

**PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN MAHAPURUSHSANKARDEV'S
PLAYS 'RUKMINI HARAN' AND 'PARIJAT HARAN': A STUDY**

JUNU MONI DEKA

RESEARCH SCHOLAR, DEPT OF ASSAMESE, GAUHATI UNIVERSITY, ASSAM
Email-junumonideka92@gmail.com

SIMA DEVI

LECTURER (PART TIME), DEPT OF ASSAMESE, KHAGARIJAN COLLEGE, ASSAM
Email-nojsima2011@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

The role of women in literature is very significant. Women have been playing an important role since the old days of Ramayana and Mahabharata. In course of time, they have been adapting diverse forms through literature..MahapurushSrimantaSankardev has represented women through various roles in his literature. He has drawn the female characters in his AnkiNaat very effectively. Among them the female characters of *Rukmini Haran* and *Parijat Haran* are very interesting. The heroine of *Rukmini Haran*, Rukmini and Satybhama, Sachi of *Parijat Haran* have appeared as more fascinating.

KEYWORDS: *Female characters, AnkiNaat, Sankardev, Rukmini Haran, Parijat Haran*

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The importance of female characters is observed in every plays of Sankardev. Comparatively, in *Rukmini Haran* and *Parijat Haran*, the female characters become more absorbing. A collective study of these characters in both plays will be included in our discussion.

METHODOLOGY:

To study any subject in a detailed manner, methods should be followed. In this proposed research paper, descriptive method will be followed in context of the subject matter. In order to study, both primary and secondary sources will be taken. Sankardev's *Rukmini Haran* and *Parijat Haran* will be taken as Primary source while various books and magazines related to the subject will be taken as secondary source.

INTRODUCTION :

Towards the end of the medieval era in Europe different types of theatres like morality plays, interludes and comedy emerged. At that time, in the beginning of 16th century a prominent type of play also appeared in Assam situated in the North East of India. The propagator of Neo Vaishnavism, social reformer and poet-reformist Mahapurush Sankardev was the originator of this theatre. In later period, Madhabdev, the disciple of Sankardev also composed plays and made the Assamese dramatic literature very strong. The plays that were composed by these two Mahapurush are called AnkiNaat.¹

ANKIA NAAT :

'Ankia' in AnkiNaat means 'One act' and 'Naat' means 'Play'. Therefore it can be called Once Act Play. Actually in terms of drama, the two Mahapurush did not use the word Anki by them themselves. They used terms like Nat, Natak or Jatra. In the later period, their followers used the words 'Anka' or 'Ankia'.

Dr Satyendranath Sarma has mentioned the main reason of calling these plays Ankia:

*'The subsequent playwrights of the two Mahapurush separated themselves from the metaphorical language of them. Brajawali language and Nandi Sloka disappeared. Therefore to show the different styles of these dramas from the later plays, they are called AnkiNaat.'*²

PLAYS OF SANKARDEVA:

The plays of Sankardev were the medium of extension and circulation of Neo Vaishnavism like his other literary creation *Kirtan Dasham*, *Bargeet*, *Kabya*, *Bhatima* etc. From that point of view, the main theme of the plays was to praise Sri Krishna or Ram. That is why he tried to flow *Bhakti Ras* amongst the people by collecting stories from numerous scriptures, *Purana* – *Upa Purana* etc. The main purpose of the plays was to create spiritual attitude among the audience. Sankardev was able to circulate that spirituality through his *Sahitya Ras*. He observed the taste of the audience and in doing so he added various resources from the Assamese society.

From 1518 to 1568, Sankardev composed six plays . They are---

1. Patni Prasad
2. Kaliya Daman
3. Keligopal.
4. Rukmini Haran
5. Parijat Haran
6. Ram Vijay

RUKMINI HARAN AND PARIJAAT HARAN:

Among his six plays, Rukmini Haran is voluminous. The dramatist has collected its theme from *BhagavataPurana*. The description in the 52-54 chapter of 10thscandh is exactly followed in the drama. The Bhagavata describes --both Krishna and Rukmini falls in love by listening each other's peculiarities as revealed by Deshantari, Rukmabir's invitation to Shishupala as a groom for Rukmini, Vedanidhi's journey to Dwaraka with Rukmini's letters, message of Rukmini's abduction, Krishna's advent in Vidarbha with his Brahmin associates, abducting of Rukmini by Sri Krishna while returning from Bhawani Temple, battle with kings and their defeat, fight with Rukmabir and his killing, Baloram's words of consolation and finally Rukmini's marriage. It is noteworthy that despite the main story, the playwright has also added oral descriptions which make the play more fruitful.

In terms of dramatic qualities, the best drama of Sankardev is *ParijatHaran*.The play is written with the main story of BhagavataPurana and HaribanshPurana. Two stories are described in the drama in a parallel way— Killing of Narakasur who invaded heaven and the story of uprooting Parijat flower from heaven to satisfy Satyabhama. The practical happenings likeIndra's request to Sri Krishna to kill Narakasur,Satyabhama'scomplaint against theParijat flower in front of Krishna, Krishna and Satyabhama's journey to heaven, battle with Narakasuar and his killing at Pragjyotish, hymn singing of Krishna by Basumati, battle with Indra in heaven and defeat of Devaraj, arguments of Sachi – Satyabhamain heaven etc have made the drama very effective.

CHARACTERIZATION:

Character is one of the main and best elements of drama. According to some critics, character is the crucial part or soul of a drama. To Luigi Pirandello—

*'Every action and every idea it contains needs a free human personality if it is to appear live and breathing before us. It need something that will function as its mother charactersin other words.'*³

Dialogue is also mutually associated with characters. One is incomplete without another. Sankardev has drawn these two simultaneously in the AnkiNaat. As we attempt to discuss the female characters, detailed study about dialogue has not been discussed. Some dialogues of characters are shown as quote.

CHARACTERS IN RUKMINI HARANA AND PARIJAAT HARAN:

Sankardev has drawn the characters in an interesting way in both plays Rukmini Haran and Parijat Haran. But in both plays, the dramatist has laid emphasis on the female characters.

Though the dramatist has not drawn the female characters exceptRukmini in a broad manner, he has been able to give unique features to them through the light touch of a skilled artist. Characters like Bhismak, Rukmabir, Vedanidhi etc do not appear for a long time in front of the audience, but have been able to leave a mark on the minds of the spectator. Even the dramatist has not given much emphasis on the character of the main protagonist Krishna comparing to Rukmini.⁴

The characterization and dialogue play a significant role in Parijat Haran. In consequence, every characters shine with own features. Male characters like Narad, Sri Krisna, Indra etc and female characters Satyabhama, Sachi andRukmini appear in a lively manner. The playwright has created the character of Narad very compelling.

As our purpose is to discuss the female characters, we have not discussed the male characters broadly. On the other hand, the primary and secondary female characters in the two plays have been discussed thoroughly.

FEMALE CHARACTERS IN RUKMINIHARAN :

It is already mentioned that Sankardev has given immense emphasis on portrayal of the female characters in Rukmini Haran. He has made each character intrinsic. We can discuss these characters by classifying them as major and minor. The major female character of the play, Rukmini Haran is the main protagonist herself, Rukmini. Minor female characters are friend of Rukmini, MadanManjari and Leelawati and they have made Rukmini complete. Another minor character is the mother of Rukmini, Sachiprabha.

RUKMINI:

Among the characters of Rukmini Haran, Rukmini is very interesting. She is shown as patient, intellectual, intense beloved and a courageous woman.

In the beginning of the play, Rukmini deeply falls in love with Sri Krishna. She learns about Krishna from HaridasBhatof Dwaraka .She becomes mad in love with him and wants him as her husband forever.

'DevikadeskhunikahoMadanManjaribahutarrajatsubarnaanibhatakdelah:

*ChiranjibChiranjibmaibuliutshukebhikshunijdeshe soli gela: Rukminibhikshukmukhekathakhuniyemohitahuwa
Sri Krishnakswamivabebalar: Krishna prahridayedharal
:Krishnakcharansintiyematrosarbatharahalaansintasab choral.'*⁵

Rukmini gets very angry when she learns from her friend MadanManjarithat her brother Rukmabir wants her to get married to Shishupala. This hindrance in her love to Krishna has made her depressed. She faints again and again.

'NisamyaBipriyangbalabhitabhumoupapatkha

Rurodhridayedhyayankrishnashyacharnangchiram'.⁶

Till the end of the play, the love of Rukmini for Krishna has taken a beautiful form.

Secondly, Rukmini is patient and courageous. When her brother manages to marry her to Shishupala and take her away from Krishna, she has not become impatient and intolerant like other common girls. In opposite, she has found the means to rescue herself in this time of danger.

As soon as she gets the news of her marriage from her friend MadanManjari, she has found some ways. Through Vedanidhi she has sent letters to Dawaraka's Krishna to abduct her. Through this letter, Rukmini's intelligence, cleverness and love for Krishna has been clearly visible. The letter is like—

*'He swami —bhikshukmukhetuwa gun
rupkhuniyekaiabakyaamanetohakativabeboreishi.TathipapiShishupalahamakvivahkariteawalthik:
jaiesinghakhbharjanitesrigalchumpiyerahaythi.Tahedekhiyebhayedandejuga jai:
Janihaminijdassikattarenewagiya swami. Jab bolobtuhanatespure rah—
konparakarebhentpayu.Tatositupaikaho —he nathtasuna: Vivahakpurbadivasebhawanikmathechalaba.
khohikhamayehamakhariniyajao. Jewetuhuhelakaynahinewar —*

*tentetohatbodhdiye hamuprancharaba.PapiShishupalaksayakahamukabahupawenaahiparakhoohijaniendeendashik
he nathuddharauddhara.Tabacharankharaheki bah lekhyamitipatramidam'⁷*

Infatuated by the love of Krishna, Rukmini goes against her father and eldest brother and accepts Sri Krishna as her husband. But she is not devoid of feminine softness and love. To get Krishna, She has played with her own brother, but her love for him is also awakened after some time. When Krishna wanted to beheadRukmabir in the battle, then she begged him to save his life.

*'He swami bhayakdukhdekhityepnanfuti jai, uhiadhamakjibarakshakarah: charanakaagoancholpatimago .He
nath, hamakkhodardandehu'⁸*

Rukmini is a woman of patriarchal society. This patriarchy does not allow her to select her own husband by herself. Her father Bhismak and her brother took the decision of her marriage amidst the royal court. But Rukmini has shown her courageous spirit by going against this patriarchy and refusing that marriage. She has tried to get the most loved person as her husband and at the end, though not socially both get together. Thus the character of Rukminibecomes complete.

LEELAWATI AND MADANMANJARI:

Leelawati and MadanManjari are two typical friends of Assamese society. Both characters are Sankardev's own creation. They are not found in Bhagavata. These two characters take Rukmini's character one step higher. They have accompanied Rukmini from learning about Krishna and his praises from HaridasBhat to her abduction to Dwaraka. They have given various messages regarding her marriage, consolation and courage in the time danger. Leelawati learns about Rukmini's marriage from the discussion of Bhismak and Sachiprabha, parents of Rukmini and informs Rukmini—

'He sakhituhakmanorathkhafalbhel,SriKrishnakVivahditenissoykaral, Swarupjanlo'⁹

Again, MadanManjari learns that from the conversation of Rukmabir and Bhismaka that they have decided to marry Rukmini to Shishupala, not Sri Krishna. She informs Rukmini –

*'Aahepransakhi, bikhambipakmilala, takhunah: TuharijyesthobhrataRukmikumar : se paapituhak Sri
Krishnakvivahdiu e nisedhala:TumarnimiteShishupalaNripatik Bar Anawal:Ihaknistejaniamujanawalu.Sakhi ,
je yogyatakarah|| ha hapransakhi: Sri Krishna Swami banchitaveli, ha habidhikbirambankibheli'¹⁰*

Thus these two characters make the main character of the play more bright and increase the beauty of the play also.

FEMALE CHARACTERS IN PARIJAT HARAN:

The female characters included in Parijat Haran are Satyabhama, Sachi and Rukmini. Satyabhama and Sachi are discussed as major characters while Rukmini is analyzed as minor.SrimantaSankardev has drawn these

characters on the basis of mutual contrast and parallelism. Satyabhama and Sachi are parallel while Satybhama and Rukmini are opposite. Rukmini is soft spoken, loyal to her husband and full of seriousness. In contrast, Satyabhama is jealous, arrogant, loyal to her husband but proud. It is significant that the obscurities shown by Satyabhama and Sachi are taken from the rural Assamese society.

SATYBHAMA :

Satybhama is the second wife of Sri Krishna. She is arrogant. In the beginning, she shows her arrogance towards Sri Krishna. The main feature of this character is to gain love and affection from Sri Krishna by crying. She gets very angry when she learns from Narad that Sri Krishna has inserted Parijat flower in Rukmini's hair by his own hands. She has been burnt in anger.

*'Tadanantarnarad mukhesatinikmahodaykhunikahokopeapamaneandharedekhiyedevin Satyabhamamurchitahoio parala: jaiselabangalatakbaateuparal, kekhomuktabelomukhebanchanharal: namatpranbayunahikhelepekhiindumoti ha hapransakhimaralbulibahumelidhraikahukhirejalakhinchal ,anchalebinchikandikandiprabodhbolal.'*¹¹

Secondly, Satyabhama is jealous. Her envy to co-wife of Sri Krishna has reached the climax in the play. Centered on a Parijat flower, her envy is clearly seen. She has described this in front of Krishna without any hesitation-

*'He swami hamidurbhagakkapatbakyakatakadarthanakarah: je toharpriyatamaRukminitahekkhamipsalah,hamatkonprayojanthik.'*¹²

*'He swami hamudurbhagya: Satinikadhintuhumakkatayebikarthanakarah: Ohiapamanehamupranrakhawa o: Tabahamakjibandhikdhik'*¹³

Satybhama is intelligent also. She doesn't believe Sri Krishna blindly. Therefore she has accompanied him to Amarawati to bring Parijat flower for her.

*'O swami usitkahal ,agudevakaryakhodhikhohijatrayerarijatanah, hamutoharsangesalab'*¹⁴

She doubts if Sri Krishna doesn't bring Parijat for her or if he gives that flower to his another wife. She travelled with him so that he can't act like this.

*'He swami hamarbahutsatini, ibarparijatanikonstrikdebabtahebujayenahi ,hamukadachitutoharisanganahisarab.'*¹⁵

Satybhama represents the argumentative women in the rural society. She reminds Krishna about Parijat flower and sends Narad as messenger to Indra. After that, an argument starts between Indra and Sri Krishna. But the debate of Sachi and Satybhama appears more serious. Satybhama has made various remarks upon Sachi—

*'Are danavarbetiIndranihamariagutoharotoyeborai: hamuparamdarpakayekahuparijatanludekhuhabatohak swami puandarajakatakhatithikyuddhakoyhamarhatokparijatniyathardak:dekhitabakhafalbaraikoyli'*¹⁶

Satybhama has replied Sachi's insult to Sri Krishna --

*'Aye Indrani,jagatakparam guru hamar swami jahernaammukharitemamahapapisabasangsarnistare: tahekatayenindakaram. Aye nilajini, maritenajawa, tohariswamikindrakathakahiteghrinaseupoje :dekhoamrawatikjatabeshyatoharswamikkhomahiantol: tohari swami koyliki – gautamrishikbharjaahalyatahekmayakorikahujatibhrastakoyli,tannimittesabasarirdhakinyonidakbhel. Oyepamrioisonindrakhamaragubokhanah.'*¹⁷

Satyabhama also scolds DevarajIndra --

*'Ahepurandartuhukinimittetalabakh,devak raja hayamanuskrisnakbhoyebhangadeloh.Usitnahe,tohariaguparijatakmanjuriparidhankariyeSachilakhbekkaribe rayetuhubajradharbir , abakaisepalawas : lajokpithideloh . OyepamriSachiohiindrakdekhaitayedarpakoili ,abatoharibhatarakkaisenahipaltaya : hamumanushihaiyatohariparijatniyajao, ohi tape maritenajawa.'*¹⁸

In the end, Satybhama seems to be very proud as she uproots the Parijat and enters in Dwaraka. She expresses her grief and trouble in front of Rukmini, first wife of Sri Krishna.—

*'He bidarbhaRajkumari,tuhuswamik tame gotaekparijatpushpapawal: dekhudekhujawatakhehiparijatkhmuleuparikrishnak hate nahianala, tawatcharlonahi, hamarsaubhagyakmahimapekhopekho'*¹⁹

Thus Satybhama has planted the Parijat in the doorsteps by the hands of Sri Krishna.

SACHI:

Sachi is the wife of DevarajIndra. The dramatist has drawn Satybhama and Sachi parallelly .Sachi is a quarrelsome woman like Satybhama. Her mind is full of evils, pride and jealousy.

In the first appearance Sachi is seen very common. Her hospitality towards Satybhama and Sri Krishna is clearly visible. She greeted Sri Krishna who rescued Amarawati from the hands of Narakasur. But the argument with Satybhama about one part of Parijat flower has revealed her character.

First, Sachi has revealed her rights in Amarawati in front of Narad, messenger of Satybhama.

‘ Oabhagyakapal, Indrani Sachikparijat kathakmanushisatybhamapindhite sad gela: He rishiraj, bolo
giyajabaanekpunyakoykahoamarawatikadhikarini hoi, teweparijatparidhankaritepawe,
hamarparijatindrediteparwenahi’²⁰

Even Sri Krishna has been the target Sachi’s argument. She has insulted him—

‘ Ayesatybhamatohari swami madhavakkathhamusabjani,
ohigopibitalgopalunikoragugukulokstrinahirahaldekhu, kangkhakdashikubujitahek hat
erawalnahitahekaarkikahaba: aisananasarikrishnatgarabkayekahohamarparijatniyajaba: O
bajrapatesabangsenashabhelijanab.’²¹

Thus the character of Satybham is also full of pride, ego and arrogance.

Sachi and Satybham have represented the female world of the Assamese society. They have been still living in every family of the society. That is why, Sankardeva has added Assamese colors to the original characters and made the play very interesting.

RUKMINI:

Rukmini gets minor place in Parijat Haran. She is the first wife of Sri Krishna. But Rukmini is opposite of Satybham. Rukmini is taciturn, soft spoken, loyal to her husband and solemn.

In the beginning of the drama, Rukmini shows her rights in front of her husband. She hears about the mystery of Parijat of Heaven, which is brought down by Narad. Then, she wants her husband to wear her Parijat by his own hand.

‘ He Swami hamutoharprathampatani,
JaniohidevadurlabhParijat, prannath
Hamakdehu’²²

In the end, Satybham enters Dwaraka by uprooting Parijat from Amarawati. First, she has gone to Rukmini and reveals her anger. But she doesn’t get the answer as she wants. Rukmini’s mild answer has stopped her mouth. There is no anger, proud or arrogance in her answer but a huge amount of respect for Sri Krishna.

‘ Aye bhagini Satybham, kikhaisa: Jagataparam guru Sri Krishna unikarcharankhewa karate
brahmandabhitorekondurlabhthik: dharma arthakaammokshacharipadarath hate
milaytoharipaarijatkonkatha.’²³

Rukmini’s address Aye Bhagini (O sister) in place of ‘BidarbhaRajkumari’ of Satybham shows that. Moreover for Rukmini the most valuable thing in this universe is to touch the feet of her husband. Parijat is far away from this. This is how Rukmini appears as a soft spoken and loyal wife in the play.

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¹Mahanta, Pona, NatakarKatha, page no 63

²Sarma, Satyendranath, AsamiyaNatyaSahitya, Page no 47

³Talukdar, Dhruvkumar. Natyakalarruprekha. Page no 37

⁴Sarma, Satyendranath, AsamiyaNatyaSahitya, Page no 57

⁵Devgoswami, Keshabananda. Ankamala. (ed). Page no 43

⁶Ibid. p.56

⁷Ibid. p.53

⁸Ibid. p.74

⁹Ibid. p.44

¹⁰Ibid. p.46

¹¹Ibid. p.89

¹²Ibid. p.91

¹³Ibid. p.92

¹⁴Ibid. p.94

¹⁵Ibid. p.94

¹⁶Ibid. p.105

¹⁷Ibid. p.104

¹⁸Ibid. p.107

¹⁹Ibid. p.108

²⁰Ibid. p.110

²¹Ibid. p.112

²²Ibid. p.114

²³Ibid. p.115