrāwolī, urpāk ṭukurā, solona, haat xolua, pada salonā, kokilā khusā

### **Elements of Sāttvika Abhinaya in Rajāghariyā nāc**

Sattriya dance has the 9 types of rasas mentioned in the Nāṭyaśāstra and Abhinaya Darpana (śṛṅgāra, hāsyā, raudra, karuṇā vīra, adbhuta, bībhatsa, bhayānaka).<sup>9</sup> In addition, Sattriya dance includes one more rasa that is not mentioned in the scriptures. That is bhakti rasa. Bhakti rasa is used in Rajāghariyā nāc. From the geetar nāc part of the dance it is seen that most of the songs are based on Lord Shri Krishna. On the one hand, it speaks of being fascinated by the sound of Krishna's flute; on the other hand, it describes the appearance of Krishna. Observing songs of the Rajāghariyā nāc shows bhakti rasa is expressed through śṛṅgāra rasa. The bhāva of śṛṅgāra rasa is rotī. Since the dance is of devadāshī there are also similarities in performance. Hence, śṛṅgāra rasa also has importance in Rajāghariyā nāc. Several songs are lost over time, but some commonly used songs have been recovered.

### **Elements of Vācika Abhinaya in Rajāghariyā nāc**

According to the rules of acting in Nāṭyaśāstra vācika abhinaya is one the most important classical elements. The actors express the act's feelings through the play's words and dancers through the songs. Sattriya dance has a part called 'geetar nās' part where the naṭuā does acting as well as dance. At present in the gā-māns

<sup>8</sup>Jagannath Mahanta, 'Sattiya Nritya gita badyar hatpathi', p. 135-144

<sup>9</sup>Adya Rangacharya, 'The Nāṭyaśāstra', p.56

bājanā songs meaning are expressed using hasta through acting. In the ankiyā nāt, which Sankardeva creates, also the songs are performed along with acting. In the Rajāghariyā nāc the naṭuā does not act in the geetar nās part, but only dance. The naṭuā doesn't express the meaning of the songs though acting. He only dances along with the music. That's why we don't see nṛityābhinaṣya. Rajāghariyā nāc is performed the hasta mudra based on the meaning and feeling of the songs. There is no character playing in this dance like the other dances. The ragas, geetas (songs), and tālas (rhythm) used in Rajāghariyā nāc are given in table no 2.

Geet is used in the 'geetar nās' part of Rajāghariyā nāc. This geet is performed using dholak and tāla. These songs were performed with the help of different ragas and tāla. These geet were composed in old folk Assamese language. Songs written by several sattrādhikāra of Dakshinpat sattra are used in this dance. In general, songs based on praising of the lord Sri Krishna are sung.

**Table- 2: List of songs (geets) in Rajāghariyā nāc**

Rāga	Geet	Tāla
Śāreg	Kimohana bāsi bājela yamunār nikate.	Saru chāri khaniyā
Gāndhār	Kanak kamanādala tuwā mukha mandala.	Madhyam chāri khaniyā
Gandagirī	Nattā rāghaba madbhutali lang a' mārīcha birādha kabanha subāhkālang.	Bar chārikhaniyā

### **Elements of Āhārya Abhināya in Rajāghariyā nāc**

According to classical rule, Āhārya helps project a character or dance performance. It is essential to put on costumes and ornaments to express rasa and feelings. Since Rajāghariyā nāc is a feminine dance, the costume worn by the naṭuās have similarities with that of a woman. It is already mentioned that in this dance, bhakti rasa is used along with śṅgāra rasa. Hence, the costume is pure white though it looks like a woman's costume. It is not very flashy. The ensemble of the Rajāghariyā nāc is described below.

### **Costume**

The costumes of Rajāghariyā nāc is quite similar to that used in Cāli nāc of Sattriya dance. The naṭuās wear long ghūri on the waist. This ghūri extends to the ankle. At the waist, ghūri has thick folds. This ghūri or lehenga is entirely white. The ghūri has no flowers or lace. On the chest a dress is worn that extends to the waist. The dress is named 'Baiṭhāpotiyā'<sup>10</sup>. It looks like the kings' sāpkoṅ dress tied on the sides. It lies form both sides of the shoulder and extends up to the knee from both the front and the back. A cloth is stitched on the chest, joining the sādār on both sides. The sādār is colorful and has lace on both sides. Over the sādār a gāmusā ṭāngali (it's not is worn on the waist. Over this kānchi is put on. The kānchi is very glamorous and bright. A specialty of the Rajāghariyā nāc is the turban worn by the naṭuā. The turban is pointed upwards like the ones used by the Mughals. This is not found in any other sattra. This turban is made by wrapping white cotton clothes.

<sup>10</sup> Baiṭhāpotiyā: The hooks on the dress are broad like the oar of a boa.



Figure- 2: Costume of Rajāghariyā nāc

## VII. Ornaments

Naṭuā's wear limited number of ornaments in *Rajāghariyā nāc*. They wear gāmkhāru (Assamese bangle) on the wrists, moṭāmoni and kolāmoni on the neck. Chandan ṭilak is worn on the forehead.

## VIII. Conclusion

A new dance form called *Rajāghariyā nāc* was formed in Dakshinpat sattrā that is a fusion of Sattriya and music from outside of the sattras. It was created to welcome the king by the *bhakats* when he entered the sattras. This dance is not seen elsewhere other than the Dakshinpat sattras.

Several elements of the rules mentioned in *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Abhinaya Darpana* are found in *Rajāghariyā nāc*. Most of the elements of acting used in Sattriya dance as per the two scriptures seem to be used in *Rajāghariyā nāc*. Apart from that, in the field of *rasa*, like Sattriya dance *bhakti rasa* has significance in *Rajāghariyā nāc*. Because it comprises all the classical elements, *Rajāghariyā nāc* can be included in the classical category (as Sattriya dance). In the *Rajāghariyā nāc*, *māṭi-ākhorā*, *hasta mudra* etc. are known with the local names used in the sattrā. Even then, its way of performing is under classical rules.

Nowadays, *Rajāghariyā nāc* is performed only when some special guests visit Dakshinpat sattrā. This dance has been taught by offering oral lessons since ancient times. It doesn't have any written scripture. The *bhakats* of the sattras said that this dance had been kept within the walls of the sattras in the fear of it becoming inappropriate under external influence. Due to this, several musics, performing techniques, and instruments have become lost over time. This dance has been performed at a few events outside of the sattras. In such organized events, only a part of the dance is performed. There are only a few published books that have discussed *Rajāghariyā nāc*. They are almost rare. Though classical elements are found in this dance due to some dissimilarities with Sattriya dance form, other sattras have not included it in Sattriya music. Music is a genre that grows and develops over time. After Sankardeva and Madhabdeva many 'dharmācāryas' (an instructor of religion) have expanded mahāpurushīa music by creating various dances, songs, dramas, etc. and it continues to this day. Therefore, *Rajāghariyā nāc* can also be the significance of Sattriya dance.

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