

Bhaona, Assam

July 18, 2020

Recently Assamese Bhaona made an English debut in Abu Dhabi

About Bhaona

- It is a **traditional form of entertainment in Assamese and Brajavali languages, with religious messages**
- These plays are popularly known as Ankiya Nats and their staging is known as bhaona.
- Bhaona is a performing art form. **It is a simple drama which shows the victory of truth at the climax,** generally using fictitious or mythological kings, queens, demons, gods, soldiers etc.
- The story generally depicts some initial superficial triumph of evils over good, but it shows the **ultimate victory of good with intercession by the Gods.**
- It was **created by sixteenth-century saint-reformer Srimanta Sankardeva**
- Sankardeva created the form, usually staged in “namghars” (places of worship) and “xatras” (Vaishnavite monasteries), to convey **religious messages to villagers through entertainment.**
- He wrote his prose in Sanskrit but used Assamese and Brajavali to develop Borgeet, a new form of spiritual music, and Bhaona, a mythology-based theatrical performance, and monastic dances that evolved into the classical Sattriya.
- He himself wrote seven dramas (called Onkia Naat) for performance in Bhaona. The first Bhaona was Chihnayatra, where he himself played the role of Bishnu.
- The particular form of religious school established by Sankardeva is called Eksaran Bhagawati Dharma (literally meaning religion of devotion to a single God).
- He had been for pilgrimage twice to most of the Hindu holy places twice and had observed the folk-music and

culture of many religious and cultural schools. Then **he created Bhaona picking up ingredients from all those cultures.**

- Later, many of his followers (including Madhabdeva, the most famous disciple of Sankardeva) also wrote numerous dramas for Bhaona.
- **The special features of Bhaona include plays, dialogues, dances, costumes, ornaments, entry and foot-steps of characters.**
- **Majuli is the centre of Assam's Vaishnavite culture and Bhaona.**
- That Bhaona can be taken to global audiences was conceptualised by Arup Saikia and his two sisters, Girimallika Saikia and Gitimallika Baidya.
- The family hails from Jamugurihat in northern Assam's Sonitpur district.