



THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF MANIPUR

Edited by
Sanjenbam Yaiphaba Meitei,
Sarit K. Chaudhuri and M.C. Arunkumar



ROUTLEDGE

THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF MANIPUR

The Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal has a project to map the cultural heritage of North-East India. One volume is planned on each state. Manipur is one of the unique multi-ethnic states of North-East India which has a complex but distinctive cultural heritage of its own. This book presents the different facets of the cultural heritage of the border state of Manipur ingrained within its historicity, identity and political ecology. This book will be of much value for scholars across the disciplinary frames and pave the way for further research.

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S. YAIPHABA MEITEI
SARIT K. CHAUDHURI
M.C. ARUNKUMAR



MANOHAR



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MANOHAR

This book is dedicated to

PROFESSOR LOKENDRA ARAMBAM

*for his contribution and lifelong
engagement for the promotion of
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Introduction

SANJENBAM YAIPHABA MEITEI

Manipur, being homeland of many ethnic group and communities, has a complex cultural heritage. The heritage has a multiple number of layers of independent streams and is a synthesis of numerous cultural traits coming from the East and West. These layers show the unique and distinctive heritage of each ethnic group and community. Each ethnic group—major and minor—keeps its heritage against the strong winds of colonialism, liberalization and globalization. Likewise, various communities in the state preserve their cultural heritage. These heritages, as they perceive, are the identity markers of these groups. Still, it is also true that many elements of these heritages face a number of odd challenges leading towards gradual lading away.

On the other hand, the art of cultural synthesis of the Manipuri brings out a unique heritage in the state. The cultural synthesis of traits of the East and the West took place since time immemorial. The cultural traits from Southeast Asia as well as mainland India reached the state even before the state formation that was completed in AD 33. The synthesis of many cultural traits of ethnic groups, due to constant social interactions over a long period, could develop a common heritage of the state. Moreover, the cultural synthesis in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave it a new set of cultural heritage. The cultural experiences and experimentations of these centuries are remarkable as they nurtured a new cultural order and heritage of the people. Due to cultural and political changes in the twentieth century, the art of cultural synthesis became weak and the heritage faced a number of challenges.

Manipur, though it is a small state in the north-eastern border of India, it is famous for its rich and diverse cultural heritage all

over the world. As it is the homeland of more than 35 ethnic groups, its enriched cultural heritage is also complex. The heritage has a number of layers of independent streams and is a cultural synthesis of numerous cultural traits coming from the East and the West. These cultural traditions are very much associated with the people and their daily activities. In fact, these heritages are the real identity of each community.

Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and preserved for the benefit of future generations. Cultural heritage includes tangible culture (such as buildings, monuments, books, works of art, and artefacts), intangible culture (such as folklore, traditions, language, and knowledge) and natural heritage (including culturally significant landscapes, and biodiversity) (Sullivan 2016).¹ Both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Manipur are quite popular and the Sankirtana tradition of Manipur has been enlisted in the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.² UNESCO recognizes Sankirtana as an array of arts performed to mark religious occasions and various stages in the life of the Vaishnava people of the Manipur plains. It narrates the lives and deeds of Krishna through song and dance, serving the social functions of bringing people together on festive occasions as a cohesive force and reinforcing the relationships between the individual and the community through life-cycle ceremonies.³

Be it dance, music, theatre, arts, sports or food, it showcases the identity of Manipuri culture, but at the same time they are influenced by different factors, of which few are threatening the cultural identity. At the same time, it is also true that many elements of these heritages face a number of odd challenges leading towards extinction. The process of cultural amalgamation is seen even at the present period. Such a synthesis may bring out a new set of cultural heritage, and at the same time, pose a threat to the existing set of heritage. The book presents the different faces of the cultural heritage of Manipur covering varied and vast traditions. Most of the articles are documentation on different cultural traits of Manipur covering different aspects.

Different contributors discuss Manipuri dance from different perspectives. Yaikhom Hemanta Kumar for instance, classifies the dance of Manipur into pre-Vaishnavite and post-Vaishnavite. Pre-Vaishnavite dance forms include Lai Haraoba and its different forms, while post-Vaishnavite includes different forms of Rasa Lila. Radhamanbi Adhikarimayum traces the origin of oriental dance in Manipur and provides a historical account of this dance form highlighting the contribution of eminent artists to it. Further, she also express her concern for the extinct yet beautiful dance forms of Manipur. Rajkumari Geetanjali Devi discusses the therapeutic or healing power of Manipuri dance, particularly Jagoi Rasa Lila in the form of spiritual and physical exercise. Further, she recommends the importance of dance therapy as it deals with body flexibility, strength, coordination, balance, etc., which can improvise a better and healthy lifestyle. Yumlembam Gopi Devi discusses the historical and philosophical aspects of Maha Rasa Lila. She opines that the intrinsic essence of Maha Rasa Lila is imparting the lesson of bhakti and true love as a means to reach Lord Krishna. Khangembam Khoni presents the contribution of the Manipuri diaspora, Manipur royalty and Guru Rabindranath Tagore towards the nationalization of Manipuri dance. The article traces the spread of Manipuri dance as performing arts through the intense experiences of the Manipuri diaspora in history. Sruti Bandopadhyay gives a historical account of the Manipuri dance in Santiniketan and also the contribution of Rabindranath Tagore and others in giving the Manipuri dance a higher standing. She opines that Manipuri dance and its composition has enriched the Rabindranritya. Sinam Basu Singh discuss the identity problems of classical Manipuri solo dance. In his article, he highlights the lack of proper institution to codify a uniform regulation regarding the Manipuri classical solo dance and suggests Manipur University and Manipur University of Culture to make work strategy for the upliftment of the same.

Performing arts is an important aspect of Manipur cultural heritage. Kshetrimayum Amita Devi highlights some of the important performing arts of Manipur, such as Rasa Lila, Pung cholom, Nupa pala, Maibi Jagoi, Lai haraoba, etc. Laipubam Surachandra Sharma

attempts to highlight the dying tradition of Manipuri Manoharsai singing, to show how it grows up on the traditional soil of Manipur and explore the hidden aspects of rhythmic patterns of Manipuri Khol in an academic way. Thoiba Singh discusses the importance of Nata Sankirtana in Manipuri society. This ritualistic art form is associated with the cultural life of the Manipuris from birth to death. Rekha Konsam address the question of Manipuri women in the context of public performances, more precisely the Sankirtan practices of Manipuri Vaishnavism in the form of Raseshwori pala.

Under the purview of festivals, Chanchan Devi discusses the socio-philosophical aspect of Anoirol, an ancient customary religious hymn performed during the Laibou daily sequence of Lai Haraoba festival. She describes Anoirol as an education through dance where the socio-political activities of the ancestors are imitated and continued in succeeding eras. Akoijam Ranjita Devi studies Lai Haraoba: Cultural Heritage of Manipur. In Lai Haraoba, there is a unique feature related to the tradition of Meitei society such as ritual programme, movements of the body and gesture, songs, instruments, etc. It helps one to know the cultural tradition. Thounaojam Ruhichand proposes establishment of cultural resource centre in the shrines of Umanglai to protect, preserve and propagate the rich traditional knowledge of Umanglai culture. The centre can serve as a library-cum-museum which will contribute and support the information required by the cultural activists, research scholars, teachers, students, practitioners of Umanglai Culture, etc., and share and exchange the information resources (traditional knowledge) available in the Umanglai culture. Aheibam Koireng Singh analyses the Luingaini festival of Manipuri Nagas in the political context. Luingaini being amalgamation of initials of three important festivals of Naga sub-tribes, means to bring a common platform for the Nagas. According to him, it is observed only at the district headquarters where Naga-based lobby groups use its festive ambience to further their political machinations like severing of ties with state government, separate administration, or even hate campaign during the yesteryears ethnic conflict days, etc. Rabikanta Singh and Sumanta Singh study the cultural and food

heritage of Kang festival in Manipur. According to them, the Meitei Hindus perform the festival with indigenous touch right from the architectural structure of the chariot up to the cultural performance of Sankritana in the form of *chali*, *khubak esei*, *choidep chongba*, etc. Besides, culinary heritage shows the blending of Meiteistic mind and Hinduism in terms of items and presentation. The notion of sharing, reciprocity, pleasure and respect of oblation and social coherence is also observed in the festival.

Manipur has a rich tradition of folklores and folk songs. The book covers some of the issues. Folk tales in Manipur play a very important role in imparting education to the younger generation, according to Chungkham Supriya Devi. These folk tales give a certain sort of message to people and at the same time they reflect the cultural values, beliefs, customs and traditions of the community. The custom of narrating folk tales by the grandparents to their children has been declining under the influence of modernization. Gaihemlu Kamei attempts to classify the folk songs of Kabui tribe, which are sung on different occasions. Folk song is a very much part of the Kabui community as it reflects and manifests the culture and practices of the Kabui ranging from their belief in the supernatural power, to their daily practices of life, such as in festivals, funerals, marriage ceremonies and other activities. Wonchipem and Arun Kumar analyse the Tangkhul folk songs, *Haolaa*, as part and parcel of their past life as singing and composing songs with the coming of each season and festivals depicting their past life. Orally transmitted, these *Haolaa* has been playing a significant role in preserving history and cultural identity of the Tangkhul Nagas. Narendra Singh attempts to reconstruct cultural heritage through oral traditions of the Meiteis of Manipur. Meitei society is well known for their oral tradition which contains religious, information of historical value, customs and tradition that has the values of local wisdom. Preservation of knowledge in oral tradition is one step into the collective responsibility of the government as well as community in preservation and storage of the oral tradition.

Few studies come from the literary heritage of Manipur too.

Salam Binoy Singh and Ibohal Singh study the library systems, archives and museums existing in the state and examine the preservation of such rare literary heritage. The techniques and other methods of conservation and preservations of the materials are found to be traditional ones which can be replaced by new techniques using the latest digital technologies. Pukhrambam Memory Devi examines some of the old books preserving the culture and tradition of the state particularly for the old and medieval period and tries to present a literary heritage of Manipur. Ratna Mutum studies old stone inscriptions written in archaic script on Konthoujam Lairemma Stone Inscription. Such inscriptions written in Meetei script are one of the most authentic, reliable and undisputed source of information pertaining to the reconstruction of the past history of this place as they are free from manipulations and tampering, giving a helping key in solving the much-disputed issue of the beginning of writing in Manipur. Laishram Sadhana Devi examines the deteriorating factors of manuscripts in Manipur and its preservation methods. She found out that many of these manuscripts are suffering from many deteriorating elements and unsuitable climatic conditions, due to poor knowledge and understanding of maintaining and conserving the written records.

Food is also an important part of cultural traits. Ngangom Jayshree Devi studies both tangible and intangible aspects of Chakluk, a culinary heritage of Manipur. Chakluk has been an integral part of Manipur society having both spiritual and aesthetic value. She also expresses the presence of South and Southeast Asian culinary traits in the Meitei culinary heritage. Grace Kom and Arunkumar explore insect eating as a food habit among in the three different communities and living on different ecological settings of Manipur. The practice of eating insects differs from one culture to another and is at the verge of extinction due to the modern mindset of people that view insects in disgust. Moreover, insects can play a major role in food security, health, environment management and culture of the people of Manipur. Sorojini Devi and Kamlenthang Khongsai present ethnic food preparation of Vaiphei Tribes of Manipur. Simple boiling mixed with varieties of leaves and vegetables is the most common practice for preparing Vaiphei cuisines. Other

methods such as steaming, smoking and charcoal grilling are also traditional methods used occasionally and shallow frying is mainly for preparing meat dish other than pork. Rabikanta Singh and Biladini Devi explores the food heritage of Vaiphei community. They examine cultural value as well as uniqueness of food in relation to the people concerned. Food is one of important cultural element for displaying respect and hierarchy in the social life of the Vaipheis.

Besides, different scholars also cover each and every perspective of cultural tradition of Manipur. Panmei Peter and Rabikanta Singh discuss the cultural heritages of Rongmei tribe with reference to dance, religion and festival. The Rongmei have a unique cultural heritage regarding dance rooted in their myth and displayed in festivals of traditionalism. It allows them to distinguish themselves from others. It can provide a common sense of unity and belongingness within the group through a better understanding of the bygone generations. Another benefit that comes from preserving cultural heritage as a whole is the communal support. Further, the feeling of preserving the patrimony in one way or the other is felt by every Rongmei regardless of their difference in religion. It means that the Rongmeis of Christian convert still value indigenous dance with cultural attachment though discarding traditional festival and religion. They propagate this intangible heritage in Christianity and also held competitions to infuse its value in the mind of present generation.

Khanchuila attempts to study gender orientation through two integral types of educational institutions of the Tangkhul tribe of Manipur; the traditional dormitory institution known as the 'Longshim' where various values and skills were imparted and the educational institutions of today against the village milieu. The article examines the changes thereof and also underlines the factors responsible for the continuity and changes of gender values.

Esther Lalremkim and Jibonkumar Singh study the communitarian way of Simte life. The Simte community has traditional selfless culture (*Tawmngaihna*) though declining slowly with time. However, new roles of philanthropic organizations, churches-based mission, societies, groups, etc., having motives of selflessness emerge

to promote this selfless culture, which will directly or indirectly improve equality of the people further and uplift weaker sections of the society.

Okram Sanahanbi Devi gives an account of the origin of market in traditional Manipur. Keithel in Manipur or market may have arisen from the display of the goods for exchange either through barter system or money circulation. The origin of market is reflected in a number of myths, legends and folklores.

Potshangbam Binodini Devi tries to make a comparative study on the megalithic heritages practised by the different communities in the past and at present. Megalithism is a living tradition of different tribes of Manipur as even the Christian converted communities raise megaliths with some modification as memorial and commemorative stones while they are living and also after their death. Grouping into eleven types structurally, can be divided either witness stone, memorial, watch towers, grave stones, stone seats, small avenues representing the population of a clan or village, holy stone, and capstone.

Thoidingjam Tombi traces the painting heritage of Manipur. It can be of four phase in the evolution of painting tradition in Manipur. Each phase is marked by unique characteristics, such as close affinities with human and environment in the first phase, replete with Vaishnavite religion in the second phase, genre painting and sculpture in the third phase and finally concept and treatment on socio-economic and political problems in the fourth phase.

Ngathem Pungfa Singh studies Tarpan Katpa, a way of ancestor worship in Khurkhul. Every year they perform their ancient way of offering to the divine entities as 'Tarpan Katpa' in order to invoke their ancestors and appease them for good health and wealth.

Kamei Samson studies the ideas of culture and identity and their dynamic relation among the Zeliangrong Christians. He reveals that Zeliangrong Christians who once condemned the culture of Zeliangrong traditionalists now fondly remember and relive them to cherish their ancestral culture.

Hosea Thanglen and Lorho Mary Maheo explore the traditional dress of Chiru tribe of Manipur and its cultural significance. The study concludes that the Chiru tribe is very rich in culture, trad-

ition, language, social norms, costumes, religion and beliefs that constitute the precious assets which have been handed down by their ancestors. A traditional dress indicates possession of rich traditional knowledge and oral history and also reflects the cultural identity.

In the present globalized days where culture contacts become usual, there is always both advantages and disadvantages in maintaining the legacy of cultural heritage of a society even in Manipur. Provision of development of a new set of heritage does always exist against the threat to the already existing. Documentation of both tangible and intangible heritage is important before it is completely lost as a part of preservation and cultural management. At the same time, it is also important to screen the newly-introduced cultural attributes before they are accepted. Cultural conflict between the already existing and newly-introduced cultural characters is possible in the heritage itself, which may lead to chaos in the society. Such an important issue of cultural change in the context of cultural heritage of Manipur needs the attention from scholars. This book is expected to give an insight on the issues and also provide food for thought to preserve, control and document such an enriched cultural tradition of Manipur.

NOTES

1. Ann Marie Sullivan, *Cultural Heritage & New Media: A Future for the Past*, 15 J. MARSHALL REV. INTELL.PROP.L. 604 (2016) <https://repository.jmls.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1392&context=ripl>
2. <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=176981>
3. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/sankirtana-ritual-singing-drumming-and-dancing-of-manipur-00843>



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PART I

HISTORICAL PROGRESSIONS OF
MANIPURI DANCE FORMS



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An Overview of Oriental Dance in Manipur: A Brief Survey

A. RADHAMANBI DEVI

INTRODUCTION

Culture is a very complex term. It is not only the manifestation of arts religious festivals. It has wide connotations and may be seen as a deep analysis of the social behaviour, human knowledge, belief, values, etc. Different anthropologists, sociologists, historians and politicians have defined culture differently according to their own perspectives and ideas, C.N. Shankar Rao (2007) explains it thus,

The term 'Culture' is given a wide variety of meanings and interpretations . . . The man of culture has good manners and good taste. Further, one may be inclined to believe that a Bachelor of Arts degree possesses 'better' culture than others. In sociology 'culture' does not mean personal refinement.

Historians use the word 'culture' in yet another way to refer to the so called 'higher' achievements of group of life or of a period of history. By 'higher' achievements they mean achievements in art, music, literatures, philosophy, religion and science.

Anthropologist Edwards B. Tylor (1871) defined culture as a 'complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'.

Again, in the words of E.V. de Roberty 'Culture' is defined as 'the body of thought and knowledge, both theoretical and practical, which only man can possess'.

Explaining about culture, sociologists R.M. MacIver and Charles remarked, ' . . . certainly all cultural change involves social change,

for, as we have seen, the social and the cultural are closely interwoven'.

From these different viewpoints about culture, it is clear that culture, as such, is a very complex term which entails various shades of meaning according to the area and perspective in which it is employed. Moreover culture is specific according to different societies. A society always has its own distinct and well-marked culture. Nevertheless, a particular culture is never static and is always dynamic due to the various confluences and influences it absorbs from time to time.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY SOCIO-POLITICAL ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL CHANGES

The twentieth century has been a great milestone in the history of Manipuri society. There have been significant changes in the socio-economic and political scenario during this century. These changes have, in turn influenced the outlook of society. Among these various changes an important one is the introduction of British education modelled on the Western education system. Unlike the previous generation who had no opportunity to get formal education, people in Manipur had access to schools established by the British in Manipur during the twentieth century. The students learnt a variety of subjects including languages like English, Bengali and Hindi. All these changes after a period of time contributed immensely in making the Manipuri culture and society more erudite and cosmopolitan. Some Manipuris also gained access to higher education in premier institutions outside the state. And when they returned they were highly imbued with new forms of knowledge in every field. Further, the new found influences related to higher education were applied and experimented in the creation of various cultural significations like music, dance, and art in general.

UDAY SHANKAR

Shri Uday Shankar (1900-77) is a world famous dancer for his creation of a new type of Indian dance. Though he was not for-

mally schooled in dance and music, he became a world famous dancer by virtue of a favourable conjunction of good fortune, aptness and opportunity. His novel creation of dance came to be known as the Oriental Dance.

In 1920, when he was quite young, he went to London to study painting at the Royal College of Arts under William Rothenstein. There he availed a good chance of meeting the famous ballerina Anna Pavlova who came to the city for an extensive tour. Since the ballerina wanted to include some dance based on Indian mythology and legends in her programmes, she inducted Uday Shankar in her troupe. Later, when Uday Shankar gave a performance with Anna Pavlova of Radha-Krishna ballet at Manhattan Opera of New York in 1929, he suddenly became famous. 'Pavlova wanted a partner for Radha-Krishna ballet, and picked up Shankar for the purpose. The first performance of Radha-Krishna ballet was held at the Manhattan Opera House of New York in 1923', wrote P. Banerji, 1982: 2.

Completely diverting from the time honoured tradition and usage of Indian dance, he created quite a different dance accompanied with Western music but thematically based on Hindu mythology and legends. In the traditional Indian custom and tradition, song and music precede dance and the dancer dances to the tune and rhythm of the music. But in his novel dance, the steps, gestures and body languages are performed first and the musical accompaniment is adopted to suit the dancing. This was quite contrary to the well founded Indian style. In fact, his early dance compositions were done mainly to attract the Western audience by adding episodes of Indian mythology and pathos of life. For that reason, Uday Shakar's new dance gained popularity among Western audience and it came to be known as the oriental dance.

It is mentioned in 'Asian Dance' by Kapila Vatsyayan (2011: 113): 'Uday Shankar may or may not have done it knowingly, but he had, by adopting these two distinct modes, laid the foundation of what may be termed modern dance, as opposed to any of the classical Indian dance forms. His style came to be known as the "Oriental Dance".'

THE ORIENTAL DANCE

The dance known as the oriental dance is a dance which is generally choreographed based on an event or episode in Hindu mythology or religious scriptures and displayed as a play through the medium of dance. It expresses the vivid imaginative power and skill of the artiste very differently from traditional dance forms and is a new genre of dance created to suit an individual dancer. It is fairly free from the traditional norms and rules as it chooses its own types of dress, music, gesture and body language and also in its composition based on an episode or event from history or legend or the Purana, and in the display of the dancer's skill to the fullest. Acrobatic skills and difficult physical movements like those of an acrobat are also adapted for high visual effect and enjoyment.

THE GENESIS AND HIS ORIENTAL DANCE

In about 1930, Uday Shankar's dance compositions such as Shiva Tandav, Shiva Parvati, Pramila Arjun, Rhythm of Life, Integral Melody, etc., were reviewed with pictures in leading English newspapers of India, like *The Hindu*, *The Tribune*, *The Indian Express*, etc. Gradually, the dance called the oriental dance spread to every nook and corner of India. In Manipur also, Uday Shakar's Oriental dance movement influenced some educated young people who began to compose dances it in their own ways.

LEADING EXPONENTS OF ORIENTAL
DANCE IN MANIPUR

The orintal dance form of Uday Shankar was made popular in Manipur. The second quarter of twentieth century by some Manipuri youths who had seen educated in Assam. Some the them were Rajkumar Priyagopalsana, Bachaspatimayum Shantikishar Sharma, Yambem Meghabir Singh, Nongmaithem Sudhir Singh, Akoijam Indubhushan Singh and Guruaribam Baldev Sharma, etc.

RAJKUMAR PRIYOGOPALSANA (1910-2000)

Rajkumar Priyogopalsana Singh was born on 4 June 1910 to noted Nata Singer Rajkumar Suryaborosana of Thangmeib and Lourung Purl Leikai. After of matriculating from Sir James Johnston High School he studied at Cotton College, Guwahati and passed I.A. Shri Rajkumar Priyogopalsana may rightly be regarded as the Uday Shankar of Manipur. The former was junior to the latter only by ten years. At the time when Uday Shankar became famous throughout Europe, Priyogopalsana was in Cotton College, Guwahati. On seeing the acclamations and pictures of Uday Shankar's dance in the English newspaper, Priyogopalsana also began to dream of emulating him and began to compose new dances of his own. Having a sound family background in dance and music he blended innate artistic talents, comeliness and good gesture in his dances. Without much training in the art of dance he could sway the audience of Assam through his dance when he was a college student. He was given the award of Nataraj by Earl's Law College, Guwahati when he was only twenty-two years. With this he at once became a renowned artiste.

In the manner of Uday Shankar's famous compositions like Shiva Tandav, Shiv Parvati, etc., Rajkumar Priyogopal Singh also choreographed dances, like Shiva Tandav, Shiva Sankar, Kamsabodh and Khamba, etc., one after another and it was much appreciated throughout India. The newspaper, *Scardale Luquirer* published in New York on 14 October 1955 said,

Priyogopal, world famous Hindu dancer from Manipur. . . . Priyogopal became famous throughout India, and then felt the call to introduced his authentic dance forms to the rest of the world. He has founded several dance centres in India to preserve and cultivate the ancient dances. He has toured Australia and New Zealand under the auspices of the Board of Adult Education, and has received acclaim in his tours of the United States of Canada.

BACHASPATIMAYUM SHANTIKISHWAR SHARMA (1912-54)

Bachaspatimayum Shantikishwar Sharma, son of Shri Bachaspatimayum Tatwabir Sharma popularly known as Tabapi Sharma,

a drummer and dance teacher of Khwai Brahmapur Bachaspati Leikai was born in 1912. Born in a family of sound background of music and to a couple devoted to dance, Shantikishwar Sharma had a special skill of drum, dance and music. When he was a considerably grown up boy he began to learn the drum from the renowned drummer Shri Aribam Gopal Sharma around 1923. After learning the drum from the guru for about four/five years, when he was a youth, he joined a circus party in about 1932 and toured various places of Assam and Bengal. During his tour he saw in the newspaper the dance with a picture of Uday Shankar when he was a world famous dancer. On seeing it he felt a strong desire to follow his footsteps. Consequently, he began to compose his own dances, such as Shiva Tandava, Chitrangada, Khamba-Thoibi, Naga Dance, Ngafa Jagoi (Fishing Dance), Loukhao Jagoi (Harvest Dance), Shikari (Hunter) and Agni Nritya (Fire Dance), one after another and gave public performances, thus becoming a full-fledged professional dancer.

While mentioning about the precursors of the oriental dance movement in Manipur the names of Shri Bachaspatimayum Shantikishwar Sharma and Shri Rajkumar Priyogopalsana Singh come to the fore. They were eminent contemporary performers of the oriental dance and their performances could sway the audience. Both of them are highly commendable for their great proficiency in oriental dance.

NONGMAITHEM SUDHIR SINGH (1914-74)

Born in 1914 as the son of Nongmaithem Tompishak Singh and his wife Angoubi Devi of Yaiskul Chingakham Leirak, Imphal, Nongmaithem Sudhir Singh was the second among six children.

Hailing from a family with a good musical background who also had close acquaintance with the song and drama activities of the royal palace, Nongmaithem Sudhir Singh had the opportunity of easy access to renowned song and dance teachers, like Sarvashri Laishram Kullabidhu, Maisnam Amubi, Gourachandra Sharma, Takhelchangbam Amudon Sharma and Tolchou Singh, etc., and acquired the knowledge and art from them. He also learned Sanskrit from Pandit Raj Atombapu Sharma.

As Manipur was fairly advanced in English education, N. Sudhir Singh studied at Sir Johnston High English School, Imphal and passed Matriculation examination in 1934 under Calcutta University. Studying further at Cotton College, Gauhati, he passed I.A. (Intermediate Arts).

Being inspired by the rising trend of proscenium theatre in Manipur and the widespread global fame of Uday Shankar's oriental dance in Indian newspapers, there came a strong desire in Nongmaithem Sudhir Singh to expose the rich wealth of Manipuri dance and music to the outside world.

Consequently, he began to make efforts to convert the customary, ritualistic and traditional Manipuri dances usually performed at *mandaps* (Pavilligns) and *laimangs* (precincts of folk deities) into stage performances so as to be suitable and acceptable to the audience of Manipur and outside. He composed new dances, such as Khamba Thoibi, Leima Jagoi, Leisemba, Poireiton Khunthokpa, Keiga Yenga, etc. Besides these, he performed oriental dances, such as, Lava-Kusha Ashtrashikshya (Learning of Martial art by Lava and Kusha), Chitrangada Arjuna, Abhisarika, etc. His dances with good form, fair complexion and handsomeness made him a dancer par excellence and his performances are unforgettable.

SHRI YAMBEM MAHABIR SINGH (1922-53)

Born in 1922 at Uripok Yambem Leikai, Imphal, Shri Yambem Mahabir Singh was the son of Y. Angou Singh, a drummer. Learning the drum from early boyhood, he became a renowned drummer during his early adolescence. By a favourable continuation of talent, destiny and luck he availed the opportunity of acquainting himself with the world famous oriental dancer Shri Uday Shankar. He was the only Manipuri artiste who was enlisted in Uday Shankar's dance troupe and got the opportunity of touring the world.

When Shri Maisnam Amubi Singh was invited to be a dance teacher at the newly established Uday Shankar Cultural Centre at Almora in 1939, Mahabir Singh (17 years of age then) was taken along as a drummer by Guru Amubi and he (Mahabir) remained there with his guru and got to know the world famous dancer Uday Shankar.

The message from Uday Shankar to the guru inviting him to Almora again reminded him of his ordained duty. Without a moment of hesitation he decided to accept the invitation with him. He took young dancer named Mahabir Singh who had received training from guru Amubi and had also been trained in the art of *pung* playing by other traditional maestros.

Though Y. Mahabir was a drummer by trade, by dint of his versatility and talents, he played not only the drum but could participate in other dance programmes of Uday Shankar. Thus in availing the rare opportunity of contact with Uday Shankar for about two years he could acquire much invaluable knowledge and practical experiences. At the same time Uday Shankar was also very happy to find a talented, energetic, resourceful and dependable young artiste.

In the beginning of 1942 Guru Maisnam Amubi and Yambem Mahabir Singh had to return to Manipur from Uday Shankar Culture Centre at Almora due to the outbreak of the Second World War. When the war ended, Shri Yambem Mahabir found it convenient to create his new dance compositions, such as Kath Putli (the wooden doll), the Kite dance, Urvasi, Abhimanyu, Durga Dance, etc., and gave public performances in Manipur. In the newspaper *Thought* published on 27 December 1952 it was reported about Yambem Mahabir: 'But there was nothing to match the two pieces Sri Mahabir Singh—the Pungcholom and the Naga dance. The great range of the musical sound on the Khol which Mahabir Singh can evoke invariably results in an appreciable quickening of the pulse in the spectator.'

GURUARIBAM BALDEV SHARMA (1935-91)

Born on 5 October 1935 at Brahmapur Guruaribam Leikai, Shri Guruaribam Baldev Sharma was the son of Guruaribam Tomba Sharma and Madhumati Devi. Having the inclination for art from childhood, he stepped into dance and music at the age of fifteen as a disciple of the renowned oriental dancer Shri Bachaspatimayum Shantikishwar Sharma. When he was young, he performed dances, like Khamba-Thoibi, Khamba Kao Faba (Khamba as a matador),

Agni Nritya (Fire Dance) and Naga Shikar (Naga Hunting), etc., under his guru and became very popular. Thus, since 1950 he took part in various dance programmes of his guru Bachaspatimayum Shantikishwar Sharma.

When his Guru Bachaspatimayum Shantikishwar Sharma died in 1954, Guruaribam Baldev Sharma started dancing as a successor of his deceased guru. The dance performances he gave were Chitran-gada, Shivatandav, Shiv Parvati, Kalidamon, Bhakta Prahlad, Abhimanyu, etc.

In 1956 he was honoured by Brahmasabha by being conferred the award of Nataraj, after the display of his new dance composition 'Veer Paona' at Johnstone High School in 1956 on the occasion of Swadhinta Sangam. He created many new dance compositions and gave public performances, such as Mahishasor Badha, Ramayana, Seetaharan, Lava-Kusha, Pakhangba Fambal Tongba (coronation of Pakhangba), etc.

A Manipuri dance troupe led by Shri Guruaribam Baldev Sharma participated in the dance and drama festival at Madras in 1958 organized by Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). Since then he became the Secretary of IPTA, Manipur Branch and worked for the organization.

THE DECLINE OF ORIENTAL DANCE

After Uday Shankar created a novel dance form and showed his Radha-Krishna ballet in the USA in 1923 he became famous instantly and his dance came to be known as the oriental dance. When he set up his organization named Uday Shankar Culture Centre at Almora in 1939, the people of India received it warmly. The global wave of the oriental dance having swayed India, some Manipuri youths who had artistic talents and who were studying outside Manipur, learnt about Uday Shankar's novel dance and began to imitate him.

The movement of oriental dance entered Manipur around 1930 and after gaining a huge popularity, it started declining slowly. After fulfilling their dream of carving a name in the world of dance, the renowned gurus of oriental dance ceased to work and perform.

Moreover the legacy of their dance form was not learnt and carried on by the future generation. The movement which had a meteoric rise finally slipped away from the world of dance around the late 1950s.

CONCLUSION

Manipur being inhabited by various ethnic groups having different languages, customs and tradition, is abundant in different forms of indigenous dance, music, and festivals. Beautiful music and dance concerning with different occasions had been existing in Manipur from very early times. Songs, music and dances pertaining to religion, rite and custom, etc., are mainly preserved and perpetuated and put in vogue, for need and inevitability to save from extinction. But many dances, songs, festivals, etc., concerning simple enjoyment and merriment have vanished with the change of time and social conditions and have been reduced to dead art and culture. Therefore, there should be an ardent attempt to revive extinct but beautiful dance forms, such as Mareibak Jagoi, Baiji Jagoi, Pasa Khala, etc., through research by ardent researchers.

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Rhythms of Manipuri *Manoharsai* Singing

LAIPUBAM SURACHANDRA SHARMA

INTRODUCTION

Without rhythm a musical art can't exist. Rhythm is the time configuration of beats and strokes. Manipur, once a princely state had experienced the glorious past of using their own time keeping devices. The people of this land had the knowledge of as many as twenty-seven stars that had been named according to their locations and used as the important element in knowing the rhythm. There is a belief that the people of this land had known the use of rhythm in an appropriate manner since Nongta Lairen Pakhangba. The ancient times of Manipuri sculpture date back to the reign of Meidingu Khuiyoi Tompok in the second century AD. It was during his rule that the first known sculptures known as *yangdouba* and *yangdoubi* were created in the form of wooden statues. The statues are symbolic of the time controlling deities of the Meiteis. A special device called *tanyipung* (a cylindrical, hollow and wooden drum) is attached to the statue, which serves as an indicator of time. Now a replica of this statue is preserved under the custody of Govindaji Temple. Originally, there were various types of *pung* depending on its shape and the purpose. In the early days, Manipuri people had *pung*, which were called *khong*, *harao-pung*, *lai-pung*, *yai-pung*, *tanyei-pung*, *khun-pung*, *lan-pung* etc. We can also find the mention *pung* as the times configuration system of measuring time at different times of a day in ancient Manipuri manuscripts like *Leithak Leikharol* and *Pudin Puya*. In the context of music, the term *pung* is a Manipuri word that also represents the percussion instrument

made from animal skin. Its function is to control the time of the musical performance. The *mridanga* or *pung* player expresses the rhythm through the percussion instrument. The first *pung* or drum of Manipur is said to have been made of the wood of *wang* tree in the first century AD during the reign of King Khuiyoi Tompok in AD 154. This shows that the long history before the advent of Vaishnavism along with the cultural influence from western India, Manipur had a long tradition of its own way of musical rhythmic concepts.

BIRTH OF MANIPURI *MANOHARSAI*
KIRTAN SINGING

Since the very early time, Manipur has been a storehouse of exchange where the east and the west meet. It has a composite culture and cultural heritages. Concerning the religious faiths and beliefs of the neighbouring lands of the east and the west are Buddhism and Hinduism respectively. When the time and situations came in course of the socio-political history of Manipur and forced the inhabitants of the monarchical kingdom by the pressures of the Buddhist or Burma for security, protection and safeguard the freedom, independence and sovereignty, Manipuri adopted Hinduism. It is believed that

Vasnavism in the Meitei Society began with Krisna cult under Nimbarka school followed by Rama cult under Ramandi school and again by the revival of Krisna cult under Chaitanya Vaisnavism in the Meitei Society was mainly due to 'Sankirtan' itself which is the form of worship of Krisna and Radha through hymns of praise and dramatization of scenes from their lives and sporting in the garden of Vrindavan. This actually suited the taste of the Meiteis whose traditional religion expresses itself in the synthesis of music, singing, dancing and drama.

Therefore, the 'Sankirtan' infused with the artistic genius of the Meiteis, created an atmosphere where dance and music became the dominant elements of their religion and life, providing an emotional outlet to the people. As the spreading out of the Hinduism in the mainland India extended, the majority of the valley

people adopted Hinduism or the Sanatana religion. The common faith of the people, as well as their religious ideal were adapted into the deep philosophy of Hinduism and the valley people, especially amongst the Meitei community, the Bhakti philosophy was absorbed as an ideal religion.

During the reign of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra, the fifty-fourth king of Manipur, deeply religious and the patron of tradition and culture who ruled Manipur for 40 years (c.1759-61 and AD 1763-98), considerable development in the performing art forms in Manipur could be perceived. It was under his patronage that the world famous Manipuri classical form of Ras Leela having live forms namely Maharasa, Kunjarasa, Basantarasa, Nityarasa and Divyarasa were composed wherein subtle emotional acting is manifest with rhythmic dance and music. Some three centuries ahead, during the dark age of hypocrisy and quarrel, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu or Lord Gauranga distributed love of God through the chant of *bhajan* and *kirtan*. Bengal is known for the birthplace of Sankirtan. Lord Gaurangahad introduced *kirtan* singings in Bengal, Assam and Orissa during the fifteenth century. His *kirtans* are sung widely there. It was the beat and the rhythm of *khol* that the lyrics based on bhakti were chanted.

This chanting of *kirtan* crossed the threshold of Manipur lately after the people of Manipur were converted to Hinduism. As in Bengal, Orissa and Assam the singing of the *kirtan* was accompanied by the *khol* and cymbal. It is a well-known fact that the present Nat Sankritan of Manipur is a derivation of the *kirtan* tradition after fusing it with folk elements and traditions suitable for the soil of this land.

According to scholars, there are two forms of *kirtan* in Manipur such as *nat kirtan* and *manoharsai kirtan*. In the recital of both the *kirtans*, the percussion musical instrument namely the Meitei pung and *khol* are used to control the rhythms of the songs. The belief that both the instruments occupy a sacred status and its performance began after *arati* is because of its associate with the sacred chant of the name of the Lord.

The present *khol* (*mridanga*) that is used in Manipuri tradition is made of wood. The sound thus produced by this musical instru-

ment is a bit different from that produced by the *khol* used in Bengal and Assam. The *manoharsai* tradition of Bengal is deemed to have extinct with the advent of other art forms. However, when the *kirtan* tradition came into contact with the Manipuri genius, it underwent artistic transmutation in its texture in this rich cultural soil by ameliorating it with the fusion of the traditional and indigenous rhythm and music, to name a few: *naheiroi*, *shikaplon*, *huikaplon*, *jat*, *lam-in*, *hiripabot*, etc.

In the context of Manipur, it was during the period of Maharaj Chandrakirti that the artistic form of *manoharsai* was popularized in this land as gurus from Bengal; Goshwami Gourachand, Bhramananda Kshetramohan and Gadadhar from whom recitals of the *manoharsai* were learned came to Manipur. As the canon of singing the *manoharsai* follows a religious tradition with certain sanctum, this article will not go to detail on how it is performed inside an arbour and the depth of the philosophy thereof. However, it is a point to be discussed on the context of different occasion where *manoharsai kirtan* singing is participated along with *Khol*.

RHYTHMIC PERFORMANCES OF *MANOHARSAI* *KIRTAN* SINGING

As the performances of the *manoharshai kirtan* singing of Manipur developed and ameliorated extensively, the accompaniment the Manipuri *khol* also developed correspondingly. They play a major role to recreate the rhythmic equivalent of the whole performance. Here we can elaborate with some specific examples of religious occasions and spiritual ceremonies to where *khol* acts as rhythm provider.

- (a) *Rasa Lila*: In the seventeenth century the *Rasa Lila* was introduced by the King Bhagyachandra and as a custom there should be at least a performance of *manoharsai kirtan* just before the commencement of the *Rasa Lila*. In the present day also, in the temple of Ramjee Prabhu the system of starting with a *manoharsai kirtan* accompanied with *khol* for a *Rasa*

- Lila is done by keeping the old system as it was. Thus, for Ramjee Prabhu's temple starting with a *manoharsai* accompanied with *khol* is an unavoidable rule and tradition.
- (b) *Gouldlila*: At the time of king Chandrakirti Maharaja the Gouldlila was introduced in Manipur. The using of notes, *bols* and strokes of cymbal was the same as in *manoharsai*. So thus for the percussion instrument those artists used were *khol* and *mridanga* as an accompanying instrument on that specific occasion.
 - (c) *Ram Lila*: In the day of Ramanavami and Sitanavami, in the temple of Ramjee Prabu there was a specific performance of Ram Lila. In that performance, the *khol* and *mridanga* was used and even now the same tradition continues.
 - (d) In the Gostha Lila and Kangshabodha Lila too the *khol* and *mridanga* were used as accompaniments.
 - (e) At the time of establishment of Basak Ishei, Khubak Ishei, Jhulan Jatra Ishei, singings of Durga Pujah, Kali Kirtan, etc., the *khol* and *mridanga* were played in Manipur society.
 - (f) *Kottha kirtan*, a type of singing at every locality of Manipur in the temple of Shri Hari for a complete month of Mera (September-October) were also performed accompanied *khol* and *mridanga*, and on the occasion of Hari Uthan Kang (a chariot) *chingba* (pull) there was also a singing and in that singing the *khol* and *mridanga* were used as accompaniments. In the night time *nam-kirtan* (a type of singing) was also offered with *dhup* (scented smoke) and *arati* accompanying with cymbal and *khol* and *mridanga*.
 - (g) *Gita Path/Prabachan*: By reciting the *Bhagavad Gita* during the Shraddha ceremony, Death Anniversary ceremony. On this occasion, the chanters recite *solha nam* (16 name) singing, i.e. *hare krishna hare krishna rishna krishna hare hare, hare ram hare ram ram ram hare hare* accompanied *khol* and *mridanga*.
 - (h) *Rath Yatra*: There were seven *sampradai* (group) and those seven groups together performed the *manoharsai kirtan* for Rath Yatra. In a group, there were two percussionists playing the *khol* and seven *kirtan* singers. Fourteen *khol* percussionists took

part in playing the *khol* in the *manoharsai kirtan*, which were the offerings to Shri Shri Govindaji during Rath Yatra. This is called *chawdhaman/chawdhmardle*. In addition, while performing Jaydeva recital (Jaydev Chongba in Manipuri) in the Kang (Rath Yatra) ceremony the performers were using *khol* and *mridanga* with cymbals.

- (i) *Dhop Pala*: In older *dhop pala kirtan* at Shri Shri Govindajee Temple, the percussionists used the *khol* and *mridanga* for regulating rhythm and tone with other musical instruments like *sitar*, *israj*, harmonium and *tabla* etc.
- (j) At the time of King Bodhachandra, the king established *manoharsai holi pala* at Shri Shri Govindaji Temple and his highness himself performed as a *khol* player at several places in Manipur on the occasions of *manoharsai holi pala* every year.

DEVELOPMENTS OF RHYTHMIC PATTERNS OF MANIPURI *KHOL*

Before we study the different rhythmic structure of Manipuri *khol* we need to first understand the theoretical backgrounds of their rhythmic patterns and developments. We can see in one pairing of a *taal* there is more than one cycle of the basic *taal*. This is done to meet the requirements of the song, to maintain its aesthetic quality. For instance, the *dashkosh taal* is composed on 7 beats but according to the requirements of the particular composition one pairing may contain 14 or 21 beats, i.e. two or three *avartanas* (basic cycle) come under one pairing more than one syllable in one beat or *varnakala*. In *Sangeet-ratnakara* only one syllable constitutes one *vamakala*—*ka*, *cha*, *ta*, *tapa*. While in Manipuri many syllables may constitute one *varnakala* like *khikhhit/gregre/dhindhen*. The explanation of Manipuri rhythmic system, is quite unlike other traditions. Referring to stresses or accented beats in a metrical cycle (*avartana*), Darshana Javeri mentioned unaccented beats like *nishabda anga* bringing out patterns of rhythm. But in Manipuri two or more *taals* can form one *avartana* in *taal-prabandhas*, which are of two types—one in which the *taal* composition is complete in itself and the other one in which incomplete compositions of

taals are grouped. *Shalaga* or *phertal* is a combination of two *taals* and *sankirna*, which has more than two *taals* grouped together. *Prabandhas*, mentioned in *Sangeeta-ratnakara* is used in plenty in Manipuri.

In fact, the original work done in the field of rhythmic pattern of Manipuri *kirtan* singing is highly creative and amazing. The Manipuri rhythmic system is based on various *Vaishnava sangeet shatras* of ancient Indian texts. However, they have not only created original *taals* and rhythmic pattern but have also evolved an individual method of documenting them in their manuscripts such as *Mridanga Vyasvastha Sangeet*, *Mridanga Sangraha*, etc. Manipuri scholars were well versed in the technical elements mentioned in the ancient *sangeet shastras*. Let us consider, *Ektali* (*Mridanga Sangraha*, p. 3) as an example of the intense research work done by the Manipuri gurus. This *ektal* is considered as the basic *taal* from which all the other *taals* have evolved. This is mentioned in *Krishnaras Sangeet Sangraha* (chap. IV, verse 527) and *Panchamsara Sambhita* (chap. IV, verse 13). The entire duration of a *taal* is subdivided into intervals and these constituent units are known as *angas*. In all the different *angapranas*, be it *guru*, *laghu* or *pluta*, the number of stresses is one and thus, these *taals* are called *ektal* in spite of difference in rhythm patterns caused by difference in *varnakala* or time measure. For example, *laghu* has 4 *varnakalas* while *guru* has 8, but the *taals* with either *laghu* or *guru* as *anga* will be called *ektals* since the number of stresses is one in both cases.

In such cases, not only *angaprana* but *jatiprana* is considered. *Jatis* are formed as variations in the *varnakalas* of *laghu* which is considered to be the standard division of *taal*. Since there are no *angas* with 6, 7 or 9 *varnakalas*, *jatis* are applied as variations in the *varnakala* of *laghu*. The number of stresses, however, is one. If we take *taal bhangadesh* of 8 *varnakala*, it is divided as 12/345678; thus, it has *angaprana druta* but since there is no *anga* of *varnakala* 6, we have to take the *ritujati* of *laghu*.

Another interesting aspect of Manipuri rhythmic system is mentioned in the old manuscript, *Mridanga Vyasvastha Sangeet*. *Taal tanchup* of four beats and one stress is considered the standard

ektal. Every Manipuri *taal* has two sections, that is right (*yet*) and left (*oi*) which is similar to *bhari* and *khali* of Hindustani Music. The *tanchup* with four *varnakala* is called *akuppa* in Manipuri while in Sanskrit it is denoted as *ektal*. Sometimes this four *varnakala* of *tanchup* is extended into 8 or 16 *varnakalas*. In that case, the *taal* does not change but the time span is expanded. *Tanchup* of eight *varnakala* is called *mayai* (middle) in Manipuri and *dwikal* (two times) in Sanskrit while *tanchup* of 16 beats is called *araoba* in Manipuri and *chatuskal* (four times) in Sanskrit.

The *taals* are divided into *shudha* (pure) *shalag* (having combination of two *taals* in the basic cycle) and *sankirna* (having combination of more than 2 *taals* in the basic time cycle). These divisions are mentioned in *Krishnarasa Sangeet Sangraha* (fourth chapter). The *shalag* and *sankirna taals* in Manipur are known as *phertal*, where in Bengali *padavali kirtan* is known as *tal pherata* (reference is found in *Banglar Vaishnav Samaj Sangeet O Sahitya* by Vasanti Chowdhury (p. 82) as well as Suresh Chakraborty's introduction to *Geeta Govinda* by Harekrishna Mukhopadhyay).

SOME TERMINOLOGIES

Taal: It is the rhythmical beating of the heart in every living being. However, the term *taal* is being used in this book to indicate the measure of time and the measure of movement from one end to another.

Taantha: In a repeated cycle of limited beats, the fixed beats for various numbers of strikes is called *taantha*.

Matra: Each beat after equal division of many beats in a cycle of a *taal* is called *matra*.

Punglon: It is the notes/boles of the *pung* or the sound of *pung* when played.

Mapung: A complete cycle of the *punglon* that is usually played repeatedly.

Ahaappa: A piece of *punglon* that is played suitably in a *punglon mapung* without changing the *taal* pattern but that enhances the note aesthetically/rhythmically giving richness of variety.

Vahoudok: It is the characteristic of the opening *bol* of any dance or music composition.

Paring: Groups of *bols* composed on a basic *taal*. It is the *theka* of Hindustani music.

Alankar: Ornamentation of rhythm patterns (*prastar/toda*) on the basic *taal*.

Akhaiba: It is the transitory *bol* between two rhythm patterns. It is a piece of adjoining *punglon* that is played as a change over for a new *mapung* or new *taal*.

Konnabi: It is the combination of syllables of the drum reproducing the sound pattern of the song or poem spoken in rhythm.

Athaba: It is the concluding phrase of rhythm patterns of an item.

Phertal: Combination of two or more *avartanas* (basic cycle) of the *taal* according to the *avartan* of the basic *taal* is called *phertal*.

Taal prabandha: A harmonious composition based on the combination of two or more *taals*. It is different from *shalang* and *sankirna taal* which combine only one *avartana* of different *taals*. *Taal prabandha* is a full composition using many *avartanas* of the constituent *taals*.

SYMBOLS AND SIGNS USED IN RHYTHM NOTATION

- + *SUM* (the first main strike), same as in Hindustani.
- 1,2,3.. *CHAPOR* denotes the no beats of a *taal*, where *matra* as in Hindustani.
- 0 *PHAK* means weaving of hands, where *khali* or *phak* as in Hindustani.
- . *BINDU* represents one *matra*, where one syllable as in Hindustani.
- ! *BIRAM* represents the space of one *matra*, where the sign, 'S' as in Hindustani.
- : Half *matra*, where the sign, '—' is used in Hindustani.

- | *BHARI* or *GHAT* where clapping of *taal* is indicated, where it is the *BIBHAG* in Hindustani.
- | ३ | *YUGAL* indicates the place of imposition of another similar *taal* within the *taal* itself.
- ✓ *AROHAN—ABROHAN* indicates sequential weaving of hands of a singer in the manner of back and forth. Besides, the *taal angas* like *laghu*, *guru*, *plut* and *jati* systems of Carnatic music was also used to indicate the numbers of *matra* or *aksharkal* of a *taal* by Manipuri gurus.

On observing the above statements, it seems to be a product of assimilation of Carnatic and Hindustani *taal* system. Further, if we look at some terminologies, naming of *taals* and their structures, etc., there is a lot of similarity with Hindustani *taal* system. We can study them briefly from the modern view of Hindustani *taal sastra* in the following manners:

Padavali Kirtan Taals:

Brahma Taal: |○|○○|○○○|

The above is the symbolic representation of *brahma taal* of 28 *matras* where, *laghu*- ‘|’ is 4 *matra* and *drut*- ‘○’ is 6 *matras* respectively. Only its *angas* indicates a *taal*, i.e. *taal murtis* which is the representation of that particular *taal*. All of the *taals* are based on *angas* of Carnatic Music. Later on, modern *taal lipi* system of Bhatkhande is also very commonly used by Manipuri gurus.

Below are the examples of a Manipuri *taal*, shown in the form of mnemonic syllables, which represents the modern notation system of *manoharsai kirtan* in Figure 2.1. In addition, Figure 2.2 represents the local notation system similar to Bhatkhande Notation.

COMPOSITIONAL FORM OF *HATUTI*

The solo compositions are known as *hatutis*. *Hat* means ‘hand’ and *tuti*, ‘repeating again and again’. All *kirtan* melodies are composed of different *hatuti-mantras*, either partially or in complete form.

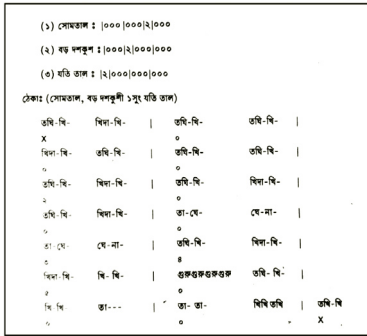


Figure 2.1: As shown in Hindustani

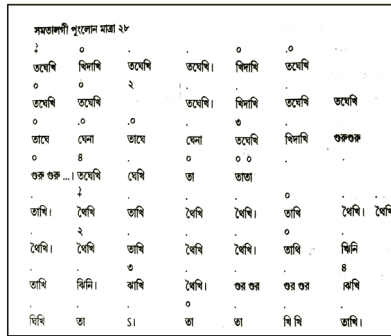
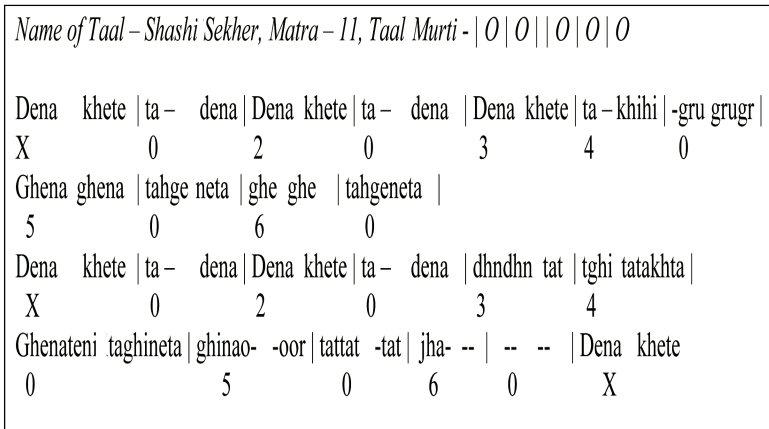


Figure 2.2: As shown in Traditional

Another example of a rhythmic cycle (*taal*) in Bhatkande Notation:



Thus, by learning *hatuti*, not only hand become very strong but also learn to speak on the *khol*, by meeting the vast realm of different *taal* and rhythms. *Hatuti* is a combination of *bols* that are passed from generation to generation. They are very carefully put together and consist of mainly of three parts; introduction part, developing part and resolving part.

There are 108 *hatutis* and usually, depending on the audience and occasion, one or more are played with an accompaniment of *karatals* and other percussion instruments. Before starting *hatuti*

compositions, one usually plays an introductory composition several cycles long. The introductory composition can itself be a *hatuti*, with all the parts. Between one *hatuti* and the next, the *khol* player plays the connecting (*mukhras*) *hatuti* which can be understood as a *kayda* in the Hindustani Music. The developing part can be represented as *paltas/relas*, the resolving part as *tihais*, and introductory part as *peshkars* or long *mukhras*.

INTRODUCTORY *HATUTIS* (STAGE SETTING)

This *hatuti* recital is intended for small solo presentations before performing devotional rituals, public parades, *bhajans*, etc. The *hatuti* uses some of the non-*khol* sounds, such as clapping of hands. The main developing part is a short, groovy, rhythmic pattern, that is similar to those pieces played on public rituals involving group dancing, etc. However, the ending *tihais* are somewhat hard and cannot be used as an accompaniment to other instrumental music. This *hatuti* is introductory and goes together with some other *hatutis* that use clapping or waving of hands.

1. *Introduction Part*

Da	guru	gur	jha	jha		
Tete	tete	kheta	tak			
tete	tete	kheta	tak			
tete	tete	kheta	tak			
tete	tete	kheta	tak	tere	kheta	
tete	tete	kheta	tak	tere	kheta	
ete	tete	kheta	tak	tere	kheta	

Resolving Tehai

tete	tete	kheta	tak	tere	kheta	tak	dhinta	dhinta
jha								
tete	tete	kheta	tak	tere	kheta	tak	dhinta	dhinta
jha								
tete	tete	kheta	tak	tere	kheta	tak	dhinta	dhinta

2. *Developing Part*

tak	dhin	taka	taka	tak	dhin	ta (clap)
tak	dhin	digi	digi	tak	dhin	ta (clap)
tak	dhin	taka	taka	tak	dhin	ta (clap)
tak	dhin	digi	digi	tak	dhin	ta (clap)
tak	dhin	taka	taka	tak	dhin	ta (clap)
tak	dhin	digi	digi	tak	dhin	ta (clap)
tak	dhin	digi	digi	tak	dhin	ta (clap)
tak	dhin	digi	digi	tak	dhin	ta (clap)
tak	dhin	digi	digi	tak	dhin	ta (clap)

Variation 1

tak	dhin	ta,	tak	dhin	ta,	tak	dhin	tak
dhin	tak	dhin	ta . . .	So on.				

3. *Resolving Part (Ending Tehai)*

tere	kheta	gade	ghine	tak	dhin	tadhin	ta	jha
tere	kheta	gade	ghine	tak	dhin	tadhin	ta	jha
tere	kheta	gade	ghine	tak	dhin	tadhin	ta	
tak	dhinta	dhinta	jha					
tak	dhinta	dhinta	jha					
tak	dhinta	dhinta						
tak	dhinta	dhinta	jha					
tak	dhinta	dhinta	jha					
tak	dhinta	dhinta	<i>finished</i>					

CONCLUSION

Thus, the usage of the rhythm of Manipuri *khols* in the traditional Manipuri *manoharsai* singing is purified and becomes the most spontaneous activities of social life in general are not without some musical characteristics. Musical tones and rhythms are symbolic of social facts. All races are genuinely musical at all times and places and each phase of human existence brings forth its own perfect musical expression. Thus, rhythm communicates the state

of human nature in the context of different cultures. It is a fact that the standard of development of Manipuri society can be known from its achievements in the field of arts and culture, as it is an indispensable part of Manipuri society and the mirror of its aesthetic values.

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Re-Thinking Cultural Heritage: The Sankirtan Tradition of the Raseshori Pala

REKHA KONSAM

In today's interconnected world, culture's power to transform societies is clear. Its diverse manifestations—from our cherished historic monuments and museums to traditional practices and contemporary art forms—enrich our everyday lives in countless ways.

UNESCO¹

What does it mean to think about or approach something as 'cultural heritage', whether it be tangible as a building or intangible as a practice? How is it different from approaching the same as 'tradition'? The article attempts to engage in these questions taking the case of the Raseshori Pala.² The article is foregrounded in the recognition of the *nat sankirtan* tradition of Manipuri Vaishnavism as part of the UNESCO's 'intangible cultural heritage' in 2013.³ The article takes up two points: (i) a critical approach towards a theoretical understanding of the concept of 'cultural heritage' with particular reference to practice; and (ii) taking this understanding to the specific case of the *sankirtan* tradition of the Raseshori Pala. It draws on an on-going research project.

To begin with, the notion of cultural heritage is not an easy concept to pin down. How do we understand or translate it in a different language and how does one work vis-à-vis such categorizations? This is a question that Adele Esposito (2014) pursues in an attempt to study how language and concepts play out. Imran

bin Tajudeen (2011) highlights how the terms ‘heritage’ and ‘tradition’ are both ambiguous terms that also share similarity in their basic meaning to mean something which has been handed down. He goes on to say how they become laden when used with ‘culture’. As he argues, the exercise of producing cultural heritage involves contemporary frames of reference and signification. In a sense, it emerges at a point when there is a realization of the need to salvage certain things/practices/beliefs in a rapidly changing material world as against those which are seen to be losing ground. In this sense, there is a strong sentiment of ‘saving’ associated with a sense of threat as against which there is a need to nurture and retain them. It works within the realization that these aspects of culture are under threat and that special actions or focussed interventions are required to sustain them in the contemporary world.

In the context of tangible cultural heritage, the conservation of concrete structures has taken an important place. In recent times, there has been much concern about threats posed to them sparked by the current political trends in places like Afghanistan and Syria. An important point in these discussions has been the juxtaposition of ‘heritage’ as remnant of the past as against the immediate needs of the present where lives of people are at stake in the same society that has seen a lot of instability and destruction. It highlights the tension between (keeping alive of) the past and (the demands of) the present. This tension is even more pronounced in the case of those intangible cultural heritages that are primarily rooted in practice. Rather than objects or artefacts that stand apart outside the individual, these are lived and carried forward across generations through its practitioners, its people. In other words, the practice survives in the people. As Philip Scher (2002) notes in certain kinds of writings where traditional practices are presented and discussed, it is presented in such a way that it is removed from its people who are the actual practitioners of the said practice.

Keeping in mind the notion of cultural practice as something intangible that is carried forward through the people, I focus attention on the *sankirtan* tradition of the Raseshori Pala in the backdrop of the UNESCO recognition of the *nat sankirtan* as an intangible cultural heritage on the one hand while on the other

hand, there is an extension of support by the present government with its announcements to foster the *sankirtan* tradition.⁴ The devotional performance of *sankirtan* has an important place in the practice of Manipuri Vaishnavism (Khangamcha, 2014; Sharma, 2016). It is comparable to a *yajna* and for this reason, it is crucial in the life cycle rituals of the Hindu Meitei.⁵ There are various technicalities and critical points that are involved in the *sankirtan* tradition. This article focuses specifically on the tradition of the Raseshori Pala.

THE INSTITUTING OF THE RASESHORI PALA

Established under the tutelage of Maharaja Bhagychandra (AD 1763-98), the Raseshori Pala was a dream conceived by his daughter, Princess Bimbavati. She is also known as ‘Raseshori’ for being privileged to perform the part of the divine lover of Krishna in the first ever performance of the Rasa Lila held at Langthabal. The princess is said to have been a young girl when she graced this performance and as she grew up, she remained devoted to the Lord Shri Govinda. Due to her fervent devotion, she came to be known as *Shija Laiioibi*. It was the dream of this devout princess to organize a group comprising of women to perform the devotional *sankirtan* singing (Devi 2006, 2009, 2010).

The *sankirtan* performance, until this point of time, was performed exclusively by men. While women were allowed to attend and experience its devotional milieu, they were restricted from participating in it. The Raseshori Pala holds the distinction of being the first women’s *sankirtan* group. The instituting of the Raseshori Pala as such a group paved the way for the inclusion of women in the performing tradition of the *sankirtan* which had, until then remained within the exclusive purview of male performers. It, however, continued to remain exclusive as it was not open to all women but restricted to the women of the Karta line of descent. The Jalakeli Pala was later instituted along similar lines as a group exclusive to the daughters of the Narsingh line of descent. While the Raseshori Pala remained delimited to the daughters and granddaughters of the Kartas, the Jalakeli Pala, during a later period

during the reign of Churachand Maharaj (1891-1941), initiated a sub-section to allow the inclusion of women married into the Narsingh fold.⁶ The Nupi Pala, as is more frequently used to refer to the women's *pala* in the broader sense, is believed to have followed the two groups linked to royalty. The term usually refers to the women's group of *sankirtan* performers whose members are specially trained in the singing tradition of these devotional songs. It is not a restricted group and its membership is open to all women.

DEVOTIONAL PERFORMANCE AND THE RASESHORI PALA

The tradition of Raseshori Pala opens up interesting questions. Its establishment was significant as it carved the way for the participation of women in *nat sankirtan* performance which, until that point of time, had remained a restricted arena for women. It was the exclusive domain of men to which the participation of women had remained excluded. To understand the importance of this point, one needs to remember that the *nat sankirtan* performances were not just devotional singing by a devotee. It was a structured event that was minutely detailed in terms of religious philosophy as well as aesthetic expression of Manipuri Vaishnavism.

The establishment of the first women's *pala* involved detailed discussions and deliberations on the established customs and norms of the time. In the oral accounts of how this came to take concrete form, credit is given to the princess Bimbavati and her devotional fervour, particularly her semi-divine status. She was the princess who had taken the part of Raseshori (another name for Radha) in the first performance of the Rasa Lila organized by Maharaja Bhagyachandra. The image of Raseshori could not be completed in time for the event for various reasons. As a result, it was only the image of Govinda that graced the performance. Bimbavati, as a young girl, performed the part of Radha. The princess is said to have never married a man as she considered herself married to the deity to whom she was devoted. She came to be called Shija Laiiobi (Devi, 2009). Because she had been blessed with the privilege of performing the part of the divine consort and spent her life in

fervent devotion to the Lord Govinda, she is given a special place in the religious tradition of Manipuri Vaishnavism.

It was the expressed wish of the semi-divine princess that there be a group of women singing the *sankirtan* devotional songs that are dedicated to Shri Govinda. Her wish was initially refused by her father, the king on the grounds that women cannot perform the *sankirtan*. The matter was further taken up for discussion between the king and 'knowledgeable' concerned people. It was finally decided that the wish of the princess was the expressed wish of the divine 'Raseshori' and as a wish coming from her, it was decided to institute a women's *sankirtan* group. Instituting this was not just the replacement of the male singers by the female singers, it involved re-working the performance structure in such a way that women could be a part of a *sankirtan* performance. While this article does not address the structure of the performance, it is worth noting that the establishment of the Raseshori is significant not just because it was the first women's *pala* but that it was an innovative tradition in its time.

WOMEN AND THE RASESHORI PALA

The Raseshori Pala was an exclusive tradition. It included people closely linked to the royal family. Through the passage of time the group has primarily consisted of the daughters and granddaughters of the Karta (Bhagyachandra) line of descent. In the present time also, they continue to form its active members and the privilege parts in the performance continue to be performed by people belonging to this core group.

Approaching the Raseshori Pala in the context of the *sankirtan*, devotional performances open out to the promise of an enriching depth in understanding the practices of Manipuri Vaishnavism. However, it is not the only way of approaching it. As discussed in the earlier part of this article, there are different ways of approaching ritual practice. Attention can be focussed on the practice itself or it can be seen as a practice carried forward by its practitioners, its people. Following the second line of approach, the Raseshori Pala is a tradition initiated during the time of the Princess Bimbavati