

Aesthetic Beauty of the Keli Gopal Natak: A Study

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to investigate the aesthetic aspects of one among six famous Ankiya Nats (dramas) by Srimanta Sankardeva of the neo-Vaishnavite movement in mediaeval Assam. The author of the book is investigating how Sankardeva blended Indian classical aesthetic knowledge with indigenous Assamese folk modes to generate a distinct style of theatre which can be both devotional and artistic. The main focus of this paper is to study the aesthetic beauty depicted through Rasa Bhava, literary artistry, musical composer and choreographic aspects in Keli Gopal. Applying the descriptive-analytical method of research, text content analysis, observation of performance and comparative study with Sanskrit dramatic principles enumerated in the Natyashastra form to be conducted. The assumption made was, that Keli Gopal symbolizes an unique aesthetic tradition where Bhakti Rasa transcends the Sringara rasa of usual presentation and still bears a competent theatric paradigm. Findings indicate the play involves in various aesthetic layers such as Sattvik Bhava, devotional music like Bhatima and Borgeet, beautiful Brajavali language form and stylized Sattriya dance movements. Discussion The article claims that where Keli Gopal is not just a source of enjoyment, but becomes yoga and delivers the worshiper to transcendental experience; Rasa-nispatti theory of aesthetics is manifested in the ethos of bhakti Islam our talking point. The research paper finally concludes that Keli Gopal has withstood the test of time because it is a perfect blend of religious preaching and pre-Renaissance psychology in art, therefore it deserves to be characterized as the masterpiece of Assamese cultural tradition.

Keywords: Keli Gopal, Ankiya Nat, Aesthetic Beauty, Rasa Theory, Sankardeva

1. INTRODUCTION

Personality of the Samkhya in terms of human activity is also depicted saw glowingly in Assam's Ankiya Nat devised by Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva during the 15th and 16th centuries. Of the six Ankiya Nats of Sankardeva, Keli Gopal is by far the most popular and highly aesthetically enriched theatrical composition. The divine drama describes magical games played by Lord Krishna with the inhabitants of Vrindavan. Keli Gopal means "Krishna's play" and the drama is a poetic interpolation of Radha and Krishna's Raas leela which turns it into an elaborate aesthetic whole, joining poetry, music, dance and devotion. Sankardeva's dramatic art developed during a period of great change, and his innovations helped consolidate the theatre tradition going back more than 2500 years. His Neo-Vaishnavite movement attempted to democratize religion by allowing common people to read and know spiritual values in their native language with the help of performing art. It wisings, however, entertainment but underscores a high level of aesthetic standards and recommendations. Using the Natyashastra of Bharata Muni and the folk performance traditions of Ojapali, Deodhani and Putala Nach as a touchstone, it invents for itself a new language that combines elements rooted in classical Sanskrit drama with an idiomatic expression which seeks to evoke both devotional and aesthetic aspirations.

The beautiful appearance of Keli Gopal spreads through many channels. The linguistic quality of Brajavali language, created by Sankardeva within Assamese with elements from Maithili and Brajbhasha is of a high order of merit lending itself to verses at once elevated in tone yet capable of easy comprehension by the common man. The musical compositions, which are mostly devotional songs sung for praise and worship of the deity Bhatima use classical ragas and talas to express feelings according to the Rasa theory. The choreography includes Sattriya dance with graceful benak (neck) movements and symbolic hasta mudra (hand posture) as well as Ganeśan, or facial expressions used to give nuance of meaning within a narrative context. While the historical and religious existence of Ankiya Nat has been fairly well documented in modern studies on Assamese theatre, intricate aesthetic analysis of plays in isolation from each other is still at a premium. The present research seeks to do just that by offering an extended analysis of Keli Gopal's aesthetic constituents, examining the manner in which Indian traditional concepts of aesthetics function within this particular mode of theatrical performance whilst demonstrating its ongoing relevance for Assamese cultural life. An understanding of the aesthetic aspects of Keli Gopal opens a new vista to dive into the artistry of Sankardev and an evolved theatre tradition prevalent in medieval Assam.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic literature on Ankiya Nat and Keli Gopal has greatly developed over the past century, and early work by Assamese scholars helped to provide a framework for understanding this form of theater. Neog's classic book "Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Assam: Sankaradeva and His Times" offers considerable historical background reading for understanding the development of Ankiya Nat within the Neo-Vaishnavite movement (Neog, 1988). His study also shows that Sankaradeva's plays were not merely extra-religious artistic extensions but integral to his process of religious reformation. Neog goes on to discuss performance aesthetics in Bhaona: The Ritual Play of Assam, investigating how the imagistic presentational form of theatre turns religious narrative into lived spiritual experience through aesthetic engagement (Neog 2008). Barua's (2011) 'A Cultural History of Assam' locates Ankiya Nat in the context of wider developments in Assamese culture, as a major phase in the literary and artistic life of Assamese civilization. The amalgamation resulted in a unique aesthetic expressions, which set Assamese theatre apart from the other regional theatre traditions. Deva Goswami discusses structural and sematic aspect of Ankiya Bhaona looking at Sutradhar as a linking dramaturgical construct which helps in keeping the audience involved by connecting the various sequences (Deva Goswami, 2001).

Investigations of the use of Rasa theory in Ankiya Nat also expose intriguing departures from what one might expect according to ancient Sanskrit dramatic principles. Sarma's study of Assamese drama as well identifies Bhakti Rasa as an important aesthetic category figured in the scholarship on the Ankiya Nat in addition to the traditional eight or nine Rasas listed in the *Natyashastra* (Sarma 1996). This innovation is indicative of Sankardeva's theological concerns, as well as artistic adaptations. Richmond's research on Asian performance traditions has included his comparative examination of the Ankiya Nat with other forms of devotional performances in India, and their implicit similarities to Ramlila and Raslila as well as significant Assamese characteristics (Richmond, Swann & Zarrilli 1990). 1955 issues of Keli Gopal have been the subject of academic attention in language and linguistic aesthetics. Though manufactured, Brajavali attains to poetic diction in its

choice of euphonious words and metrical forms. This dimension of Brajavali as a sacred, bridging vernacular accessibility and classical refinement has been examined in Mahantafs research (Mahanta, 2001). Musical dimensions of Ankiya Nats, especially the Borgeet and Bhatima have been studied by scholars in relation to their relationships with devotional music and Assamese classical musical traditions. When classical ragas are embedded in devotional setting its engaging aesthetic facets help meet the religious and artistic ends.

Additional scholarship has been devoted to performance and the meaning of these texts to modern culture. Dutta and Sarma describe the Baresahariya Bhaona community-festivals, which evidence the continuing vibrancy of Ankiya Nat in rural Assamese culture (Dutta & Sarma, 2009). Bhuyan studies the Ankiya Nat as an alternative media, discovering how these traditional performances form communication mode in modern time (Bhuyan 2018). Masks/Costumes/Theatrical Design Studies of masks, costumes and theatre design demonstrate an advanced understanding of visual aesthetics in the Ankiya Nat. But proper aesthetic analysis on Keli Gopal as an art form is seldom found yet, to understand its theatrical excellence more academic research is needed.

3. OBJECTIVES

The present study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

1. To analyze the application of Rasa theory and Bhava expressions in Keli Gopal Natak and identify the dominant aesthetic emotions presented through dramatic action and performance.
2. To examine the linguistic and poetic aesthetics of Brajavali language employed in Keli Gopal, evaluating its contribution to the overall aesthetic experience.
3. To investigate the integration of musical and choreographic elements including Bhatima songs, Borgeet compositions, and Sattriya dance movements in creating aesthetic beauty.
4. To assess the contemporary relevance and cultural significance of Keli Gopal's aesthetic traditions in preserving Assamese theatrical heritage.

4. METHODOLOGY

The method used by this study is descriptive-analytical using qualitative content analysis, performance observation and comparative theoretical approaches. The research design is based on an interpretive paradigm as suitable for aesthetic performing arts research. The first textual sample is the adaptation of Bhavacari simha's Banga kavisvara Krsna parijata in Brajavali by Sankaradeva, supplemented by modern performances were videotaped at live presentations covering bhaona productions. Data collection involves several sources from archival manuscripts to published editions of the play text, from video recordings of Bhaona performances in different Sattras (and also those available with other cultural organizations in Assam) to scholarly commentaries on the aesthetics of Ankiya Nats. These research tools are derived from, on the one hand, textual analysis frameworks drawn from Indian aesthetic theory with a special focus on concepts of Rasa-Bhava relationship(s) as enunciated in Natyashastra and ethnographic observation protocols for live performance elements. The analysis method requires a systematic coding of aesthetics elements in dramatic text and performance practice, accounting for the various components according to transcultural aesthetic principles, but also be sensitive to Ankiya Nat's special features. Comparison of SNA's Pan and the Sanskrit Dill conventions serves both as a theoretical base and as an empirical source for understanding some of the innovations which make the form distinctive in

Sankardeva's theatre. Performance observation looks at aesthetic matters, such as gesture repertory, interpretation of music, costume and mask design, the organization of place/spacing on stage and patterns for holding audiences. Textual analyses and performative analysis are synthesised to provide full understanding of the aesthetic dimensions with recognition that text is performance and performance is necessarily text in traditional Indian theatre practice.

5. RESULTS

Table 1: Classification of Aesthetic Elements in Keli Gopal Natak

Aesthetic Element	Manifestation	Theatrical Function	Cultural Significance
Rasa (Sentiment)	Shringara, Bhakti, Adbhuta, Hasya	Emotional evocation	Devotional transformation
Bhava (Emotion)	Sattvik, Sthayi, Sanchari	Character expression	Spiritual awakening
Nritya (Dance)	Sattriya movements, Chali patterns	Visual narration	Heritage preservation
Sangeet (Music)	Bhatima, Borgeet, Ragas	Aural aesthetics	Sacred soundscape
Abhinaya (Acting)	Natyadharmi style, Mukha expressions	Dramatic communication	Traditional continuity

Source: Analysis based on Neog (2008) and Deva Goswami (2001)

The typology identifies five central aesthetic modes evident in Keli Gopal, each serving several theatre and cultural roles. Rasa expression/ manifestation is mainly of Shringara (love in its romantic or devotional aspects) and Bhakti (devotion), with auxiliary appearances of Adbhuta (supernatural wonder) and Hasya(humor). Bhava expression includes three categories as prescribed in Natyashastra, that of Sattvik Bhava (or the involuntary psychological states), which are not just imitation for the theater. The components of Nritya make use of the exclusive dance jargon of Sattriya created in Sattra monasteries, and typically include twenty-four Chali patterns typical for a story narration through encoded gesture conventions. The elements of Sangeet adopt the traditional ragas to associate them systematically with particular times and emotional states to evolve an architectural style of music. The Abhinaya style conforms to Natyadharmi in being stylised and not naturalistic, but much development has gone into facial expressions which are more visible even to an audience at a distance. 'Sankaradewa's synthesis of aesthetic pleasure and devotional purpose enables both aandolian and gamus to serve its dainty aspiration, with each providing at the same time an outreach towards one.

Table 2: Rasa and Bhava Dynamics in Keli Gopal Performance

Rasa Type	Associated Bhava	Dramatic Scenes	Performance Intensity (%)	Audience Response
Shringara	Rati (Love)	Krishna-Gopi interaction	45%	Emotional engagement
Bhakti	Bhakti (Devotion)	Prayer sequences	35%	Spiritual elevation

Adbhuta	Vismaya (Wonder)	Divine manifestations	12%	Awe and reverence
Hasya	Hasa (Laughter)	Vidushaka episodes	8%	Joyful participation

Source: *Performance analysis synthesis from Sarma (1996) and Mahanta (2001)*

Analysis of the distribution of Rasa (emotions) in Bharata Muni's Natya shastra: Shringara rasa dominate at performance intensity 45% because the main deity Krishna is treated through devotional, nayak Nayikabhav and not as worldly romantic. There is 35% Bhakti Rasa in the aesthetic experience and it's intensification occurs in the sequences of prayers including moments of divine recognition, transcending above narrative flight. This large presence of Bhakti sets Ankiya Nat apart from its counter part i.e. classical Sanskrit drama where (until Modern times) in which Bhakti was not established as an independent Rasa. Adbhuta Rasa is felt upto 12% during the performance of miraculous acts by Krishna and his divine manifestations, giving rise to feelings of awe or wonder as well as supporting theological themes. Hasya Rasa (8%) is not big for laughs, but is necessary to inject humour with witty lines and situational comedy that makes a performance entertaining for long duration. The related Bhavas are pure psychic states and through these psychic conditions, certain Rasas can be evoked in the audience of Art. Trends in audience response suggest that successful Rasa-nispatti (aesthetic realization) by way of which aesthetic emersion is succeeded by spiritual ascension foregrounds the play's efficiency as art and but also a devotional vessel.

Table 3: Linguistic and Poetic Features of Brajavali in Keli Gopal

Linguistic Feature	Example Components	Aesthetic Function	Accessibility Level	Preservation Status
Vocabulary	Maithili-Assamese blend	Poetic elevation	Moderate comprehension	Well-preserved
Meter	Pada, Dhruvapada	Rhythmic beauty	Universal appeal	Active tradition
Imagery	Nature metaphors	Emotional resonance	Culturally rooted	Living practice
Sound patterns	Alliteration, Assonance	Aural aesthetics	Immediate impact	Continuing
Devotional language	Krishna epithets	Sacred atmosphere	Deep meaning	Strong continuity

Source: *Linguistic analysis based on Mahanta (2001) and Sarma (1996)*

The linguistic constitution of Brajavali achieves an optimal balance with its poetic sophistication and audience appeal. The vocabulary is roughly 60% Maithili words, 25% native to Assamese and rest (15%) is from Braj Bhasha and Sanskrit as a literary language for Eastern Indian disciples while remaining sacred literature differing from mainstream languages yet intelligible on some level. Metrical pattern Metres use the dasa metre, pada (foot) structure and eight to fourteen syllables per line, which are suitable for a memorable rhythmically recited song form with shoulder actions. In group performances such as kolaattam, wherein every group has its own song sung by it. Imagery relies most often on metaphors of nature in the Vrindavan countryside lotuses, moonlight, flowing rivers evoking emotional response by way of common aesthetic language, while indicating transcendent spiritual truths. Its sound patterns consist of abundant alliteration and assonance creating euphony, which heightened when

the liturgical songs are sung with music proving Sankardeva's inclination toward auditory beauty. The devotional language is rich in epithets for Krishna and the Gopis, each of which possess theological depth, as well as adding poetic color. Reading ease for modern and culturally relevant Assamese audiences is moderate while “Perfect understanding” requires a little linguistic orientation. Preservation status is strong through relentless performance tradition and scholarly documentation.

Table 4: Musical Components and Their Aesthetic Contributions

Musical Element	Raga Association	Emotional Effect	Performance Context	Duration (minutes)
Bhatima songs	Bhairavi, Dhanasri	Devotional intensity	Opening prayers	8-12
Borgeet compositions	Kalyan, Kamoda	Ecstatic devotion	Key dramatic moments	5-8 per song
Instrumental music	Khol, Taal, Doba	Rhythmic foundation	Throughout performance	Continuous
Dhemali preliminaries	Various traditional	Atmospheric creation	Pre-performance ritual	15-25
Character songs	Context-specific ragas	Emotional expression	Character entry/exit	3-6 per song

Source: Performance timing analysis from Neog (2008) and field observations

Musical architecture in Keli Gopal performances The organization of musical elements in Keli Gopal performance displays a highly developed sense of an aesthetic and devotional role for music. Bhatima songs, located at the opening of a performance, use ragas such as Bhairavi and Dhanasri more typically employed in devotional environments to create an environment that is sacred suharna on the audience for 8-12 minutes aesthetic-spiritual experience. The borgeet are also the best known of Sankardeva's compositions, which use ragas like Kalyan and Kamoda to place the singer in a state of devotional ecstasy. Every Borgeet last 5 to 8 minutes, timed carefully for maximum drama, the better to heighten that ghung...ghung feeling. The instrumental support consistently creates an emotional base for the rhythmic structure through standard instruments like Khol, Taal, and Doba, which help to shape time and generate internal power throughout 3-5 hours of total performance duration. Dhemali Before performance, this choir present a long (15–25 minutes) liturgical music, in which complex rhythmical patterns are accompanied by coherent higher pitched communal singing – ordinary space is turned into sacred theatre. Character songs are composed in situational ragas that appeal to the dramatic situation and emotional state of being, and with duration running from 3 to 6 minutes, there is some scope for elaboration without impeding storyline. This sort of musical stratification produces a multi-levelled aesthetic encounter in which devotional content and artistic prowess work to strengthen, not override one another.

Table 5: Performance Components and Cultural Transmission

Component	Traditional Form	Contemporary Adaptation	Transmission Method	Vitality Status

Sutradhar role	Single stage manager	Enhanced interpretation	Guru-shishya parampara	Strong continuity
Costume design	Natural materials	Modern fabrics	Institutional training	Moderate adaptation
Mask-making	Bamboo-papier mache	Mixed techniques	Workshop transmission	Active preservation
Dance training	Sattrra-based	Institutional programs	Formal academies	Expanding reach
Musical education	Oral tradition	Notated curricula	Multiple pathways	Thriving practice

Source: *Cultural transmission analysis from Bhuyan (2018) and Dutta & Sarma (2009)*

Process of cultural transmission show that in the same time, there is the continuity and adaptability changes in Keli Gopal performance traditions. The tradition of Sutradhar is classical and involves a master-disciple link (Guru-Shishya parampara) but modern performers have developed more complex interpretations of the role after exposure to a wider range of theatre. Costume design has evolved to varying degrees, in that natural dyes are still used, with hand woven wool remaining very popular (with some individuals and groups advocating tradition for its own sake); modern production methods are more recently sometimes employed due to reduced costs than they perhaps conserve the visual aesthetic but purists oppose this move. Mask kao Making continues to maintain fertile ground on which to serve as the focus of living heritage preservation thanks to its comparatively technical knowledge-demanding practice in traditional papier-mache construction-specially using a bamboo frame-which can only be experienced through training under master artisans' supervision, or at specialized workshops. " Around 60% of today's productions use the traditional construction of masks, while the other half employs new versions that prioritize look congruency with functional need. Dance instruction has broadened beyond the traditional Sattrra-based learning to institutional courses such as those at Sangeet Natak Akademi and university departments, which have made them more accessible but engendered questions of pedagogical authority. Musical tuition exhibits living tradition as well as multichannel transmission oral techniques are still employed in the Sattras, while notation based teaching promotes widespread learning. The vitality analysis shows that the Keli Gopal is in good health overall, with very strong continuity in its aesthetic aspects at core zone but adaptive flexibility of peripheral technique to remain relevant and useful within contemporary context without compromising culture-specific cultural settings.

Table 6: Comparative Aesthetic Features: Keli Gopal vs. Classical Sanskrit Drama

Feature	Keli Gopal (Ankiya Nat)	Sanskrit Drama (Nataka)	Distinctive Innovation
Language	Brajavali (vernacular blend)	Sanskrit-Prakrit hierarchy	Democratic accessibility
Length	Single act (Ankiya)	Multiple acts (5-10)	Concentrated impact
Dominant Rasa	Bhakti-Shringara fusion	Shringara or Vira	Devotional primacy
Performance venue	Namghar (sacred space)	Royal courts	Communal participation

Theatrical style	Natyadharmi with folk elements	Classical Natyadharmi	Cultural synthesis
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Source: *Comparative analysis based on Richmond, Swann & Zarrilli (1990) and Deva Goswami (2001)*

Synthetic and comparative studies have reviewed Sankardeva's creative deviations from classical Sanskrit dramaturgy, though he kept the drama aesthetically more sophisticated. Choice of language This is the most radical democratic innovation as in Sanskrit drama the linguistic hierarchy, with Sanskrit being spoken by the higher- caste characters and Prakrit by commoners, existed In Keli Gopal Brajavali led to all characters (save from verses in Sanskrit for invocations) speak it regardless of their position and it made aesthetic excellence available across social strata. Squeeze Structure In To Single Act Form: The classical Nataka generally have 5 to 10 Acts with complexity of production it is essential get compact sense. Theme and alarity for the respective occasion might be set easily. Rasa Innovation: towards Rasa, prime Bhakti sentiment is conceived as diegetic aesthetics pure-form (devotional intensivized) while Shringara's potency gets sentimentalizing Both are rhythmically entwined in odd combination unknown to classical taxonomys. With the movement of performance venues from royal courts to Namghars, theatre going becomes a democratized experience as performance ceases to be an elite entertainment and emerges as communal spiritual practice open to all devotees regardless of class. Theatrical style borrows from the classical protocols of the Natyadharmi with its stress on stylisation, and local indigenous Assamese folk performance elements to generate hybrid aesthetic language that communicates to both classical refinement and local cultural nuances. All these innovations combine to make Keli Gopal as an unique aesthetic achievement in the broader Indian theatrical tradition, proving that local theatre traditions don't have to forsake aesthetic brilliance while serving their ethnic needs.

6. DISCUSSION

The aesthetic examination of Keli Gopal proves a matured theater which comes in composite form by blending different art forms to serve its devotional end. The play is an ideal example of Indigenous plays in the Indian tradition- what Vatsyayan refers to as "multiple streams" (1980) and where regional forms create vibrant aesthetic languages without forsaking some basic principles set forth in Natyashastra. What Sankardeva understood is that devotional efficacy and aesthetic achievement are not mutually exclusive, but complementary aims. Despite holding high aesthetic aspirations through conscious deployment of Rasa-Bhava dynamics, linguistic artistry, musical craftsmanship and choreographic elegance, Keli Gopal achieves success as much in the domain of mystical enchantment as that of theatrical beauty. The Rasa dynamics in Keli Gopal display creative theological aesthetics. Though the primary storyline of Krishna's intimate dalliances with the Gopis is characterised by Shringara Rasa, it's taken through various forms of devotional re-interpretation where even the erotic and sentimental becomes a symbol for a soul's yearning to be at one with its God. This aesthetic tactic is part of wider Bhakti movement traditions in which earthly mysticism figures as a metaphor for spiritual transcendence. The acceptance of Bhakti as an autonomous Rasa in Ankiya Nat tradition despite the absence of it in olden days in classical Natyashastra, is indicative toward theological choices and awe-struck aesthetic adaptability. As Neog points out, it is not a diminution of aesthetic; rather an extension of Rasa theory to include the context of devotional theatre (Neog 2008).

The beauty of Brajavali should be treated especially. Sankardeva's development of this literary language manifests nuanced insight into the functioning of language in aesthetic experience. The Brajavali fulfills several interconnected purposes: it "raises discourse from the plebeian level of conversational meetings to a poetic plane", speaking in diction and metric tempo; it continues to remain accessible through its use of phrases known to an audience from Eastern India; it is establishing or creating a sacred linguistic space quite different from the high formalized structure expressible in classical Sanskrit, or colloquial Assamese; and also, Brajavali is- beauty in sound. This act of linguistic invention bestowed upon Sankardeva the levelling ability to democratise aesthetic performance without compromising good poetical taste - and then some: he was able to make poetry live according to egalitarian dogma, but never at the expense of its artfulness. Musical aspects of Keli Gopal combines the best musical maturity and devotional intent. The methodical application of the ragas reveals Sankardeva's knowledge of classical music theory and a grasp of emotional psychology. Every song (raga) reapplies theatrically to your sense of dramatic tension and character emotion AND spiritually to the sort of mood in which monks would meditate. The Borgeetis works are a great achievement in themselves; they represent an original synthesis of the ragas and devotional words. As one of the kind, these devotional songs gained recognition as an independent music genre and had their impact on the later progress of Assamese classical music (Sarma 1996).

The Sattriya repertoire of Keli Gopal is rich in this category of compositions, and it encapsulates aesthetic enrichment for devotional music. The dance is never just decorative but integral to the narrative, as well as an emotive offering. Twenty-four Chalis are provided to encode certain meanings or feelings generating kinetic language as an offshoot of verbal text. Facial expressions and hand postures are made according to codified systems similar to those described in *Natyashastra* based on the mood, theme and message of that particular performance, but adjusted for Assamese social customs prevalent in the Indian state of Assam. The visual attractiveness of these gestures adds a great deal to the overall aesthetic experience, but serves also the purpose of bringing divine stories down to earth. It's not just about. Present day relevance of Keli Gopal aesthetics goes beyond historical attention. The endurance of the Bhaona performances all over Assam even today is as an evidence of their unyielding cultural resilience. This artistic accomplishment of the play, thus, offers its contribution in setting a tradition in which Assamese theatre would be able to project itself as being both culturally rooted and aesthetically sophisticated. New developments, such as international performances and translations, widen the canvass but also raise issues about aesthetic fidelity in the course of cultural adaptation. As Bhuyan notes, groups such as Prajanma Unmesh negotiate the dialectic between archivism and futurism by exploring ways to respect traditional aesthetics while at the same time connecting with modern audiences (Bhuyan, 2018).

The aesthetic theory of Keli Gopal has wider implications in terms of comprehension of Indian performing arts. VEP* reflects that even if the local traditions of theatre are particular and original they would build aesthetic systems which harmonize with the fundamental principles enunciated in Indian aesthetic theory. Sankardeva's hybridisation of the classical and the folk, religious devotion with artistic aspirations, and elite cultural taste with mass appeal provide a model for all cultural innovation that combines aesthetic quality with practical social purpose. This is an accomplishment which challenges hierarchical presuppositions that favor the Sanskrit classical traditions at the expense of regional vernacular forms, positing instead that Indian aesthetic tradition entails a variety of complex formations.

7. CONCLUSION

This research has shown that Keli Gopal Natak is a masterpiece of Assamese dramatic culture, created with incomparable aesthetic transcendence and spiritual pursuit which are fundamental to Sankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavite legacy. The aesthetic planes of the play function in a series that run from finely nuanced one between Rasa-Bhava to sophisticated musical structure, poetic linguistic artistry and graceful choreographic movement. Sankardeva's juxtaposition of Sanskrit basing theatre practice with local Assamese performance idioms formulated distinctive theatrical grammar addressing at once aesthetic, as also spiritual needs. Keli Gopal's ongoing popularity in recent Assamese cultural space is an indication that this is a testimony to the vitality of aesthetically rich devotional drama. To do so, future work will compare aesthetics in various Ankiya Nats; research audience reception studies within contemporary audiences (like the WIP center); and consider how traditional aesthetic ideals adjust to living performance practice. Preservation decisions need to be an appropriate conservation between keeping what is essential, in terms of looks and the way it works, with allowing it to evolve naturally and keep contemporary. The legacy of Keli Gopal gives insight to how regional theatrical traditions provide a treasure trove for uncovering the incredible diversity that formed India's aesthetic heritage.

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