

## The music of Sattriya and Manipuri dance: A comparative study



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### Abstract

Music and musical instruments play a significant role in any dance forms. Music has that potential of aesthetic power to enhance any dance composition. This research paper mainly focusses on the aesthetic musical accompaniment of the two major classical dance forms of North East India, Sattriya and Manipuri dance. The term music in this research paper encompasses songs, instruments and the rhythmic pattern of some of the talas. A comparative analysis will be done in this research paper which will be based on primary sources, i.e. discussions with related people of the field and secondary sources comprises books, journals and internet content.

**Key Words:** Sattriya, Manipuri dance, Music, Musical instruments, Rhythm

### Research Paper

“Rhythm is the creative force in the hand of the artist. So long as words remain in uncadenced prose form, they do not give any lasting feeling of reality. The moment they are taken and put into rhythm they vibrate into a radiance” (Cuthbertson 1968, 19).

In dance framework *Vachika Abhinaya* encompasses songs and dialogues. Both vocal and instrumental music are the two sides of one coin that together embellishes the dance composition.

*Tatam caivavanaddham ca ghanam susirameva ca /  
Caturvidham tu vijneyamatodyam laksananvitam* //<sup>[1]</sup>

Bharatmuni classified the instruments into four categories:

- *Tata* includes the string instruments such as vina, sitar etc.
- *Avanaddha* are the covered or the percussion instruments including khol, pung, pakhawaj etc.
- *Gana vadya* are the metal instruments, those are made up of metals. Cymbals fall under this category.
- *Susira vadya* are the hollow instruments. Flute is the best example of this category.



### Music: Sattriya dance

The music employed in Sattriya dance has its own uniqueness. Both Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva composed a number of songs as *Borgeet*, *Ankar git*, *Bhatima*, *Totaya*, *Kirtan ghosa* and *Namghosa*. Among these, *Borgeet* and *Ankar git* may be referred as the classical mode of Assam's Vaishnava music, in order to spread the Neo-Vaishnava faith in the state.

### Borgeet

The devotional music that was composed by Sankaradeva and his disciple Madhavadeva in the

15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century to spread *Neo-Vaishnavism* in Assam is known as '*Borgeet*'. Later poet's composition of such similar songs is not referred as *borgeet*. Sankaradeva composed various devotional songs to inculcate the Krishna bhakti among the lay people. Madhavadeva too followed his guru's footprint and composed numerous devotional borgeets. According to the *Charit Puthis*, "Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva referred to their songs as *git* only"<sup>[2]</sup>. The prefix '*Bor*' (*Bawr*) must have been added later by the disciples of the two Vaishnava saints. Two reasons can be concluded for the addition of such prefix *Bor*. The first one is its place of importance in the religious rituals. They are sung in a proper decretals style in the *Mahapurusiya Sampradaya* (sect). The other being the non-manipulation of these songs by the provincial traditional decree. The term *Borgeet* has been opined by different scholars in different ways –

- 'Great Songs' or 'Songs Celestial' by Kaliram Medhi.<sup>[3]</sup>
- 'Bargeets are crown pearls of Music' by Kirtinath Sarma Bordoloi (atributetosankaradeva.org n.d.)
- 'Noble numbers' by Banikanta Kakati<sup>[4]</sup>
- 'Holy songs' by Debendranath Bezbaruah<sup>[5]</sup>

Borgeets are sung in congregational prayer in the *Sattras* and village *Namghars*. It is known from the *Charit Puthis* that Sankaradeva himself composed 240 songs out of which 34 are extant, the rest being lost in the fire. On the other hand, Madhavadeva composed 191 songs, out of which only 157 are present. A total of 191 *geets* are extant today. Sankaradeva wrote his first *Borgeet* '*Mana Meri Rama Caranahi lagu*' on his first pilgrimage at Badrikashram.

"Opinions vary as regards the borgit as a distinct class of music. Some held that it belongs to the dhrupada school of music while other declare that it is by itself a distinct class.....The general construction, the division into anibaddha, and the names of ragas and talas which are attached to these songs distinctly shown that bargit is a branch of Indian classical music. The dhrupada has also the two parts of anibaddha and nibaddha. But the bargit singers are not found using the art of laya, i.e duguna, chauguna, adi, upaja, which are used in the dhrupada style. Moreover, Mansingha Tomar whose name is associated with the dhrupada style, was a contemporary of Akbar, and belonged probably to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The bargits preceded that period"<sup>[6]</sup> The *prabandha gitas*, referred to in the 13<sup>th</sup> century musical treatise, were earlier than the *dhrupadas*.

They belong to the days of Jayadeva. Hence, it shall not be incorrect to assume that the *prabandha gitas* to a certain extent have influenced the borgeets.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Language

The lineage of the Assamese poetry is always drawn from the *Bauddha Caryagits* prevalent between 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Centuries by different scholars and connoisseurs. *Ragas* such as *Baradi*, *Mallari*, *Dhanasri* are found in the *Charya Pada* stanzas that concur with the Kamarupa music. It is claimed that the language of the *Charya Padas* is closer to that of the ancient Assamese language and this context adds weight as Buddhist poets like Meennath, Gorakhnath belonged to Kamarupa. The language employed in these devotional songs are in *Brajavali*. The scholars believed that "it was never the language of any people of any place and time. Instead, it was an artificially designed idiom that has been known in the Sattriya circles as *Brajavali*".<sup>[8]</sup> There are differences in opinion among the scholars regarding the formation of the artificial poetic idioms. It is believed that the *Brajavali* is an admixture of *Maithili*, *Assamese*, *Bengali*, *Hindi*, *Udiya*, *Newari* and *Brajabhasa*.

## Subject-matter and Rasas

The *Borgeets* of both the saints excels in poetic and aesthetic beauty. They generally reveal the theme of Lord Krishna. These devotional songs mainly manifest the *bhakti rasa* along with the *viraha* (separation of gopis from Krishna). Sankaradeva beautifully express the vedantic philosophy in his *Borgeet* composition. *Paramartha tatva* (the ultimate divinity) is the main subject-matter of Sankaradeva's *Borgeet*. He describes in his *Borgeets* the uselessness of transitory life attached with worldly desires. Madhavadeva's *Borgeet* depict the deeds of child Krishna containing *vatsalya rasa*. His *Borgeets* mainly convey the *chora*, *chaturi* and *leela* themes. Both the saints never expressed the love of Radha and Krishna. These are free from the conjugal love. According to different themes the *Borgeets* are divided into the following categories –

1. *Viraha* (Separation)
2. *Virakti* (Annoying)
3. *Chora* (Stealing)
4. *Chaturi* (Clever)
5. *Leela* (Divine sports)
6. *Paramartha* (to attain the knowledge of Supreme being)

These six subject-matter are the six basic sentiments or *rasas* of *Borgeet*. The *leela* theme *Borgeets* are again sub-categorised into six classes –

1. *Jagaran* (Mother Yasodha wake up child Krishna)
2. *Chalan* (Going to graze the cows)
3. *Khelan* (Playing with the milkmaids)
4. *Nritya* (Dancing)
5. *Chora* (Stealing butter-milk)
6. *Chaturi* (Cleverness)

According to B.C Mahanta there is not even the slightest present of *Karuna*, *Bibhatsa* and *Raudra* in the *Borgeets*. Besides this, the other six *rasas* are present. Among this six *rasas* *Veer*, *Bhayanaka* and *Hasya* are observed in scanty. *Shringar* and *Adbhuta* are clearly visible.<sup>[9]</sup> But the pivotal theme of *Borgeet* is *bhakti* and the main *rasa* is *bhakti*.

### Ragas and Talas

*Raga* (raag) define the traditional pattern of musical notes which express different moods in a musical piece. The ragas in *borgeets* are mainly divided into two categories.

- *Mela raga*
- *Bandha raga*

*Mela raga* means ‘open’. *Mela ragas* are generally sung without employing any *tala*. According to the Kamalabari satras, *Mela ragas* are the creations of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva’s.<sup>[10]</sup> The recitation of *Namghosa*, *Kirtan ghosa*, *Sloka* of *Ankiya naat*, *Bhatima* etc are recited in *Mela* style.

*Bandha raga* means ‘restricted’. These *borgeets* are sung with *tala*. It is said that the *Bandha ragas* are mainly associated with the *sangeet* tradition of *Ojapali* prevalent in the satra circles. *Bandha ragas* like *Jayashri*, *Malashri*, *Paharia*, *Khat*, *Salengi* etc sung in *Ojapali* tradition are actually not present in the *raga* list of *Borgeet*.<sup>[11]</sup>

There are 36 *ragas* of *Borgeets* utilized by both Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. These are –

*Aowari*, *Nat Mallar*, *Gauri*, *Suhai*, *Basanta*, *Shri*, *Kedar*, *Mahur Dhanasri*, *Tur*, *Tur Basanta*, *Kalyan*, *Kanara*, *Sindhura*, *Belowar*, *Shyam*, *Mahur*, *Sri Gandhar*, *Ahir*, *Bhatiali*, *Sareng*, *Shri Gauri*, *Kau*, *Nat*, *Purvi*, *Bhupali*, *Tur Bhupali*, *Kamod*, *Mallar*, *Baradi*, *Lalit*, *Shyamgarha*, *Gandhar*, *Karunya-*

*Kedar*, *Shri Poyer* and *Kau-Kalyan-Sindhura*.

Amongst them *Gandhar*, *Karunya-Kedar*, *Shri Poyer*, *Sareng*, *Kau-Kalyan-Sindhura*, and *Sri Gauri* are the ragas used only in *Ankiya naat*.<sup>[12]</sup>

From the above list, the names of the *ragas* are found in the Indian music treatise except the raga *Kau*, employed by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, which seems to be unfamiliar to the students of Indian music. “*Raga Kau* does not appear in any of the old Sanskrit treatises, but reference is available of a *raga* called *Kahu* in the *Caryapadas* composed by the Buddhist *Siddhas* of the eastern region. There was possibility that *Kau* was derived from *raga Kahu* which was once popular in the eastern region of India.” (Phukan 2016, 61). Karabi Deka Hazarika states, “the ragas *Tur*, *Bhupali*, *Purvi* and *Sareng* used in Sankaradeva’s songs find no place in the songs of Madhavadeva.”<sup>[13]</sup>

An important aspect of the *Borgeets* is that no *raginis* are used. The reason may be due to “no female principle is to be found in the religious system of Sankaradeva” (<http://atributetosankaradeva.org>, 2008). Maheswar Neog states, “Much stress has been laid upon the fact that in the Vaishnava music in Assam *raginis* or ‘female melodies’ are absent; and this again is ascribed in some quarters to another remote fact no female principle is to be worshipped in Sankara’s system of religion. Whatever might be said about this parallelism, it stands out clear that no distinction between *raga* and *ragini* seems to have been ever envisaged in Assam’s music.”<sup>[14]</sup>

*Tala* spelled as *Taal* is define as the rhythmic beat that measures musical time. It is referred as clapping of hand. It is believed that the word *Tala* originated from the *Tandav nritya* of Shiva- the letter “*Ta*” and “*La*” from Parvati’s *Lasya nritya*.<sup>[15]</sup> The rhythmic beat is identified by two positions, *tali* and *khali* represented as (x) and (0) respectively. “*Tali* (clap) is an emphatic position of a rhythmic cycle, while *sam* (*sama*), the first *tali* of a rhythmic cycle is recognized as the most emphatic position. It is the *sama* that creates aesthetic excitement among the players and the audience.”<sup>[16]</sup> *Khali* means without beat represented simply by waving the hand. In Sattriya the term *tali* mean *Chapori* and *khali* mean *Maan* or *Xuda*. The *raga* in a *borgeet* is generally mentioned at the top but no *tala* is indicated in the *borgeets* except the “*Sadachandar git*” of Sankaradeva. The *Sadachandar git* determines the *tala*, but why he used the term *Sadachandar* is not yet ascertained.

“A bargita does not always have to keep rhythm in its singing. When an individual Vaishnava pours out his devotion in public or in a domestic temple in the measures of a bargita, he does not generally submit to the control of rhythmic beats. At other times, especially in congregations, when one man or a group of individuals performs a bargita, tala is to be maintained. The adept knows what such rhythm is to be adopted in executing a particular melody. The Asowari raga is commonly timed to Yati-man, Kalyana to Kharman, and so on. In the case of each of the three bargitas, known as sadachandar gita, three talas are successively prescribed.”<sup>[17]</sup>

The talas employed in Borgeets vary from Sattria to Sattria. The various talas used in Ankiya geets are – *Ektali, Kharman, Cutkala, Cuta, Yatiman, Domani, Visamatal, Parital, Rupak tal and Mancho*.<sup>[18]</sup> “The rhythms *Rachak* and *Thaktala* (an upa-tala), which were found in the songs of Madhavadeva, were not used by Sankardeva in his songs”.<sup>[19]</sup> “According to the ojas of the sattras there are twelve Talas and twelve Upatalas. The 12 Talas are: Ektala, Kharman, Chutkala, Dasbari, Domani, Dharamyati, Vara-yati, Vara-visama, Saru-visama, Paritala, Racaka-tala, and Rupaka. The twelve Upatalas are: Actola, adsari, Arvisama, Unayati, Olota-ganjol, Rupa-ganjol, Suda-ganjol, Chab-tala, Chuta, Tora-visama, Pur-visama, and Matha-tala. The Kamalabari-sattria in the district of Sibsagar, which seems to present the norm in the matter of Vaishnava music and dancing, still possess twenty-six talas, which include all these twenty-four except Racaka, Adsari, Arvisama, Olata-ganjol, chab-tala, Chuta, Fora-visama, Pur-visama and Matha-tala; and, have in addition, Raktatala, Matha-yati, Tak-tala, Virupatala, Brahmatala, Carikhaniya, Khan yati, Tinimani, Cari-mani, Panc-mani and Dovaj.”<sup>[20]</sup>

The three different tempos i.e the *vilambit* (slow), *madhya* (medium) and *druta* (fast) are found in the Sattriya musical repertoire. For example, the initial *bol* of *Jhumura* and *Chali nritta* starts with *vilambit laya*.

**Jih | thak S**

x x

The *bol* of *Chali gitor (Ektaal)* generally played in *madhya laya*.

**Khitdhai | dhaidhai | dhoga | tinda**

x o x o

The *cok* part of *gitor nac* of *Chali* or *Jhumura* played on *druta laya*. *Jhumura chok*:

**Dherkhita | khitidau | takhinita | khitidau |**

x o x o

**dherkhita | takhinita | khitidau**

x x o

**dhinadhina | dhinadhina | tadhenidhe | nitadhina |**

x o x o

**dherkhita | takhinita | khitidau**

x x o

The *tala* pattern consists of three parts in Sattriya musical repertoire –

- *Gamaan*: the *ga-bajona* (main bol) or the rhythmic pattern of a taal. It is similar to that of theka in Hindusthani music.
- *Ghat*: denotes the end or change of the bol. In sattras like Kamalabari the ghat is employed in between the text of the singing lines. While in some other sattras like Chamaguri sattria the singing continues even if the ghat is played on.
- *Cok*: the last part of *gitor nac* is played in *druta laya*. It means ‘sharp, quick, pungent’.<sup>[21]</sup> It may be compared to Manipuri *thuba-pung-leng* (quick-drum-sound).<sup>[22]</sup>

The following *Kharman tala* of 8 *matras* shows the above three parts:

Matras - 8, taal - 4, khali - 1, bibhag - 5

*Gamaan*: 1+1+1+1+0

**rata tak | dhei | dhei | dhinaS Su | SS SS**

x x x x o

*Ghat*:

**dhei kheti | tak | dhei | kheti tak | dhei SS**

x x x x o

**dhina khita | khita | khita | kheti tadhi | nadhi nak**

x x x x o

*Cok*:

**tata khirkhir | rata | khitdhei | tata khirkhir | rata khitdhei**

x x x x o

**tata khirkhir | rata | khitdhei | tata khirkhir | rata khitdhei**

x x x x o

(Again, ghat repeated)

The music in Sattriya moves in a gradual crescendo. The most commonly used talas are:

- *Thukoni*: matras - 3, taalis - 2, khalis-0, bibhag - 3

**Jih** | **thak S**

x x

- *Cuta tala*: matras - 4, taalis - 2, khalis - 2, bibhag - 4

**dhina** | **khiti** | **nadhei** | **khiti**

o x o x

- *Ektala*: matras - 8, taalis -1, khalis -1, bibhag - 2

**thei S jih** **thak** | **thene yangi tak S**

x o

- *Paritala*: matras-7, taalis - 1, khalis - 3, bibhag - 4

**dhina** | **theni tak** | **dhina theni** | **theni tak**

o o o x

or

matras - 21, taalis - 6, khalis - 3 bibhag - 6

**tau SS** | **tau khiti** | **tak dhei SS**

x x o

**dheni tadhi** | **nau khiti** | **tak dhei SS**

x x o

**dhina tata** | **tau SS** | **SS SS SS**

x x o

- *Rupaka tala*: matras - 12, taalis - 4, khalis - 2, bibhag - 6

**Dhei dau** | **dhei dau** | **tinta krikri**

x x o

**Rau drik** | **dau SS** | **khiti SS**

x x o

- *Jyoti*: matras - 14, taalis - 8, khalis - 6, bibhag - 14

**ratanita** | **khititak** | **ratanita** | **khititak**

x o x o

**ratanita** | **khitidau** | **khidadhei**

x x o

**dhinanita** | **khidadhei** | **dhinanita** | **khidadhei**

x o x o

**dhinanita** | **khitidau** | **khiti**

x x o

- *Cutkala*: matras-28, taalis-12, khalis-4, bibhag-16

**dhei** | **tata khita** | **dhei dau** | **dhei** | **dau**

x x x o

**taS** | **dhei dau** | **khita takhi** | **dau SS**

x x x o

**tau** | **tata khita** | **dhei dau** | **dhei dau**

x x x o

**ta** | **dhei dau** | **khita takhi** | **dau SS**

x x x o

## Presentation Style

The *Borgeets* are traditionally sung in prayer songs. The *Borgeets* form an indispensable part of *Nama-Kirtana* in the *Sattras* circles. They are grouped together and sung at different hours of the day. There are specific restrictions, regarding which *raga* is to be sung, in which part of the day. The conventional rules are –

1. Morning ragas: *Ahir, Shyam, Kau* etc
2. Afternoon ragas: *Gauri, Basanta, Sri, Dhanasri,* etc
3. Evening ragas: *Asowari, Belowar, Kedar* etc
4. First part of night ragas: *Suhai, Sindhura, Kanara* etc
5. Second part of night ragas: *Bhupali, Kamod* etc

*Borgeets* are sung in two ways, with *tala* and without *tala*. When a *Borgeet* is sung with one *tala* or more *talas* are known as *Bandha raga* while it is sung without *tala* is known as *Mela raga*<sup>[23]</sup> According to the Kamalabari satras, *Mela ragas* are the creations of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. The recitation of *Namghosa, Kirtan ghosa, Sloka* of *Ankiya naat, Bhatima* etc are recited in *Mela* style. The *Borgeets* are sung in the *Mela ragas* in the routine rituals of *Nama-Kirtana* in the *Sattras* and *Namghars*. The *Mela ragas* starts with the resonance of *Govind, Raam, Gopal* etc. while the *Bandha ragas* starts with *Hereri, tanena, hauri* etc.

The *Borgeets* and *Ankiya geets* both are employed in Sattriya dance. In *Jhumura nritya* (male dance form) the *borgeet* is employed in the *gitor* part sung in *bandha raga*. The dancer keeps the rhythm in the *ga-man* and dances in the *bhangani* and *cok* part.

*Uddhava Chalahu Gokula Lai*

*Hamu Bine Gopir Tilaka Jug Jai*

(Sankardeva, *Borgeet* in *Sri raga*)

Similarly, in *Chali nritya* (female dance form) both *borgeets* and *ankiya geets* are employed. First the rhythm is sustained by footmovements in the *ga-man* part and dances in *ghat* and *cok* part. At the completion of *cok* part the *geet* comes to end.

***Jashomati pekhite nayana jurai***  
***Jagajan-jivana bhakata paramadhana***

(*Madhavdeva, Borgeet in Bhupali raga*)

In *Nadubhangi nritya* (Male dance form) the same performance style is followed as *Chali* and *Jhumura* but here instead *Bandha raga, Mela ragas* are used.

***Ab Sakhi Pekho Madana Gopala***

(*Madhavdeva, Borgeet in Saranga raga*)

The dance numbers like *Jhumura, Nadubhangi, Bhojan Bahar* are all performed in special occasions in the *Sattras* without performing any *abhinaya* in the *borgeet*. But today while performing on the proscenium stage, *abhinaya* is performed in the *borgeet* and while playing the *ghat* and *cok* the performer danced instead of *abhinaya*. Different choreographies have been incorporated in different ways in a *Borgeet* and the widely vogue is performing *sanchari abhinaya* in between the couplets of a *borgeet*. The *geet* is represented with *rasa* and *bhava* by the performer and ultimately merges in *bhakti rasa*.

In an interview with Padmashree Jatin Goswami, eminent Sattriya exponent, shared that Odissi and Sattriya exponent Garima Hazarika was the first dancer who composed *abhinaya* on a *borgeet* in Sattriya dance.<sup>[24]</sup>

These *borgeets* proved to be one of the strongest vehicles of propagation of *bhakti* in the Vaishnavite movement of Assam.

### **Ankar gits**

The *ankar gits* are the songs employed in the *ankiya naats*. The *tala* and *raga* of *ankar gits* are always mentioned in the *naats*. They are performed in the course of dramatic representations having contextual relevance in the *ankas* revealing different themes often lighter than that of *borgeet*. Few *ankar gits* are also observed singing in as a part of *Prasanga* like the *borgeet*.

### **Kirtan ghosa and Namghosa**

The verses of *Kirtan ghosa* (composed by Sankaradeva) and *Namghosa* (composed by Madhavadeva) are sung in the congregational prayers held in the namghars of *sattras* and villages and those are executed without *raga* and *tala*. These *ghosas* are mostly represented with *tala* and *raga* in the Sattriya recital on stage either in the beginning or at the end of a performance. Sometimes they are also observed performing as an *abhinaya* piece on stage.

### **Bhatima**

These are eulogy to the Lord, the King, the Guru or the hero. They are executed without *tala* and *raga* in *Ankiya naat*. In Sattriya recital while performing on proscenium stage sometimes with or without *tala* is used to depict the meaning of the *bhatima*. These are found to be expressed in both *shabda abhinaya* and *artha abhinaya*.

### **Totaya**

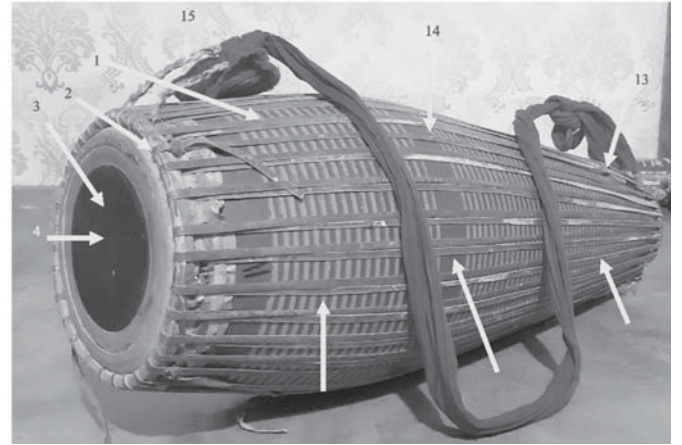
The *Totaya* metre, glorifying Krishna was composed by Sankaradeva at the Koc court of King Naranarayana.

***Madhu danava darana deva varam***

***Vara varija locana chakra dharam***

This *Totaya* metre has been performed in *abhinaya* in the Sattriya recital.

The musical instruments played an important role in Sattriya repertoire. The instruments employed are *Khol* (drum), *Taal* (cymbal), *Behela* (violin), *Bahi* (flute), *Kali, Doba, Nagara, Sankh, Sitar, Harmonium* etc. Among these the *Khol* is the most significant instrument of Sattriya dance. It is regarded as '*Deva Badya*' (God's instrument).



Picture of a *Khol* and its various alamkars

The alamkars of the *Khol*:

1. Baya	2. Puli	3. Ghun
4. Major Taali	5. Maidan	6. Katani sal
7. Moluwa	8. Gajara or Singar	9. Rupohi
10. Garbhamani	11. Rosi or Duwali	12. Daina
13. Khula / Dima	14. Boroti	15. Tikoni

If we study the history of *Khol* it is evident in the *Charit Puthi* that Sankaradeva was pioneer in the

innovation of the *Khol* at the time of the representation of *Cihna yatra*. It is written as:

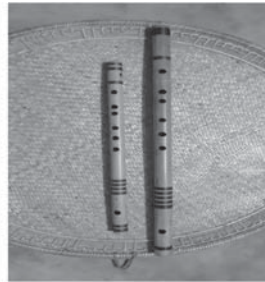
*“Kapili nadir pora kumar onai  
Mati khil gohrailanta sankara gohain /  
Salmara haite musiyar onai  
Aage thaki bhala mote kholok sowailo /  
Kara kara bhat loha guri mishra kori  
Sankare diyaelo ghun khule xur dhori //”*<sup>[25]</sup>

From the above, it is clearly evident that Sankaradeva got *khol* made by the potters of Kapilimukh and the cobblers from Salmara. The *ghun* (the black circle part on the khol) was prepared with the mixture of cold boiled rice and iron powder. Though the *khol* is not only found in Assam but in Manipur too with the name *Pung* with its little difference in cognizance in regard to its size and dimension.

Some other musical instruments employed in the dance form are given below



Doba



Flute



Khuti taal  
(Small cymbal)



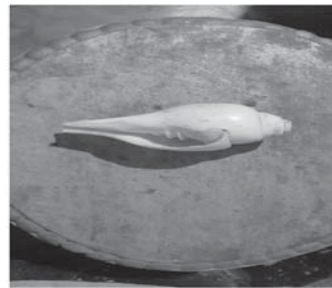
Pati taal  
(Medium sized cymbal)



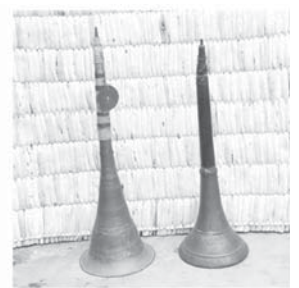
Nagara



Violin



Sankh



Kali



Harmonium



Tanpura

### Music: Manipuri Dance



The Manipuri dance is one of the most elegant classical dance forms with its vibrant rhythmic expressions. The *Chaitanite Vaishnavism* dominates the Manipuri culture significantly. The music of Manipuri is similar to that of the Hindustani music. However, there are differences in nomenclature of *talas* and *ragas* and in the presentation style. Sruti Bandopadhyay stated, “The vocal raga and ragini of the Hindusthani music has been adopted in classical Manipuri singing but the primary connotations are that of the Kirtana style of singing. Moreover, the pre-existing style of the *laiharaoba* singing has influenced the classical technique also. For a long time, the natural and impromptu singing was encouraged and not much of trained singing was

introduced in Rasalila, the lack of adequate training in Hindusthani raga was perceived. But the outlook of the Manipuri people gave this type of singing a special nuance which became the identification of the Manipuri singing. Kirtana received a special treatment in Manipur and a new dimension was set to this presentation. As mentioned earlier the style of singing is called the *Natasaishak*.<sup>[26]</sup> *Natasaishak* is the blending of *Khulanga-ishei* (Manipuri folk style of singing) and *Kirtana* style of Bengal singing. The quivering style of singing in Manipuri is one of the peculiar characteristic (*kampan alamkara*) that transforms the presentation into a much higher level of aesthetic approach.

R.K Singhajit Singh penned, “The typical classical singing as found in the Sankirtana is called Nat music. Traditional Manipuri Sankirtana are of two kinds: Ariba pala or the old Sankirtana and the Anouba pala or Nat Sankirtana, which developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra. The singing style as well as voice production system in Nat Sankirtana is very different from either North Indian or South Indian classical singing. Manipuris usually sing at a very high pitch and are trained to comfortably touch very high notes. This style of music became extremely popular and the other kind of Ariba pala music gradually declined. The main temple of Govindaji in Manipur still maintains a department of ariba pala Sankirtana to participate in the daily rituals. For lack of public patronage, the older variety of Sankirtana is almost extinct and is rarely performed.”<sup>[27]</sup> *Prabandha* is another type of singing specially found in Manipuri *Rasalila*. The Vaishnavite *Padavalis* also made its entry in the Manipuri dance. Songs are primarily taken from Jayadeva’s *Gitagovinda* and other works composed by Vaishnavite poets such as Chandidas, Govindadas, Vidyapati etc. Various *ragas* and *raginis* are used in the songs. “The six ragas and the 36 raginis are followed in Manipur. The Naradapancamsamhita elaborates them. The ragas are – Malava, Mallara, Sriraga, Vasanta, Hillola and Karnata. The *raginis* of the above ragas are –

- Malava – dhanasi, malasi, ramakeli, sinshura, asabadi and bhairavi
- Mallara – belabali, puravi, kanada, madhavi, koda and kedarika
- Sriraga – beloyari, goudi, gandhari, subhaga, koumari and vairagi
- Vasanta – todi, pancami, lalita, pathamaiyari, gurjari and vibhasa

- Hillola – Mayuri, dipika, desakari, pahida, varadi and marhatta
- Karnata – natika, bhupali, ramakeli, gada, kamodi and Kalyani”<sup>[28]</sup>

Besides these, there are other numerous *talas* and songs applied in the *rasalilas*.

R.K Singhajit Singh stated, “At one point of time, Manipuris used to learn Bengali as their first non-Manipuri language and all educated people were conversant with it. Later it was completely given up as the people began to concentrate on their own language. Manipuri gradually replaced Bengali and nowadays singing in the latter has become rare.”<sup>[29]</sup> Language employed are Sanskrit, Brajavali, Maithili, old Bengali and words of *ahomiya* and *oriya* are rarely found. “It is worthy to note that Vaishnava kings of Manipur composed devotional songs in Brajavali which is an artificial language containing Maithili, Bengali and Sanskrit words.”<sup>[30]</sup>

The most commonly used talas are *Menkup*, *Tanchep*, *Raajmel*. The *Jati* of a tala means class. Sruti Bandopadhyay penned, “A tala may have two classes of rhythms - the four - varnakala class (caturasra) and the three-varnakala class (trayasra). They resemble the ancient tala practice stated in the *Natyashastra* as *cancataputa* (three-varnakal rhythm). But with time the classes of Jati has increased and at present five to eight jatis are found in our rhythm practice. The Karnataka tala system follows five-beat (*khanda-jati*), seven-varnakala (*misra-jati*) and nine-varnakala (*samkirna-jati*) rhythm of tala in addition to the four-varnakala (*caturasra-jati*) and three-varnakala (*trayasra-jati*). Manipuri follows the *Talarnava* and has a total of eight jatis. Apart from the above five they also follow one- varnakala (*ekaki-jati*), two-varnakala (*paksini-jati*) and seven-varnakala (*misra-jati*). These are all found in the pung ragas and pung talas of Samkirtana.”<sup>[31]</sup> A *tala* is demonstrated by the *kriya* of stress and un-stress. Stress referred to as *sasabda kriya* denoted by a sound whereas *nihsabda kriya*, i.e the un-stress denoted by without any sound. In Manipuri taal, the clapping sound (stress) is known as *tantha* and the silent action (un-stress) is called *haidokpa*. The following *angas* are present in Manipuri tala system.

Anga	Varna kala	Kriya	Matra
Anudruta	1	One stress	¼
Druta	2	Stress on 1 <sup>st</sup> varna kala	½



Druta virama	3	Stress on 1 <sup>st</sup> varna kala, contraction of fingers on 2 <sup>nd</sup> and extension of fingers on the 3 <sup>rd</sup>	$\frac{3}{4}$
Laghu	4	Stress on 1 <sup>st</sup> varna kala and un-stress on 3 <sup>rd</sup> Varna kala	1
Laghu virama	5	Stress on 1 <sup>st</sup> varna kala, contraction of fingers on 2 <sup>nd</sup> , extend of fingers on 4 <sup>th</sup> varna kala	$1 \frac{1}{4}$
Guru	8	Stress on 1 <sup>st</sup> varna kala, un-stress on 3 <sup>rd</sup> , contract fingers on the 5 <sup>th</sup> and extend fingers on the 7 <sup>th</sup> varna kala.	2
Pluta	12	Stress on 1 <sup>st</sup> varna kala, un-stress on the 5 <sup>th</sup> , contract fingers on 8 <sup>th</sup> and stretch fingers on eleventh varna kala.	3

The main percussion instrument *Pung* played in Manipuri dance is akin to that of the *Khol* of Sattriya dance. “The first mention of a drum in Manipur is obtained from the time of Khuai Tompak. Since then the evolution of the drum according to the proclivity of the Meitei people are seen in Manipur...The ancient kind of pung is called the yaibum or khunbum.”<sup>[32]</sup> In Manipur it is believed that the *pung* is the personification of Krishna with the two sides resembling the two eyes of Krishna and the black colour applied on the wood analogue the dark complexion of Krishna. The two rings on each side are the bangles of Krishna and the red strap is *navagunjamala* representing the garland of flowers. *Pung* is the most significant percussion instrument in Manipur. Made from wood with two faces somewhat similar in sizes. *Manao* the small one on the right and *Maru* on the left. The wooden frame of the *pung* is called the *naothom* and is covered with around 44 rounds of leather strips which helps to achieve the finest tune. The covered parts on the right and left side of the *pung* called the *kata bedi* where the hammer is used to tune the instrument. The black portion is made up of rice paste. Two bronze rings are fitted on each side of the pung from which red string is attached, called as *thamgam mari* which can be adjusted according to the drummer’s height.



Picture of a Pung

Apart from the Pung (membranophone), the Kartal (Idiophone), Esraj (chordophone), Bansuri and Moibung (aerophone), Harmonium (chordophone) are observed to be employed in the Manipuri dance and music.



Kartal



Maibung



Esraj

### Conclusion

After making a comparison on the music of Sattriya and Manipuri dance it is found that the main percussion instrument i.e Khol (in Sattriya) and Pung (in Manipuri dance) played in both the dance forms is similar in its appearance but differ in its size and shape. While showing the tala pattern, the clapping sound is called Tali and without beat is called Khali/Maan/Xuda in

Sattriya dance and Tantha and Haidokpa in Manipuri dance respectively, the difference is observed in the nomenclature. Brajavali is the language employed in the text of Vaishnavite literature that is used by both the forms in its composition part. One major difference is observed in the singing pattern. Quivering of notes (kampan alamkar) is an important characteristic of Manipuri singing style, on the other hand in Sattiya dance this practice is not found. Moreover, the use of ragini is not present in Sattriya music rather it is found in the songs of Manipuri dance. The theme of the songs conveyed in the stories of both the forms is mostly on Lord Krishna and his deeds but the striking difference observed here is the stories of Radha along with Krishna in the repertoire of Manipuri dance state explicitly but in Sattriya the songs are based basically only on the stories of lord Krishna.

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