The Origins and the Gradual Changing in Bengali Folk Drama 'Bolan'

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Abstract

The 'Bolan' is a popular occasional folk-drama in South Bengal. It is still very popular in rural areas as like as sub-urban areas. Recently this performing art form has been undergoing rapid modification .The authentic context of it has been changing from rural to urban context. The inspiration for modification primarily comes from 'Jatra pala' and modern theatre. So the folk artists are being compelled to modify themselves to cope with the some optimistic changes in its traditional rules like stage and stage decoration or managements, lighting, costumes, acting, scripts, musical instruments and musical tunes. In this situation original context or authentic context of folk drama is being changed gradually through urbanization. In this paper I have tried to explain how the traditional performance is shifted from folk traditional context to urban context.

***KEY WORDS:** Bolan, Traditional performance, Modernization*

INTRODUCTION: Folk dram is known as traditional theatre. It is in direct contact with the audience and is often created and supported by them. Folk drama performed by the folk group that has developed traditional context. According to 'The New Encyclopedia Britannica' folk drama is "Belonging only remotely to oral literature is folk drama. Dances, many of them elaborate, with masks portraying, animal or human characters, and sometimes containing speeches on songs, are to be found in many parts of the preliterate world. Though the action and the dramatic imitation is always the most prominent part of such performance these may be part of a ritual and involve speaking of chanting of sacred texts leaned and passed on by word of mouth[1]. So the folk drama, the performers include actors, dancers, singers, musicians. Their performance is not restricted to dialogue in prose but include dance, instrumental music and prose, verse or lyric speech as narration or dialogue[2].

'Bolan' is a popular folk drama of South Bengal. This performance is held on during the Hindu '*Gajan*' *utsav* (festival) when the Lord Shiva is worshiped. Generally it is popularly known as a folk song, *pala gan* is a term of folk terminology. But today it is a popular folk drama as like as performing art. Acting, songs, dance and dialogue are the main structure of Bolan. According to Gurusaday Dutta Bolan is a ballad dance. His opinions- "The word Bolan means recitation

and the dance derives its name from the fact one of the dancers chants or recites the story or ballad from a writing which he holds in his hand[3].''According to Panchanan Mondal '*Bol*' (sound) is the original word of Bolan[4]. Another school of thought enunciates that the word 'Bolan' is derived from the 'Bol', that means travelling and '*Bol*' implies respond to some one call. According to Folk Etymology, '*Bula*' means "to walk or travel[5]." Shri Pulakendu Sinha has said that Bolan is a play composed in poetical form having a metrical system of Bengali poetry each line consists of fourteen letters or syllables[6].

The performance of the drama is not approached professionally; it reveals the spontaneous expressions of mind which are natural, real and pragmatic. The life-force of this play is its own originality and indigenous character. The Bolan drama troupes previously moved from one village to another and perhaps this wandering later identified this form of performing art as Bolan. But today this performing art form has been undergoing many modifications. The inspiration for modification primarily comes from the seeing the modifications in the most major folk-drama *Jatra*, and modern theatre. The changing forms are lighting, costumes, acting, musical instruments, musical tunes and the story of this drama. Now I deal with the original form of Bolan and changing form of Bolan[7].

MATERIALS AND METHOD: The researcher in this paper used both the primary and secondary methods to collect data. For the secondary information the researcher took the help of both the printed and electronic documents as well. However for the primary data the researchers used observation, interview, schedule and case study methods. To do that I took help of the group of professional Bolan performer of Nadia district in west Bengal and at the same time I talked with local people who were engaged in Bolan at the recent past time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

A) **The performing areas of Bolan:** The root of this folk drama is at Nadia district of south Bengal, but it is disseminated through Bardwan, Birbhum and Murshidabad. The main performing areas of Bolan are Kaligang, Palashipara, Paglachandi, Tehatta, Debogram, Krishnaganj etc at Nadia district. On the other performing areas are Lavpur and Nanur in Birbhum, Kandi, Bharatpur at Murshidabad and Katoya, Ketugram in Burdwan. Before 20 years it is performed also in rural area but today it disperses in urban areas and as like as performed in urban context.

B) **Who are the participants?**
Bolan is a traditional folk performing art form of South Bengal. The most backward classes of the villagers are the traditional bearers and performers of Bolan. So the performers are the lower rural classes of people who are illiterate and below poverty line. Today the literate person and higher class society in urban areas are acted in this form.

C) **Overview of the traditional performance:** Bolan is an occasional folk performance. Traditionally it performs only at '*Gajan Utsav*'. Gajan is a very popular festival in some parts of Bengal. *Gajan* songs are sung in praise of Lord Shiva and Goddess *Parvati* in the Bengali month of Chaitra[8]. Today it is executed in different times of a year. Even it performs outside of the actual performance area, like fairs and festivals in different districts. Originally it is a sacred performance but its application is totally

secular. It is associated with the worship of the god *Shiva.*

Traditionally this performance is performed in open ground at the outside of a village. The performing place was circle and oval shaped. The audiences sit down surrounding this performing place. This performance was associated with the light of *Petromax and Hajak Lanthan.* The performer used natural dresses and costumes like *Saree, Blause, half-pant, Lungi, Photuya etc*. They did not use any cosmetic. Generally a Bolan troupe was composed by 10 to 15 artists but everybody was male. Most participants were teenager boys and middle age young men. Effeminate young men played the role of woman and they sing and dance. Bolan-*gan* was usually composed in the form of a narrative play based on mythological stories. However, the themes of these songs have expanded to include social and contemporary issues[9]. It reflects the sorrows, distress, dejection and in secured life of the poor who love to live in dance and music. For imparting education to people, the story of the Epic Ramayana, Mahabharata and the episodes of Krishna are also being taken up for performance. Some times it presents social awareness and protest against social problems, for example *Briksha ropon*. It has been found that Muslims to participate in this traditional programme and they offer their prayers to Hazarat Md. So the Hindus and the Muslims jointly celebrate Bolan *utsab* through dance and music[10].

The performance of Balan is mainly divided into five sectors, according to subject and performance style. The five sectors are as following:

1) Dak Bolan 2) Shasan Bolan 3) Santale Bolan   4) Palabandi Bolan 5) Rang Panchali

The performance is started by the inauguration song that is known as *'Bondana'*. During the performance, the actors stand in a semi-circle position and maintain a little distance by standing in between the forefront and back side. The prime singer commences the first stanza of a composition which is repeated insistently by the co-artists. It is factually a '*chorus*' song which in musical language is known as '*Dhuya*'. The Bolan is basically song based. Bolan- *gan* was usually composed in the form of a narrative play based on mythological stories. However, the themes of these songs have expanded to include social and contemporary issues. Bolan-*gan* may be both light and serious: songs based on serious issues are known as *khanda giti*, while light and humorous songs are known as *rangpanchali*[11]. The use music is mainly folk music and tune is generally folk tune. The local instruments *Dhol, Jhumjhumi, Sarinda, Kartal, Madal, Sanai* and *flute* are used for music. The actors don't used script during the performance. So they compose the dialogue in extemporary. Dance is the main part of this form. The performers of Bolan-*gan* are non-professional. Usually village youths form Bolan- *gan* groups when there is no work in the fields. They then get someone to compose a song for them. Musicians are hired if they are not available in the group. However, the whole arrangement is temporary[12].

D) **Changing form of traditional performance Bolan:** Recently the mode of this traditional performance of Bolan has been developing. The main factors of

development are urbanization, modern technology, Information communication technology, professional attitude. So it is developed in an urban context as a new traditional form. The developing parts are lighting, costumes, acting, musical instruments, musical tunes and story. Recently *Jatrapala*, classical theatre, cinema have highly influenced to develop the traditional context. Today, they use modern technology like sound system and light system. Similarly that causes a great change in the costumes. Now a days performers use different types of decorative dresses according to the facts. They also use *jaributi, tarawal*, musk, etc. So the tendency is very clear that it is influenced by the urban culture. Besides they use different types of cosmetics, like face cream, talcum powder, perfume etc. All these things are developed to respond to demand of the audience. Today women participants are presented here as performers. Once upon a time it is banded. Today they come because of our social approval. On the other hand they came in this profession to improve the financial condition of their family. Recently a group of women has formed a Bolan team in Nadia district. Plots of the drama are gradually changing. Local social issues, social problems, political issues are dominating instead of mythology. Bolan is basically a musical cum poetical play of the agro-oriented society of Bengali community. The songs are composed in a local folk tune. But recently the performers sing the song in the tune of popular Hindi and Bengali film songs in its place. Not only song but also the instruments have been changed. Casino, Electronic guitar, mouth organ, drum are used instead of folk instruments. Today, a prompter prompts and performers take a written script in Bolan folk drama. The factors of development of Bolan are given bellow:

Performing configuration	Original form	Changing form	Factors of change
Performing place	Earthen floor	Stage	Modern Theater
Plots	Mythical and Social	Social and political	Political Agenda
Dialogue	Extempore	Predetermined	Modern theater and *Jatra pala*
Dress	Dress of normal life	Decorative dress	Urban Culture
Song	Folk song and folk tune	Folk song and popular musical tunes	Cinema and popular band song
Instruments	Folk instruments	Folk and western instruments	Western culture
Script	Verbal and extempore	Written script	*Jatra Pala*
Performing media	Oral and jester	An addition with instruments, recorded voice, objects making sound, digital screens	Information communication technology

Artists or Performers	Only male and local trained people	Male and female and professional trained artist	Professional attitude of performer
Audiences	Marginalized rural people	Rural and urban society	Upgrade Socio-economical Perspective

E) **Stage of development:** The population of radio, TV and Internet as source of entertainment has diminished the interest of the traditional performance. Now aggressive consumerism has mesmerized the people's mind due to advent of electronic media. At this stage folk artists of Bolan are compelled to change their traditional form according to the equation of other classical form. The demand and the interest of the audience are changed. So to meet the demand of the audience and to save their existence, they are compelled to change the configuration of this Bolan performance. Today vulgarization of films, TV serials with overdose of sex and violence are polluting people's mind with main objective of giving sensuous pleasure[13]. Similarly Bolan has also performed social and religious facts. Young generation is not motivated and is interested in its facts and performances. Because in this new trend in the field of entertainment industry young generation is interested, so, majority number of audience gradually maintains long distance from Bolan. In this situation the traditional performer cannot search any positive way of holding their traditional form. Therefore, they have to go in blind imitation of classical form. In this circumstance the Bolan has been incorporating new traits of classical tradition which is different from folk tradition.

CONCLUSIONS: From the above discussion it can be state that our glorified traditional performance Bolan has gradually losing its originality due to the rapid urbanization. If this train goes on, the Bolan folk drama will not exist in future generation. Bolan is gradually losing its popularity due to lack of patronage and changes in taste.

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