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Hiya Nam, a unique Sattriya Cultural Art Form-with special reference to Brahmacharin Satra, Samaguri, Nagaon, Assam

Urmi Priti Mahanta

Faculty, Kathiatoli H. S. School, Nagaon, Assam, India

Abstract

In the process and development of the Sattriya culture many segments of religio-cultural units have entered into the main stream culture and some have become extinct. One such Sattriya cultural art form- Hiya Nam has become an important part of Sri Sri Brahmacharin Satra of Samaguri, Nagaon and has become a part of occasional practice of the Satra's own ceremonial performance. The researcher here attempted to bring into light this particular art form which has been of great significance in the Sattriya culture and an important part of the Brahmacharin Satra. This art form is found to be in existence in many other Satras of Assam but the present study aims at to investigate as to how this pattern of Nam Prasanga has come to this Brahmacharin Satra of Samaguri its historical background and how it has developed throughout time.

Key Words: Sattriya, Naam, Hiya Naam, Bhrahmachari Satra, Sankardeva.

1. Introduction: Recitation of *Nam*, a choral singing performance sometimes called *Nam Prasanga* or *Nam Kirtan* has definite scheme. This form of *Nam Kirtan* as prevailed in the Vaisnavite- post Sankardeva society; Satra in particular, is the traditional scheme that has been systematically framed after the first generation of the Vaisnavite activities in the sixteenth century AD. Of the nine modes of meditation *Nam Kirtana* is considered as the prime mode. The devotees automatically dedicates himself in the service of God in terms of '*atmanivedan*' as he engages his body and mind in the recitation of God; '*Shravana*' - deep hearing itself is a mode of meditation (Bhakti) and it is fulfilled as he hears the uttering of 'Krishna' by his associates; '*Smaran*' - remembering; '*Bandan*' - praising, are integral part of *Nam Kirtana*. *Dasya*, *Sakhitya* are the results of self-realization and *Nam Kirtana* leads to the state of self-estimation. There are five types of Kirtana according to the manner of presentation:

1. Exclusively from within, soundlessly remembering the Lord is ***Manas Kirtan***.
2. In solitarily and secretly away from human habitation in form of meditation is ***Biral Kirtana***.
3. ***Nibir Kirtana*** is recitation without much musical aids, gestures, sounds, intonation; expressions are associated in this form.
4. In ***Bir Kirtana***, instruments like pairs of cymbals, *Daba* (big drum) *Nagara* (a pair of small drums) are played. There is repetition of sequences in choral singing of *Nam Ghosa* and than *Kirtana Ghosha* to the extent that in association with the musical instruments maintaining the proper *taal* (rhythm). The singers gradually sink into an enchanting charm.

5. The fifth form of *Kirtana* is **Upanga Kirtana**, *Upanga* are the extraordinary parts of our body- in terms of dance it refers to the head, the neck and the eyes. In this form of *Kirtana* the performers go on dancing along with musical concerts and choral singing.

Hiya Nam is a form of choral singing in *Upanga Kirtana*, where a group of *Bhakats* chant prayers or the *Gunamahima* of Krishna with frequent rhythmic movements to the clapping of the hands and cymbals.

2. Methodology: The methodologies which are followed as per the need of the study are- Interview Method and Participant-Observation and Non-Participant Observation. The exponents, persons closely associated with the art form and also other dignitaries of the Satra were interviewed. The researcher observed as well as participated in the *Nam Kirtana* and attended the function. It helped to strictly scrutinize and categorize this art form.

3. Sri Sri Brahmacharin Satra: The traditional institution established by Sankardeva and his associates for stabilizing and spreading the new cult of Vaishnavism is the Satra institution. The Brahmacharin Satra is situated in the district of Nagaon between Puronigodam and Samaguri about 16 kilometers from Nagaon, the Satra lies about a kilometer on the north of the National Highway 37. The Kalong Suti (branch stream of the Brahmaputra) has almost been close to the National Highway 37 from Nagaon to Jakhlabandha. But in this particular spot the rivulet has taken an unexpected turn leaving a vast *saar* of around thousand *bighas* of land before she once again takes a close turn to the N.H at Beloguri mouza. Anybody visiting would thoroughly convince with the running myth of the '*devdatta*' land which has later been bestowed to the Satra by the Ahom king. There is a Siva Mandir near the Satra Namghar which has a glorious past of its own and which still stands erect reminding of the indomitable faith of its devotees.

3.1 Its historical background: Vasudeva was one of the Brahman disciples of Sankardeva's grandson Purushottam Thakur (1561-1619). He set up the Chatamiyal Satra. Vasudeva's grandson Viswambhar Brahmacharin later shifted to the present location. He being a Brahmacharin (unmarried and unattached to the family) the Satra later came to be known as Brahmacharin Satra and the village came to be known as Brahmacharin Gaon (village). Chatamiya or Chatamiyal Satra has been established as per the directive of the Purushottam and thereby it falls on the line of 'Purush Samhati' (derives its name from the elder grandson of Sankardeva, Purushottam Thakur (the followers of Purush Samhati give primacy to the '*Guru*'). Chamaliya Vasudev' as he was known, initially established his Satra at Majuli, who later shifted to Nagsankar of Jamaguri-Sonitpur and for various natural calamities he finally shifted his establishment to Nagaon.

As in the record of *Prachya- Sasanvali* (pp-180, Edit by Dr Maheswar Neog) "Viswambhar Brahmacharin the grandson of Vasudeva- who came to the Ahom capital at Rangpur and stayed on the bank of the Jaysagar tank and about 1783, got himself involved in an intrigue against the king Gaurishma. He was arrested punished and sent to his house in Nagaon. (Tunkhungiya Buranji Art-179). The Tamrapatra (copper plaque) of Brahmacharin Satra is the inscription of the land and savior grant to the Kalangpar Brahmacharin Satra, Samaguri, Nagaon, Assam, 1722 saka/1800 AD.

The text of *Prachya-Sasanavali* (pp.180-181) says that "Vasudeva was removed to the place called Cheuni, as many as 60 of the *Bhakats* (monks) were forced to take the duties of Pikes or Kadis. Lakshmisimha placed the matter for disposal with the chief of the judiciary Shiva Ram Borborua of the Ada Borsya Sandikai family, and (Kareru) Kalita Phukan. The officers after proper examination of the whole business ordered the cancellation of records in regards to 10 Gots of Paiks in Nagaon, and gave these men as *Bhakats* and same land to Viswambhara.

Viswambhara appealed to the Prime Minister Purnananda Buragohain so as to record the gifts in a Tamrapatra. Accordingly on the recommendation of the Burhagohain, the King sent Dhanborbora for an enquiry. Evidences in writing were taken from the people and based on Bora's report; the Prime Minister issued Tamrapatra unit bestowing on Viswambhar Brahmacharin 91/2 Gots of Paiks and 124 Puras pf paddy growing land and 16 Puras of homestead land . The gift was to be continued as *Brahmatra*.

4. Hiya Nam: The particular form of choral singing in *Upanga Kirtan* form as prevails in the Brahmacharin Satra of Samaguri is **Hiya Nam**. Some people belonging to the Satra intend to call it **Hira Nam**. One of the exponents of the form of Kirtana-the present Sattradhikar, Sri Dharma Kanta Devgoswami, as well as Sri Prasanna Goswami, Sattradhikar of Telia Pahukata Satra is of the opinion that the name of the form of the Kirtana is Hiya Nam. The players often in gesture close the cymbals to their chest indicating their emotional outburst and the chest is the hiya-the core of the human body and the Kirtana is Hiya Nam. Sri Girish Chandra Saikia- a close associate of the Satra-who has long been studying on the customs and tradiotions of the satra however says that the form of the Kirtana is most precious as the diamond(hira) and the name of the Nam could have been Hira Nam.

According to Dr. Pitambar Dev Goswami, Sattradhikar of Aunati Satra, Hiya Nam or Hira Nam are the names of the same Sattriya art form the names are used differently. While in Auniati Satra, it is known as Hiya Nam, *hiya* –expressing ecstasy and full of aesthetic pleasure, in Satras like Dhakinpat, Garmur, Kuruwabahi and many other Satras it is known as Hira Nam, *hira* –diamond which is extremely valuable and the Nam is also valuable as jewel.

4.1 Historical Aspect: The traditional form of Hiya Nam has been continued since the foundation of this Satra by Sri Sri Vasudeva. According to some sources Vasudeva, a disciple of Purushottam had made an extensive pilgrimage at the Vaisnavite institution of North and Central India and he was expected to learn the form of Kirtana from Jagannath Dham. The idols of Jagannath and Vasudeva which this person had brought with him and established on the Simhasana after establishment of the original Satra gave significant evidence to this fact.

4.2 Occasion of performance: Hiya Nam is a form of choral singing on special occasion in the Brahmacharin Satra. The Brahmacharin Satra has its branch Satras at Tezpur, Da-Parbatia and Bam-Parbatia, but as informed by the exponents of the Satra this Nam is not practiced in those Satras. There are three occasions when this particular Nam is practiced:

- In the month of *Jeth* –the second month in the Assamese calendar, the Brahmacharin Satra observes the death ceremony of Viswambhar Deva Brahmacharin . There is a two day long function of *Namkirtana*. Hiya nam is the main attraction of this function.
- The second occasion is the month long *Bhadra*. The month of *Bhadra* is observed by the Assamese as the most sacred month. Here in the Brahmacharin Satra, the Bhakats meet at the Satra Namghar in the evening hours after dusk. They then practice the Hiya Nam for about two hours, with the usual procedure and finishes with the share of the offering-*Prasada*. This continues from *Sankranti* of *Shrawana* till *Bahdra Sankranti*. In between there are some special functions too.
- Sri Krishna Janmastami is one of such occasion when the Hiya Nam goes for hours together followed by Nam Prasanga. Next day is observed as Nandautsav with colourfull function. There is mud theatre- *Buka Bhaona* signifying the observance of happiness and children

play in the mud in Braja-where the newborn Krishna was sheltered at the house of Nanda and Jashuda.

4.3 Content of Hiya Nam: The *jura*(group) consists of expert man, pairs of cymbal in everybody's hand first lay before the Simhasana in kneeling postures and then the chief exponent begins with the stanzas of Nam Ghosha (special prayers by Madhabdeva). They sing four sets of **Ghosas** (refrains) in repetition playing the cymbals first in slow process and then in the fast movement pacing forward and rearward along with the chief. After then they perform Lilamala, a special chapter in the Kirtana by Sankardeva wherein the mysterious quality of Krishna Nam is elaborately described.

Next they play upon the songs of **Lila Kirtana** by Sankardeva, *Lila kirtana* wherein the activities of Krishna in his incarnation as human being are elaborately picturised. As is understood only certain specific parts of the Kirtana are the favoured Kirtana in Hiya Nam. They usually sing *Simanta Haran, Sisu Lila, Kansa Badh, Kalia Daman, Raslila* etc. which are evidently good for abhinay(dramatic expression) by the movements of the Upangas-head, neck eyes, eyebrows etc. There are enough scopes to express- *Bibhatsa, Veera, Hasya. Karuna* etc Rasa's and these are sufficiently the central theme of the Lila Kirtanas in the Hiya Nam. The players circulate round in formation while singing choral holy songs.

Next they sing **Gunmala**- the shortest expression the abstract nature of Bhakti-Tattva and the Hiya Nam is concluded by one chapter of the **Dasma-path**.

There are two chapters of Ghosa sung while practicing *Prasanga Kirtana*. They are:

1. *Ghosa Chanda*
2. *Nam chanda*

In the usual practice Nam Chanda is sung in the day Prasang while Ghosa Chanda is sung in the night Prasangas. These Ghosas are the parts of Nam Ghosha written by Madhabdeva, in Hiya Nam also the exponents play four padas of Ghosa such as:

Dina Bandhu Ram Daya Sila Deva I
Dua Pada Kamala Sadaie Karu Seva II
Mura Prabhu Ram Karuna Sagar I
Ami Dukhitaka Nasariba Damodar II
Madhuripu Ram Kamala Lochan I
Tuwa Guna Nam Bhaba Bhoi Bimuchan II
Bondhu Madhava Madhu Ripu Ram I
Tuwa Pada Kamala Jugal Hari Ye II

Sri Krishna Lila consists of seven no of Padas, each written in 14 letters metrics in rhetorical form, they are also sung in usual Nam Kirtana. This in fact is the shortest and precise description of Sri Krishna Lila the elaborate form being the Dasam Skandha Bhagavata of three chapters. The Lilamala starts with the Ghosha:

Bandhu Madhava
Tuwa Bina Asa Ara Taraka
Bandhu Madhava Hai II

Gunamala is the essence of Bhagavata in the shortest form and written in the lyrical form. This is written by Sankardeva wherein the scholastic capability of writing a precise of Dwadah Skandha (12 chapters or divisions) of Sri Sri Bhagavata. The story runs that the Koch King Narayana asked his

learned men to put an elephant in a small lime pot (bhuruka). Sankardeva wrote the Gunamala in the night and brought it in lime pot and got recognition from the king. Gunamala starts with a Ghosha:

Ram Niranjana I

Pataka Bhanjana II

Followed by some rhythmic pada:

Namu Narayan

Sansara Karana I

Bhakata Tarana

Tumara Sarana II

Tumi Niranjana

Pataka Bhanjana I

Danawa Ganjana

Gopika Ranjana II

4.4 Hiya Nam as Performance: *Abhinaya* is four fold: *Angika*, *Vacika*, *Aharya* and *Satvika*. *Angika* relates to the movements of the major limbs (*Angas*) minor limbs (*Upangas*), their use (*Viniyoga*), for the expression of sentiment (*Rasa*) and of dominant moods (*sthaiya bhava*) and transitory moods (*sancari bhava*). *Vacika* relates to speech, i.e the prose and verse part of the play, words of songs etc. *Aharya* is related to costumes, make up etc. *Satvika* relates to the natural condition of man. The different movements of the hands which are known as *hastya*, *hastakarma* or *mudra* are used in different religious functions as a means of expressing devotion towards God.

Abhinaya which is a part of Hiya Nam consists of the movements of both hands and foot. Knowingly or unknowingly these foot movements (*padasanchalana*) have become the part of Hiya Nam. The chief exponent of Hiya Nam is generally called *Barnamloguwa*. He along with his associates, with some sort of yogic practice invites Nam from *Baikuntha* to the sacred space (*Namortholi*) inside the Namghar, where it is actually practiced. The chief exponent first evokes a silent prayer then with movements forward and backward and going round the center place makes the posture of moving round what is called *Pradakhin*. This is to signify the poses of holy birds flying with wings flapping and they now sing and dance playing upon the cymbals in combination. The *Bhakats* believe that the Nam has landed to the Namghar premises from *Baikuntha* in this manner. The Vaisnavas who come from all round in good number with cymbals in hand began the *Parikrama*. In Brahmacharin Satra, the Sattaradhikar is the chief exponent and he along with other Satriyas takes active part in Hiya Nam.

4.5. Difference between the usual Nam Prasanga and Hiya Nam:

General Nam Prasanga in Satriya institutions especially in Purush Samhati intuitions can be classified into two types:

1. *Na* (nine) *Prasanga* and
2. *Choudhya* (fourteen) *Prasanga*.

The first type consists of various steps like remembrance of *Adi Guru*, *Raga* followed by *Borgeet*, memorizing *chaubish* (24) *Tattva*, Nam Ghosha followed by *Na* (Neo) Ghosha, *Kirtana* followed by *Dulari Ghosha*, *Jai* and *Path*. This is a usual practice in the Satra at four times in a day-morning (*pratah*), noon (*derpar*), afternoon (*biyala*) and evening (*sandhaya*). The evening i.e *Sandhya Kirtana* has some additional inclusion like *Gunamala*, *Bhatima*, *Sapoi*, *Tutoi* and *Lilamala* with inclusion of this five makes the entire *Kirtana* a combination of fourteen (14) steps which is called *Choudhya Prasanga*.

Some of the exponents of the Satriya institute are of the opinion that these fourteen (14) *Kirtanas* are nothing but the combination of all the steps of the four periodical *Kirtana* during the day. For them the morning *Kirtana* has three steps only they are *Borgeet*, *Ghosa* and *Kirtana*. The other parts

like *Raga*, *Na Ghosa*, *Dulari Ghosa*, *Jai* etc are parts of these steps. The *Nam Kirtana* in the noon session have four steps where in addition to the three steps of the morning *Kirtana*, there is another step called *Path*. The afternoon *Prasanga* (*biyala*) also has the same three steps of the morning and the *Path* is not a part of the *Biyala Kirtana*. The evening (sandhaya) *Kirtana* again has the same four steps of the noon *Kirtana* i.e 3+4+3+4 total 14 (*choudhya*) and the exponents are of the belief that 14 *Kirtana* is the sum total of the periodical steps. Actually the first division of the *Kirtana* is well accepted in general.

The *Hiya Nam* procedure is no way related to the general pattern of the *Nam Prasanga*. *Hiya Nam* is not a regular *Nam Prasanga* but it is only occasionally practiced and its steps are no way similar to those of regular *Nam Prasanga*. *Hiya Nam* is sung occasionally in the evening (sandhaya) and not in the other hours of the day. And the *Nam* starts with singing of the four sets of *Ghosas* followed by *Lilamala*, *Lila Kirtana*, *Gunamala* and the whole process is concluded by *Dasampath*. In addition to this the sitting arrangement of the regular *Nam Prasanga* has some specific order. The *Bhakats* (devotees) sit in a semi-circle with the exponent sitting in the middle. The opening of the half circle is towards the *Thapana* (sanctum sanctorium). The *Pathak* who recites the scripture sit at the edge of the half circle on the right side. But the sitting arrangement in *Hiya Nam* is different from the usual *Nam Prasanga*. *Bhakats* sit in a vertical manner in two groups facing each other. The *Pathak* sits at edge near the *Simhasana*. While in general *Nam Prasanga* it is seen that the chief alone with the two *Duhars* have cymbals in their hands in *Hiya Nam* most of the *Bhakats* have cymbals (*bartals*) and they go around in cyclic order with regular clapping of hands and cymbals.

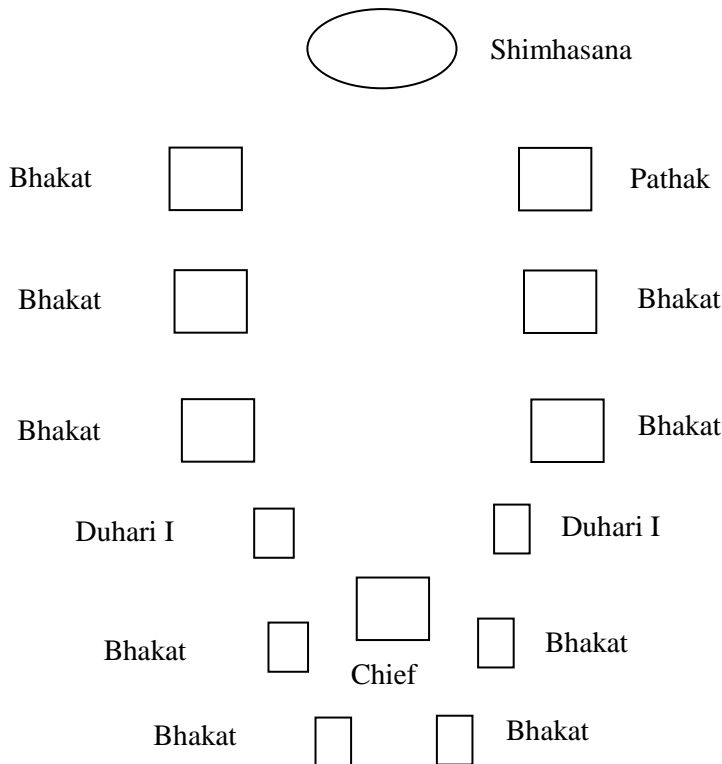


Figure 1. Sitting Arrangement of usual Naam Prasanga

the *Simhasana* upon the banana leaves and the offerings- a mixture of cereal like mogu, boot, raw rice, fruits such as coconut, chipped ginger and salt are some of the important ingredients. There are at least of nine types of fruits known as *Naibedy* which are arranged in a *Sarai* in a circular manner upon a banana leaf that too in circular manner. The *Prasad* is considered to be very sacred.

5. Conclusion: Hiya nam is part and parcel of the Satriya functions particularly of Brahmacharin Satra. It has its own significance and importance. As a form of kirtana, it definitely falls in one of the nine ways of bhakti but unlike the usual Nam Kirtana, this dance and art form cannot be generalized. Hiya nam is simple and straight forward. This study has found the Hiya Nam has some similarity with the *Bairagi* nam, in the sense that as informed by the exponents Vasudeva, the founder of the Satra made a extensive pilgrimage to the north and central India and learned this form of Kirtana from Jagannath dham. Similarly, *Bairagi* nam which is an important part of the Auniati satra, the Vaishnavite of the Satra have acquired this *Bairagi* Nam when they went through the parts of the Brindaban, Gaya, Prayag etc. The Bhakats disguised themselves as *Bairagis* and went to these sacred places for immersing the mortal remains of their deceased Satradhikars. The Bairagi Vaishnavas after while returning from Brindaban, Mathura, recited the Lilakirtanas which were sung there and those Kirtans later gave shape to Biragi Nam. The similarity of both Hiya nam and Bairagi nam lies in their orgin. This study gave the researchers a chance to know this particular art form which has been out of focus in the cultural folk art panorama of the North East. To prevent this art form from extinction, proper measure should be taken up. This solely depends on the initiative of the people and the conscious response of the government.

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