

Naamghar Association of America

NEWSLETTER

WWW.NAAMGHAR.ORG

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MESSAGE FROM THE BOR-MEDHI

Dear community members and well-wishers of NAAM,

The global pandemic seems to be gradually under control. Vaccines and boosters are being timely introduced in 2022. Closed spaces are still considered safer with face masks on. We express our gratitude to all the people who are working in this environment, putting their own well-being at risk, to help others. Let us all follow the prescribed guidelines not only for our own safety but also for the safety of all others around us.

Now coming to this third quarter newsletter of 2022 from NAAM, it is my pleasure to highlight a few key points:

celebrated Sankardeva's A) NAAM Janmotsav Tithi celebration September 25 at our Naamghar which will be followed by our global annual fund-raising virtual event on October 15, 2022. Please feel free to provide your input and contact me directly (binoy.bordoloi@gmail.com) or write to naaminfo@naamghar.org to make it a grand success.

We are busy planning the event with an attractive list of performing artists, including Ms **Sunita Bhuyan** in violin for a Borgeet and a Devotional song, specifically recorded for NAAM in a Mumbai studio. In addition we are also in communication with several additional

well-known artists to show case their work for your pleasure. These may include Eepsita Hazarika, Anurag Saikia. Torali Sarma, Goswami, Jatin Bora and Seujpriya Goswami from India, and our own home grown Thapona Dance Group of NJ/PA, led by Pronoti Tahbildar, the **Nritya Dhwani School** Performing Arts from North Carolina, and the Bay Area Sattriya Dance **Group** from California.

Please look up our event flyer with more details in another section of this newsletter.

- B) NAAM has been jointly co-sponsoring a series of webinars, led by Dr Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti, President, Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva, Nagaon, Assam. The 9th webinar dated September 11, 2022 was on "Borgeet as a Form of Classical Music", delivered by Dr. **Pabitrapran** Goswami, Retired Principal, Jorhat College, Jorhat. Dr. Goswami's article on this topic titled "Borgeet: the Last Reminiscence of Prabandha Gan" is included in the newsletter, which you will find very enlightening.
- C) We request all our well-wishers and community members to join us in this journey of establishing a Naamghar with your contribution of ideas, a

commitment of time to join us at our monthly WG (working group) meetings, and monetary donations to NAAM.

We have been actively pursuing land ownership ideas and processes as that is the basic minimum required for seeking any assistance from government bodies for constructing a building for the Naamghar. The building maintenance is another important matter that would require annual fund-raising support, as that is not expected to come from any government bodies, whether in India or in the US.

We have not ruled out any renting either, which was covered in depth in our Q-2 of 2022 Newsletter.

If you have any constructive thoughts, please contact me or any of our Executive Committee members at your earliest convenience. Hope you all had a wonderful

summer, and now we get ready for a colorful Fall.

আশাকৰো অক্টোবৰ ১৫ ৰ (October 15th, 2022) এই শংকৰি কলাকৃস্টিৰে পৰিপুৰ্ন অনুস্থানত আপোনালোক সকলোৱে উপস্থিত

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I am looking forward to your feedback and continued co-operation to drive the processes for our Naamghar mission.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Dr. Binoy K. Bordoloi, Bor Medhi

Email: binoy.bordoloi@gmail.com



UPDATE ON FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

- We are gearing up for hosting Sankardeva's Janmotsav celebration and fundraising event on October 15, 2022. Please register at:
 - https://naamghar.org/registration/
- NAAM is soliciting your donations via its website (https://naamghar.org/), NAAM Facebook page (
- https://www.facebook.com/NaamgharAssoci ationOfAmerica/), and the "DONATE" button on this page to fund a community Naamghar in North America.
- We encourage our well wishers who shop at Amazon, to use the link https://smile.amazon.com/ and add "Naamghar Association of America" as the designated charity. By adding a charity at Amazon Smile does not cost you additional charges. It is free.
- NAAM is looking forward to an active participaiton of the community (Assamese diaspora) for realizing a common dream of building a Naamghar in North America. Please use the "DONATE" button below and/or contact Dr. Binoy Bordoloi at binoy.bordoloi@gmail.com for additional information. Thank you!



Please contribute to NAAM's effort to build a naamghar in North America:



SANKARDEVA'S JANOMOTSAV CELEBRATON AND A FUND RAISING EVENT

Please join us to commemorate the auspicious day of the 574th **Janmotsav of Srimanta Sankardeva** with your friends and family on **Saturday**, **15th October 2022 1:30PM EDT onwards**. We hope to share a few peaceful moments together in naamprosongo prayer and with devotional music.

This is a Cultural Event on a virtual platform to raise funds to construct the first Naamghar in North America.



We request you to register for this event and pay an admission fee of \$25 which will help us cover the cost of hosting this event as well as raise much needed funds to build a naamghar.

Registration https://naamghar.org/registration

Event Date and Time: Saturday 15th October, 2022 1:30 PM EDT (11:00 PM IST) **Platform**: Zoom Virtual (Remote). Instructions will be emailed to registered guests before the event.

We sincerely look forward to your active participation and patronage, donating freely and inviting friends and families to this event to raise funds towards building a community Naamghar.

We warmly welcome your donation, any amount, to help us build a naamghar in North America: Please click here to donate.

Thank you!

RECENT AND UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

A NAAM sponsored webinar on Borgeet

As a part of a webinar series on "Different facets of Sankaradeva Studies," organized by the Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva and co-sponsored by the NAAM, Dr. Pabitrapran Goswami, an eminent performer of Borgeet and scholar on the subject, delighted the audience with his talk.



Webinar on Borgeet as a form of classical music

GUWAHATI, Sept 12: As part of the international webinar series on different facets of Sankaradeva Studies, the 9th webinar was held on Sunday under the aegis of the Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva in association with Naamghar Association of America and Delphic Council of North East India.

Dr Pablitrapran

Dr Pablitrapran
Goswami, eminent
traditional Borgeet
performer and
researcher was the
resource person, stated a
press release.
He delivered a lecture on
'Borgeet as a form of
classical music'. The
webinar was moderated
by Dr Sanjib Kumar
Borkakoti, author and
scholar of Sankari
culture.

Dr Pabitrapran
Goswami said in his
lecture that by Borgeet
we should refer not
merely to a bunch of

songs but to the special trend of Indian classical music that Sankaradeva-Madhavadeva consciously tried to popularize through all of their lyrical compositions, including the songs of their dramatic works called Ankiya plays too, set in similar raga and sung with the accompaniment of similar rala. The musical trend that Borgeet reflects is the trend of Prabandha Gan of ancient India. The traditional prasangiya style of Borgeet performance exhibits all the characteristics of a Prabandha Gan as described in the treatise 'Sangit Ratnakar' by Sarangadeva.

Several scholars and

Several scholars and eminent persons, including Dr Ratul Chandra Bora, former Registrar of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Dr Binoy Bordoloi, Chairman of Naamghar Association of America, Dilip Changkakoty, Coordinator of ICOMOS North

East
Zone, musician Pranab
Goswami, musician Das,
musician Rupam Jyoti
Bora, career guide Dr
Buljit Buragohain
etc., attended the webinar. All of them stressed
the fact that the classical
features of Borgeet could
be seen in the Prasangiya
style only and hence this
form of performing
Borgeet must be popularized.

Dr Sanjib Kumar

Dr Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti in his comments said that the creations of Srimanta Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva were treasures of entire India as they had revived the Vedic music. He said that Borgeet deserved to be declared as a world heritage by UNESCO, because of its unique features.

Guwahati English Edition

Celebration of the Sankardeva Janmotsav Tithi

On September 25, 2022, a few families from the New Jersey and Pennsylvania area gathered at the residence of the Naamgharia of NAAM, to celebrate the Srimanta Sankardeva's Janmotsav Tithi.





The *naam-proxonga* was coordinated by Puran Sarmah, Treasurer of NAAM.



FEATURED ARTICLE

BORGEET: THE LAST REMINISCENCE OF PRABANDHA GAN

By Dr. Pabitrapran Goswami

Introduction:

The name Borgeet, as we know, is popularly ascribed to a special set of devotional songs, set in classical rags and sung with the accompaniment of scientifically measured tals, composed during the late 15th and the early 16th centuries A.D. by Srimanta Sankardeva and his disciple Sri Sri Madhavdeva, the two chief exponents of Vaishnavism in Assam.

However, what I would like to say is that by Borgeet we should refer not merely to a bunch of songs but to the special trend of Indian classical music that Sankar-Madhav consciously tried to popularise through all of their lyrical compositions which include the songs of their dramatic works called Anka too, set in similar rags and sung with the accompaniment of similar tals. The musical trend that Borgeet reminisces is the trend of Prabandha Gan.

Prabandha Gan:

Dhrupad and Kirttan or Kriti are the earliest forms of music extant today in the Hindustani and the Karnatik systems. The Prabandha Gan evidently represented a stage in the evolution of Indian music prior to that of Dhrupad and Kirttan, a stage till which perhaps the rags and the tals enjoyed uniformity in almost all parts of India.

Sarangadeva, the 13th century scholar and musician, in his encyclopaedic work Sangita Ratnakara, speaks of three chief types of Prabandha, viz., Suda, Ali and Biprakirna and of two chief subdivisions of Suda-Prabandha: Suddha-suda and Salaga-suda.

Conceived as a living body, a Prabandha is said to have possessed six limbs (anga) such as Svara

(the tune or the raga), Biruda (the eulogizing of the god or the person worshipped), Pada (the lyrics), Tena (the words suggestive of Brahma or Paramatatva), Pata (the beats of the drums), and Tala (rhythm). Sarangadeva places the Prabandhas in five categories (Jati) in accordance with the number of limbs: Medini (6 limbs), Nandini (5 limbs), Dipani (4 limbs), Bhavani (3 limbs), and Taravali (2 limbs).

Sarangadeva also speaks of four principal Dhatus or music parts of a Prabandha: Udgraha, Melapaka, Dhruva and Abhoga. Another dhatu called Antara, which comes between Dhruva and Abhoga, is also said to have been present in Salaga-suda and Rupaka type of Prabandhas. The presence of at least two of these dhatus was essential in any kind of Prabandha, and the dhatu called Dhruva was indispensable everywhere.

Udgraha:

A piece of instrumental orchestration used to prelude the actual singing of a Prabandha, and that instrumental part figures in Sarngadeva's Sangita Ratnakara as Udgraha:

Adau <mark>vadya</mark> Prabandhanang suddh<mark>a</mark> kutadi nirmitah.

Yah k<mark>han</mark>do vadyate prahurudgrahatang mahattamah.

Melapaka, Dhruva, Antara and Abhoga:

Melapaka was the dhatu that established the link between Udgraha and Dhruva. As Dhruva stood for what is called Sthayi or Tek in modern times, Melapaka, the linking dhatu between Udgraha and Dhruva, must have been the counterpart of modern Alapaka or Alapa, as the word Melapaka results from a blending of the two words: Mela and Alapaka. The

dhatu called Abhoga is known to have given completion to the Prabandha and hence may be understood to have referred to the last part of a song containing the composer's name. The dhatu called Antara separated the Dhruva from the Abhoga, its position being in between the two.

The Bauddha Caryagits, that were in vogue between the 8th and the 12th centuries AD, are categorized by both Sarangadeva and Vyankatamakhi as Biprakirna Prabandha of the Taravali class. It is noteworthy that in the Caryagits, as found in the printed editions available so far, only the rags are mentioned, there being no mention of any tal. This, quite in conformity with their inclusion in the Taravali class of Prabandha, indicates that the Caryas were perhaps not accompanied by any drum like instruments (anaddha vadya) and comprised of just two limbs (anga), viz., swara and pada.

The Astapadis of Jaydeva's Gita-govinda, on the other hand, besides being set in rags, were accompanied by certain tals too. In fact the different verses of an Astapadi are known to have been sung in different talas. The tal mentioned atop a song therefore might have indicated the first or the chief tal to be played with it.

Sankardeva's Initiation to the Tradition of Rag Sangit:

Sankardeva's predecessors, while migrating from Kanauj through Bengal to Assam sometime between the 12th and the 13th centuries A.D., must have brought with them a rich heritage of Indian classical art and music. This hypothesis is supported by Sankaradeva's referring to his father in his Rukminiharana Kabya as a Gandharva:

"Vangsate prakhyata gandharva sakhyata jagate bakhane yaka"

So Sankaradeva must have got the initial exposure to the latest trends in Indian music in his early childhood. That he could appreciate the musical talent of his father, whom he lost at an early age, also supports this inference. That initial knowledge of music was theoretically streamlined through the

study of the four Vedas, fourteen Sastras (including the Natyasastra) and eighteen Puranas in Guru Mahendra Kandali's tol, and further enriched and perfected from all sides by the practical experience he gathered during his pilgrimages for long twelve years.

It is noteworthy that during Sankardeva's time, the holy places and temples like those of Jagannatha of Puri and of Shrinathji of Vrindavan were the living centres of dance and music and the musical trend in vogue everywhere was that of Prabandha Gan. The practice of the Astapadis of Jaydeva's Gitagovinda, which were the creation of a fully developed stage of the Prabandha type of music, is known to have been alive till then in those temples.

Hence, we may infer that Sankardeva fully mastered the musical system of Prabandha Gan during his pilgrimages and afterwards composed Borgeet on that model. The significance of the rags of Borgeet must also be assessed in that historical perspective.

Borgeet as Prabandha Gan:

The traditionally ideal style of performance of Borgeet, as is done in the Satras or village Namghars, exhibit all the five dhatus or musical parts of a Prabandha Gan, as described by Pundit Sarangadeva in Sangit Ratnakara.

Such performances happen to be choral. The singing is preceded by a recital of several Khols, Tals and one or two pairs of Negera, which conforms to the corresponding instrumental orchestra called Udgraha, that preceded the actual singing of a Prabandha gan. The bajanas or the rhythmic compositions played in the orchestra comprise several parts such as Jorani (the prelude), Cahini, and Gurughat (the Ghat played in honour of the Guru). All these parts may not be played in all the satras, but the Gurughat is played everywhere.

The Gurughat is followed by a composition called Rag Talani or Rag Tal, set in a rhythmic pattern of four strokes and one gap, along with which

the rag of the Borgeet as such is elaborated. The moment the Rag Talani is started, the chief gayan (singer) of the group initiates the singing of a rag of Borgeet suitable for the hour. Subsequently the group joins the chief gayan in the singing and there follows a choral elaboration of the rag. The various parts of a rag thus elaborated are known by different names in different satras. Thus while some call them Ghar and Tolani, others call them Bhujanga and Apluta. Again some satras split a rag into three parts bearing the names Bahani (initiation), Urani (arohana) and Ghurani (avarohana), while some others have the convention of splitting a rag into as many as five parts, such as Ukar, Hukar, Tar, Ghor and Marddan.

There is a practice among quite a few satras of uttering some words like Krishna, Sankara, Guru, Hari, Rama, Govinda etc. in the rag portion, while some satras prefer to utter such meaningless sounds as ta, na, ne, ri, hereri, hauri etc. instead. Again in some other satras we notice the use of both the sets of words and sounds. Now, without going into the controversies among the orthodox circles as to which of the above practices is correct, we may conclude that from the musical point of view the differences involved are quite immaterial. If we concentrate upon the tune of the rag, the words like Krishna, Sankara etc. will cease to connote anything and appear, like the sounds ta, na, ne, ri etc., mere vehicles for elaborating the rag. We may at the same time note that the utterance of the various names of Lord Vishnu such as Krishna, Sankara, Hari, Rama, Govinda, etc. with such meaningless sounds as ta,na,ne,ri,etc. in the rendering of the rag of a Borgeet has historical significance too. It is noteworthy that the Omkara as the symbol of the cetana nada (animated sound), and such meaningful phrases as O Ananta Narayana, Tuhi Ananta Hari etc. as the abridged forms of Devabandana or Gurubandana (hymns in praise of the Lord or the Guru) were resorted to in the alapa part of ancient Indian raga sangita, prior to the influence of the court singers of the Moghul period. Any way, this rhythmic elaboration of the rag as such corresponds to the Melapaka Dhatu of Prabandha Gan.

When we look at the evolution of Indian music, we see that after the Prabandha style of music has become obsolete, the Dhatus like Udgraha and Melapaka have also been discarded from the modern forms of classical music and in the new system the parts of a song have come to be known as Sthayi, Antara, Sanchari and Abhoga.

Hence the continuation till date of the Dhatus like Udgraha and Melapaka in the traditional performing style of Borgeet is indeed significant.

The Udgraha and the Melapaka parts being over, there come Dhruva, Antara and Abhoga successively. The first two lines of a Borgeet are marked as Dhrung, which is an abbreviation of Dhruva. The rest of the Borgeet, though marked as Pada as in the case with Jaydeva's Astapadis, may be split into two parts, viz., Antara and Abhoga, in accordance with the difference in singing style.

The Dhruva portion is sung in a single tal. With the completion of the singing of the rag (rag diya), there follows an interim break in the percussion, when the chief gayan sings the first line of the burden of a Borgeet, marked as Dhrung, set in the rag already sung, without being accompanied by any rhythmic instrument. The group repeats the line in the same style. This is done twice and on the second repetition of the line by the group the percussionists make their entry with the Ghat of the tal in which that particular Borgeet is conventionally started. The same tal is continued through the second line of the burden. In fact the Ga-man of the tal is first played from where the second line of the burden begins. This line is repeated as many times as required for the full play of all the three parts of the tal, viz., Ga-man, Ghat and Cok. This requires proper understanding between the gayans and the bayans. Then the singers together proceed to the padas (the subsequent verse couplets) line by line without repeating the burden in between.

Again, the last line of a Borgeet is sung several times repeatedly with the accompaniment of a rhythmic composition called Thela Bajana, which entirely differs from the other tals played with

Borgeet. The moment the Thela Bajana starts, one comes to know that the Borgeet has come to its end. Hence this portion of a Borgeet deserves to be marked as Abhoga, as the Abhoga Dhatu indicates the end of a Prabandha Gan.

The singing style of the lines in between Dhruva and Abhoga is quite different, as each line is repeatedly sung in two different tals of various length and rhythmic pattern such as Saru Bisam (10 matras) and Bar Bisam (12 matras), Rupak (12 matras) and Athtala (26 matras), Dharamjati (28 matras) and Dahbari (32 matras) etc. Hence this portion of a Borgeet deserves the name Antara, as the Antara of a Prabandha Gan marks the antar or difference between Dhruva and Abhoga.

The traditional style of performance with khol, tal, negera etc., that starts with the Gurughat and ends in the Thela Bajana is unique in all respects and exhibits in Borgeet the characteristics of all the five dhatus (musical parts), viz., Udgraha, Melapaka, Dhruva, Antara and Abhoga, and the six Angas (limbs), viz., Swara, Tala, Pada, Tena, Biruda and Pata, of Prabandha Gan. Hence Borgeet may be categorised as Salaga-suda Prabandha of the Medini Jati, like the Astapadis of Jaydeva's Gita-govinda. Written in Sanskrit, the Astapadis were the last and probably the best specimens of Prabandha Gan in the general Indian context. No other musical composition is available today anywhere in India comparable to the tradition of music represented by the Astapadis of Gita-govinda save the Borgeets by Sankara-Madhava. More than that, the musical

practice of the Astapadis being no more seen anywhere, the Borgeets of Assam may, with justification, be projected as the only living reminiscence today of the ancient Prabandha type of music in entire India. It is indeed a matter of great significance to the cultural history not only of Assam but also of the nation as a whole. As such Borgeet deserves to be included in UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage too.

References:

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- 2. Kagendranath Das; *Bharatiya Sangitar Paramparat Sattriya Sangskritir Ruprekha;* Manasjyoti Prakashan, Barpeta, 1995.
- 3. Swami Prajnanananda; *Historical Development of Indian Music*; Firma K.L.M. 1973.
- 4. Bapcandra Mahanta; *Asamat Marga Sangit Aru Manasa-git*; Mahanta Prakasan, Jorhat; 1997.
- 5. Bapcandra Mahanta; ed., *Borgeet*; Studets' Stores, Guwahati; 1992.

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Q&A

Q: What is NAAM?

A: Naamghar Association of America, Inc. (NAAM) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit spiritual and cultural organization formed to construct and manage a Naamghar for the Assamese diaspora to celebrate and perform the spiritual traditions and philosophical teachings of Srimanta Sankardeva. With strong ties with all the Satras of Assam, NAAM seek to provide a forum for learned spiritual leaders and traditional artistes to share their knowledge and talent with the current and future generations of the Assamese diaspora.

Q: What are the immediate goals of NAAM?

A: Some of the immediate goals of NAAM include spreading awareness on NAAM initiatives, build a digital media platform, plan for fund raising, and participate regularly in Naam-proxongo. NAAM seeks volunteers from the large Assamese diaspora across the United States to achieve these goals. Please join us (details at the bottom of this newsletter). In our planning activity, the first

priority is to identify what is needed to establish a temporary *Naamghar*. This will make the *Guru Axon*, consecrated by the Sri Sri Auniati Satra Satradhikar, more easily accessible to the public, while we work on the longer-term project of building a permanent *Naamghar*.

Q: Does NAAM collaborate with other organizations?

A: NAAM is actively seeking to collaborate with all community organizations which are willing to help achieve NAAM's mission. NAAM plans to have meaningful discussion with all organizations in our community; please contact us if you would like to be a part of this conversation (contact details at the bottom).



HOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH NAAM?

JOIN THE NAAM WORKING GROUP (WG): We need your help in achieving the dream of building a Naamghar in North America. Therefore, NAAM is open to everyone who is interested in building the Naamghar.

If you are interested in getting involved actively in NAAM's mission, please join the NAAM by sending an email to: <u>Naaminfo@Naamghar.org</u>. The WG meets regularly via teleconference/video conference to discuss various issues that are related to NAAM and its mission and goals.



NAAM WORKING GROUP TEAM MEMBERS

Following individuals comprise the current NAAM working group (WG) team. We invite all individuals who are sincerely interested in the Mission and Goals of NAAM to join the NAAM team. The current WG members are:

- Iswar Agarwalla, NC
- Tutumoni Baishya, Assam
- Niraj Barbara, PA
- Dr. Sanjib Bhuyan, NJ
- Pranab Bora, WI
- Lolit Bora, PA
- Subhasini Bora, NC
- Dr. Babul Borah, OH
- Utpal Borah, VA
- Dr. Binoy Bordoloi, NJ (Bor-medhi)
- Manoranjan Bordoloi, NJ
- Monidipa Bordoloi, CA
- Susanto Bordoloi, CT
- Chirayu Kr. Borooah, CA
- Malabika Brahma, NJ
- Debojit Chowdhury, CA

- · Niren Choudhury, NJ
- Dr. Bikul Das, MA
- Namita Das, VA
- Dr. Pradip Das, MO
- Rupam Das, Assam
- Shyam DevChoudhury, PA (Secretary)
- Dr. Saswati Datta, OH
- Hemanga Dutta, NJ
- Panchali Dutta, NJ
- Sawmick Dutta, CA
- Prandeep Gogoi, NJ
- Ajoy Hazarika, NY
- Kamalakshi Hazarika, NJ
- Suranjoy Hazarika, NJ
- Priyadarshini Inman, NC
- Dr. Jukti Kalita, NJ

- Lalita Kalita, IL
- Rashmi Kalita, CA
- Sangaurav Kaushik, NC
- Nilanjona Mahanta, CA
- Nabanita Mazumdar, WA
- Chayanika Mohan, NC
- Rachna Nath, AZ
- Shakhyar Neog, NJ
- Dr. Yashwant Pathak, FL
- Lelkhika Pathak, Assam
- Anu Perlmutter, VA
- Nilakshi Phukan, NC
- Gayatree Prasad, CA
- Dr. Purandar Sarmah, NJ (Treasurer)
- Vavani Sarmah, CA

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