

# A Comparative Study of *Borgeet* and *Dhrupad*

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## Introduction

This seminar paper is based on an analytical study of singing style and lyrics used in *Borgeet* and *Dhrupad*. *Dhrupad* tradition is invariably a major heritage of Indian culture. The origin of this music is linked to the recitation of *Sama Veda*, the sacred Sanskrit text. *Dhrupad* is the oldest vocal and instrumental style, and the form from which the extant Indian classical music originated. The continuity of *Dhrupad*, a contemplative and meditative form, has been sustained by traditions of devotional music and worship. '*Dhruva-pada*' is accepted to be the original word for *Dhrupad*. The first component of this compound is '*Dhruva*' which literally means 'stationary' or 'unchanged' and the second component '*pada*' means 'verse' or 'poetic expression'. *Borgeet* came into existence in the hand of Sankaradeva in the 15th century and was later enhanced by his disciple Madhabadeva. The chief task of creating *Borgeet* was similar to *Dhrupad* and it helped to spread the devotional faith of Lord Krishna in Assam. The period of the evolution of *Borgeet* was the time of *Vaishnavite* moment in all over India. Followers often gathered at the time of pilgrimage at four holy places (*char dhaam*) and those are the best places for cultural exchange. Sankaradeva was influenced by *Dhrupad gayaki* (singing style) and he created a new style of music in Assam called *Borgeet*. He also put some local flavour within it. So *Borgeet* carried the heritage of the oldest form of Indian classical music. Now a days *Sattras* of Assam keep *Borgeet* alive by living tradition, that is mouth to mouth or *guru-sishya parampara*. The singers of *Borgeet* are decreasing day by day due to many circumstances like poor economic conditions, unemployment, globalisation and lack of recognition. This seminar paper strives to highlight the similarities and dissimilarities of two ancient singing forms of India- *Dhrupad* and *Borgeet*.

## Aim and Objectives

- a) To know the literary aspects of *Borgeet* and *Dhrupad*.
- b) To explore the similarities and differences in the singing style of *Dhrupad* with *Borgeet*.
- c) To compare the singing style and theme of *Borgeet* and *Dhrupad*.

## Methods

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- \_\_\_\_\_ a) Participant observation
- b) Analysis of literature
- c) Analysis of singing style

### Origin and journey of *Dhrupad* and *Borgeet*

*Borgeet* came into existence in the hand of *Sankaradeva* to spread *Vaishnava* faith among Assamese people and it was later enhanced by his disciple *Madhabadeva*. That was the time of the *Vaishnavite* movement all over India. This movement started from the ninth century and continued up to the sixteenth century. The principal belief of *Vaishnava* faith was based on the identification of Vishnu or *Narayana* as the one supreme God. This belief contrasts with the Krishna centered traditions, in which Krishna is considered the Supreme Lord Vishnu. Assam was also affected by this movement and it was led by *Sankaradeva*. Some famous saints like *Jaydev*, *Kabirdas*, *Mirabai*, *Tulsidas* etc. wrote verses on the faith of Krishna or Vishnu to reach the movement to common people. Similarly the chief purpose of creating *Borgeet* by *Sankaradeva* was to spread the *Vaishnava* faith in Assam. This genre of music is practiced with definite *raga* and *tala*. The nature of *Borgeet* is spiritual, which means that rather than entertaining the audience, its purpose is to worship Lord Krishna. At that time *Borgeet* was only referred to as “*Geet*” but being greatly influenced by the practice of using the adjectival prefix ‘*Bor*’ the devotee disciples of *Sankaradeva* added the prefix *Bor* before ‘*Geet*’ and the name ‘*Borgeet*’ was coined. This bore upon the musical grandeur of the songs in both aspects i.e.; musical and literary. Though it is a part of the *Vaishnavite* religion propagated by *Sankaradeva*, its cultural value means a lot to Assamese community. It helps the devotees to develop *Bhakti* (devotion) to Lord Krishna and eventually reach Lord Krishna.

On the other hand, *Dhrupad* is accepted to be the oldest existing form of North Indian classical music. The *Dhrupad* tradition is invariably the oldest heritage of Indian culture. The origin of this music is linked to the recitation of *Sámi Veda*, the sacred Sanskrit text. *Dhrupad* is the oldest vocal and instrumental style, and the form from which the extant Indian classical music originated. The continuity of *Dhrupad*, a contemplative and meditative form, has been sustained by traditions of devotional music and worship. Indeed, the leading *Dhrupad* maestros remark that rather than to entertain the audience, *Dhrupad*’s purpose is *Aradhana* (worship). The nature of *Dhrupad* music is spiritual. Seeking not to entertain, but to induce deep feelings of peace and contemplation in the listener.

### Musicological analysis of *Borgeet* and *Dhrupad*

*Natyashastra* of *Bharata* is honored as the fifth *Veda* or the first theoretical analysis on music. Its musical chapters describe ten characteristics of *Jati - Gayan*, which is accepted as the oldest form of classical music in India. Those are; *Graha*, *Angsh*, *Taar*, *Mandra*, *Nyaas*, *Apanyaas*, *Alpatwa*, *Bahutwa*, *Sharabatwa* and *Ourabatwa*. Moreover the singing styles of Indian classical music depends on six different counters i.e. notes (*swar*), lyrics (*pada*), rhythm (*tala*), *pata* (mnemonic syllables produced on various instrument), *birud* (subject of lyrics), and *tenak* (meaning less syllables like, *num*, *tum*, *re* etc.).

Till that time the term *raga* of Indian classical music was under a deep shadow. The word *raga* was hardly used in *Natyashastra* with some prefix like-

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2. *Yesmina Bhasati Ragastu* (*do; NS, Sl. no. 21. 72*)
3. *Raga-Marga Prajajakaha* (*do; NS, Sl. no. 31. 39*)
4. *Ibhamenam Veena Ganam Natyam Ragam na Gachyati* (*do--32. 35*)
5. *Chalaga Ragaha Samagrahach Ibha Ka* (*do—32.475*)

But there is no definition about *Raga* in *Natyashastra*. Matanga first used the word *Raga* in brief, in his book “*Brihaddeshi*” from the 4th to the 5th century. After that time *raga* became a definite counter point in the face of Indian classical music. In Indian musical hierarchy, the *Dhrubapad* form occupies the highest rank as a legacy from the Vedic period. The journey of *Dhruba-geeti* to *Dhrubapad* and *Dhrubapad* to *Dhrupad* takes place in about 1000 to 1200 years. In its journey *Dhrubapad* is tied up with *Prabandha gayan*. *Prabandha -gayan* is an umbrella term to describe a group of Indian classical and semi-classical music. The word *Prabandha* means a variety of musical components so bound together as to form a coherent whole. It comprises of the *anga* or the six characteristics of classical music and on the other hand, the four divisions of *Dhatu*; which are *udgrah*, *melapak*, *dhruba* and *abhoga*. The music which can satisfy any two *anga* or *dhatu* can come under the umbrella of *prabandha*. In the period of pilgrimage of *Sankaradeva*, *prabandha* was in the verge of extinction. Only *Dhrubapad* flourished in places like Gwalior, Delhi, Vrindaban etc. and also *Vaishnavite* movement was in its full motion. *Sankaradeva* may have been influenced by both aspects and the result was the existence of a new genre of music called *Borgeet*. Here we can observe a clean link where *Sankaradeva* came in to touch with *Dhrupada*. Scholars proved that *Dhruba-geeti* is the origin of all Indian classical music and with the following similarities *Borgeet* can be considered as a part of the race.

### Application of *Anga* and *Dhatu* in *Borgeet* and *Dhrupad*

If someone observes by participating, then he/she may come to know the application of the six *angas*, the four *dhatu*s and also the addition of other local musical flavor within *Borgeet* in order to enrich its quality and also for it to be acceptable by the native folk of Assam by *Sankaradeva*.

*Raga - a combination of notes*: The combination of several notes woven into a composition in a way which is pleasing to the ear is called *Raga*. Each *Raga* creates an atmosphere which is associated with feelings and sentiments. Any stray combination of notes cannot be called a *Raga*. All *Dhrupada* are practiced within a specific *raga*. *Mel* (*That*) or groups give birth to all *ragas*. Mother of *Dhrupad* and *Borgeet* is called ‘*Mel*’. In both musical style, *Swar* (notes) are aesthetically appealing. Here *Aroha* (ascending notes), *Avaroha* (descending notes), *Raga Chaneki* (flow or main combination of notes) etc. complete its character. With the two immutable notes *Sa* and *Pa* and five other notes that have two states each, we get 12 notes in an octave.

The notes that have two states are:

Re, Ga, Ma, Dha, and Ni. Each and every Raga is composed with the help of these 12 notes i.e. Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni, Re, Ga, Ma, Dha, Ni. In Indian classical music including *Dhrupad* and *Borgeet*, we get the following characteristics of a *Raga*.

1. *That* or *Mel* i.e. a sequence of notes,
2. *Jati* or classification
3. King and Queen relation of notes, i.e. *Vadi* and *Samavadi*
4. The ascent and descent of *Raga*, i.e. *Aroha* and *Avaroha*
5. *Raga Chaneki* i.e. the smallest combination of notes depicting the *Raga*,
6. *Saptak* (octave): *mandra*, *madhya* and *taar*
7. *Nibaddha* and *Anibaddh*: without or with rhythm
8. Division of songs within a 24 hour time span. Both *Dhrupad* and *Borgeets* are also allotted a particular time space in the cycle of the day. It is called the “*Prahar*” of singing.

By comparing the name of *raga* used in *Dhrupad* with *Borgeet*, we find some similar names like *Dhanashree*, *Ashawari*, *Basant*, *Gauri*, *Malhar*, *Shree*, *Kedar*, *Kalyan*, *Purvi*, *Sarang*, *Kanada*, *Bhupali*, *Kamud* etc. Some of these are similar to the ancient art form of Assam like *Oja-Pali*, *Charyageet*, *Geeti-Ramayan*, *Ushaparinay* etc. The study establishes the influence of ancient Assamese music and *Dhrupad* in Sankaradeva’s musical assets. Analysis of *swar* (notes) used in *raga* shows a different picture of *Borgeet*. Each and every *raga* of Hindustani classical music contains some special combination of notes, which is its identification mark. Any regular listener or performer can easily identify the *raga* in any language or without language. In the case of *Borgeet*, a very few *raga* can claim this quality. We observe some effects of *raga* used in *Dhrupad* like *Dhanashree*, *Bilawal*, *Khamaj*, *Jaijayanti*, *Megh*, *Madhyamad-Sarang*, *Dhani*, *Kafi* etc. Due to giving less importance in scale holder instrument for over hundreds of years, the notes came to be used haphazardly. The use of *komal nishad* is very common in *Borgeet* and on the other hand, the use of *tivra madhyam* is very rare. Some great work was done by an eminent Sankari scholar, ‘Golap Mahant’, who continuously tried to specify the *raga*.

*Dhrupad* were practiced in religious rituals and in temples in the ancient period. Similarly the rituals of *Nama-Kirtana*, whether coral or solo is invariably initiated with the singing of a *Borgeet*. The chief instrument played with *Borgeet* in *Sattras* today are the *Khol* and the *Taal*. The *Khol* is a double-headed barrel shaped drum on which the *Taalas* or the rhythmic compositions are played with both the hands. The *taal* played with the *Khol* to mark the strokes and gaps of a *taal*, comprises of two plates (cymbals) made of a compound metal called *kah* (bell-metal) fastened to the fingers of each hand with the help of jute strings drawn through a small hole in the bowl-shaped belly called *betu* of each plate. In singing *Dhrupad* the chief instruments are *Veena* and *Pakhuwaj*. It is very similar to *Khol* but smaller in size. *Dhrupad* probably evolved from the earlier chanting of *OM*, the sacred syllable which is claimed in Hindu as the source of all creation. *OM* is said to have a spiritually purifying effect on the person chanting it. Later, the rhythmic chanting of the *Vedic* scriptures evolved into singing of *Chhanda* and *Prabandha*, sometime in the first millennium. *Dhrupad* is said to have emerged from *Prabandha*. One significant characteristic of *Dhrupad* is the emphasis on maintaining the purity of the *ragas* and the *swaras* (notes). According to some accounts, *Dhrupad* was sung in temples, the singer

facing the divinity. *Dhrupad* is characterised by the fact that during the same performance it changes a number of times. Generally the singer begins his performance in a slow tempo and later quickens it in stages. The acceleration in tempo is not in a continuum but in a ladder-like fashion. Each rung of the ladder represents acceleration in a multiple of two, three, four, 1.5, 2.5, 5/4, 7/8 etc. Each change in *laya* produces a sort of an electrifying effect on audience. The compositions were prayers addressed to Hindu gods. As *Dhrupad* consists of prayers for all Hindu *Dev-Devies*, *Borgeet* addresses Lord Krishna and Rama. Many of *Borgeet* written by Madhabadeva are about child Krishna and his divine mischief. Later *Dhrupad* evolved into a highly sophisticated and complex musical form but still retaining its sacred character. The recital of *Borgeet* also maintains the notes of a highly reputed *raga*. In *Borgeet* we get two kinds of *raga*; one is called *Bandha-raga* and the other is called *Mela-raga*. *Tala* for *bandha raga* is fixed and its vister or elaboration of notes in the beginning is different from *mela-raga*. In *mela-raga* any kind of *tala* can be played and the number of *tala* used here is indefinite. The change in *laya* is also present in *Borgeet* but it is not in multiple ways. We can express it as a geometrical curve.

The analysis of language used in *Borgeet* and *Dhrupad*: Originally *Dhrupad* was written in Sanskrit. It was used as a part of entertainment in between the chanting of *Sam-Veda* and *Purana*. For example,

The language of composition also changed from Sanskrit to Brijbhasha, in between 12th and 16th centuries. A major part of the compositions being sung nowadays were written in the 16th century and later. The Brijbhasha, is basically Maithil. From 12th and the 16th centuries, it was the common language for North Indian literature. Dialects varied from place to place. In 1324, Ghyasuddin Tughluq, the emperor of Delhi invaded Mithila, defeated Harasimhadeva, entrusted Mithila to his family priest Kameshvar Jha, a Maithil Brahmin of the Oinvar family. From that time onwards Maithil came in to practice in Mathura-Vrindaban.

Another name of Mathura-Vrindaban is Brajadham. So Maithil was renamed Brijbhasha. But the disturbed era did not produce any literature in Maithili until Vidyapati Thakur (1360 to 1450), who was an epoch-making poet under the patronage of King Shiva Simha and his queen Lakhima Devi. He produced over 1,000 immortal songs in Maithili on the theme of erotic sports of Radha and Krishna. Brajavali was a literary language used by Sankaradeva for his compositions and *Borgeets* was with an old Assamese dialect. Though similar languages were used in the *Vaishnavite* contexts in Odisha and Bengal, all these were based on Maithili. In general, the vocable and idiomatic expressions of Brajavali were local (Assamese), while the inflectional forms were Maithili, which was easily understood by the people of Assam and the people of North India, because it carried the flavor of Brajbhasha. Thus it became the language of choice of the Bhakti poets. Here are examples of both *Borgeet* and *Dhrupad* with Brajavali; leading *Dhrupad* maestros remark that rather than to entertain the audience, *Dhrupad*'s purpose is *Aradhana* (worship). *Borgeet* also has the same purpose. Only difference is that *Borgeet* is sung mainly out of devotion of Lord Rama and Krishna but in *Dhrupad* maestros sing for all the Gods and Goddesses of Hindu mythology. In *Dhrupad*, language is transmitted from Sanskrit to Brajavali / Brajbhasha, but *Borgeet* is written only in Brajavali, with an Assamese dialect. Sankaradeva was the first poet and lyricist of East India who used Brajavali as the medium of writing. The first *Borgeet*, "*Rama meri hriday pankaja roise*," was written in 1481. It was the first written work in Brajavali language among East India. The common writing style for *Borgeet* and *Dhrupad* is as follows:-

### 1. Borgeet

*Dhrung: Re sui gopala piyaru*

*Meri prana adharu I*

*Madhupuri rahe dahe jeeu hamaru II*

*Pada: Gokulaka manika kanu nabanidhi I*

*Haate haral nikaruna banka bidhi II*

*Chanda bine rayani sajani kisu nuhe I*

*Hari bine birinda bipina nahi shuhe II*

### 2. Dhrupad

*Dhrung: Chanana laga bisama sara hei bhubana bhela bhari I*

*Jaah udhi taba madhupura hei, tuhe takana murari II*

*Pada: Hare ita se dhani thira, abatina bhubana agura I*

*Puni kiye darashana paawa, aba muhe ina dukhaha jaawa II*

*Bidyapati taba guna dekhaha aan II*

From the above displayed lyrics it is clear that the "sthai" of both poetic styles are the same and are known as *dhrung*. By reading these poetic pieces, one can come to the conclusion that the theme and language of literature for both genres of music are the same. One more common thing in both musical genres is having an association with different dance forms. The dance form associated with *Borgeet* is called *Sattriya* dance and *Dhrupad* was used in many dance forms in the ancient time and sometimes it is used in *Kathak* dance and some other semi-classical dance form of India.

### Conclusion

*Dhrupad* is accepted as the oldest existing form of Indian classical music. The origin of this genre is linked to the recitation of *Sama Veda*, the sacred Sanskrit text. In comparison to

*Dhrupad*, *Borgeet* came into existence after a long time but both genres have similar characteristics in respect to the language and the style of singing. Both styles of music are sung in the praise of God. Both are practiced in different rhythmic variations. *Dhrupad* is accepted as the oldest classical music form of India. So with all the similar characteristics, *Borgeet* should be recognised as a genre of classical music. The government of India and all the established vocal artists of classical music should promote and take interest in this music form that is *Borgeet*. Only then it will be alive and students should be encouraged to study this musical form, otherwise it will lose with time.

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