

**“Introspection and Revision
On
The Tāla System of the Jagoi Rāsa Līla”**

Junior Fellowship 2013-14

Dance and Dance Music, Manipuri

Enrol. No. - JF20140230

Fellowship File No.:– CCRT/JF-3/17/2015

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INTRODUCTION:

The Sanskrit word *Tāla* has various meanings. Musical time or measure, clapping of hands, slapping of hands together or against one's arm, etc. Its root word is 'Tal' means flat, level, the palm. *Karātala* means the palm of the hand, clapping the hands. *Bhutala* means the surface of the earth. From the connotation of the surface of the earth humans became understanding the time which came to be known as *tāla*. Clapping hands is known as doing *tāla*. So also every percussion instrument which has round flat faces that creates beautiful sounds while beating on it also came to be known as *tāla*. "The word *tāla* is used in music in several senses: (1) instrument – a type of *ghanavādya* which is called *tāla* or *Kāṁsyatāla* (bronze cymbal), (2) action in general – for instance, striking with the hand, (3) a specific action – one type of *śaśabda kriyā* (on beat), (4) a specific time span – a time span consisting of the repetition of a group of *kriyās* such as *caccatpuṭa*, *tīntāl*, etc., (5) the inner concept i.e. the idea of supporting and unifying *gīta*, *vādya* and *nṛtta* by a series of *kriyās*,"¹ Today the Sanskrit word *Tāla* is used as a *meiteilon* word of Manipur even though it is derived from Sanskrit language.H

Humans worship the Supreme GodHead by creating images and idols of various sizes naming differently so that people could able to see and concentrate worshipping the formless, shapeless Supreme Being. Likewise, people started to create the art of representing the time known as *Tāla* in different sizes giving different names which is employed in *Sangeet* (songs, instrumental music, and dance) as a medium and a part of devotional services of the Supreme God since the Vedic age.

It is quite difficult to explain the philosophy of 'Tāla' as it is invisible. All the materials whatever we see, living and non-living have their own life span and do will vanish when their

¹ Chaudhary Subhadra, 'Time Measure And Compositional Types in Indian Music', Aditya Prakashan, New Delhi 1997,p- 9

time is over. It does have different durations for all the things like planets, sun, moon, stars, animals, birds, trees, fields, buildings, people etc. All this different time durations is measured by the humans from the earth's journey revolving in its axis along with sun, moon, etc. which is the only medium to measure the time.

The measurement of time on this earth is created from this planet itself. When the earth revolves one complete round of its own, it makes one day and one night. From today's sun rise upto tomorrow's sun rise makes one day which is the first unit of the time measurement. This first unit is divided into two halves, day and night. The first unit one day when counted to 30/31 days makes one month which is the second unit of time measurement. One month is also divided into two halves, waxing moon/Sukla Paksha/Thanil (period of the brightening moon) and waning moon/Krishna Paksha/Thasi (period of the fading moon). When one month reached to 12 months it makes one year. One year is the complete cycle of time measurement on earth where all the seasons are included. Once more it is also divided into *Uttarayana* and *Dakshinayana*. *Uttarayana*- The northward journey of the sun from winter to summer. *Dakshinayana*- Southward journey of the sun, summer to winter.

As the *Tāla* represents the time, its structure is also prepared by following the structure of time measurement consisting two sides right side and left side just like day and night of a day, waxing moon and waning moon of a month, and *Uttarayana* and *Dakshinayana* of a year. The right and left sides of a *tāla* have various *pādas* of same number of beats in each side. Months are made up of days which are made up of day and night, likewise every *pādas* consists of various beats, and every beats are made by updown motions representing the two half of a beat which makes the *tāla* representing an image of the structure of the time since ancient period. Such codified *tāla* structure is still practiced in the *Nata Sankirtana* music system with strict

preservation used in ritual performances in Manipur. Thus, it can conclude that the *tāla* is an image of time created and designed by man/human which is considered auspicious and used in worshipping in olden days where the beats are the basic units making in different sizes known by different names. *Tāla* is the art to represent the time. This ‘time’ is nothing but the beating sounds which gives a particular timing. Laya or speed/tempo is also a part of *tāla* which has three levels. Fast/dhrut, medium/madhium, slow/bilambit. So, *tāla* can identify with a number of rhythms and pulse which comprises of on beats and off beats. It is not easy to explain *tāla* and there is not an exact term of *tāla* into English.

The *Tāla* is the rhythmic arrangement of beats in a cyclic manner. Each cycle is complete in itself and is repetitive. There are various sizes of *Tāla* which is formed by the addition of small units of time comprises within a minute in a definite manner. *Tāla* is an art form in which experts represents the time (*Māhākāla*) of on beats and off beats. Man creates icons or images of the Almighty God in different shapes and sizes. Likewise, *Tāla* is also created by the experts representing the time (*Kāla*) in different shapes and sizes giving different names and used them in ritual dancing and singing since the Vedic times.

ELEMENTS OF TĀLA:-

There are some basic essential elements of *Nata Sankirtana Tāla* on whose regulations the structure of a *Tāla* is created. They are Tānmit(kala), mihul (Kalā), Mihul Mapi (Dhruva), Nimesha, Ghat (Laya), Tāntha (Saśabda Pāta), Haidokpa (Niḥśabda Pāta), yet (samya), oy (sanni Pāta) and Pāda. These elements will explain in detail in the next term report.

- **Tānmit (kala):-** The single unit of the fastest beat or the quickest sound which can be uttered by human tongue, playable by hands or fingers on a percussive instrument, or any

other means is known as *Tānmit* or *kala*. It is the fastest beat which can create by man. Eg., the sound of a small bell (*sarik*). The smallest unit has two beats to form a pulse (*Kalā/mihul*).

- **Mihul/Kalā or Pulse:** - The *Mihul* or Pulse of a *Tāla* is the two motions of the rising and falling actions of hand while clapping or doing a *Tāla*. A *Mihul* or Pulse (*Kalā*) does have two equal halves which represents the form of a day where it is divided into day and night.
- **Mihul Mapi/Dhruva:-** All those prime beats starting from the smallest or the fastest, a human can ever utter, which cannot further breakdown or unchangeable, but can take to its double in size, fourth times bigger in size (double of double) and so on. These pulse beats are known as *Mihul Mapi* or *Dhruva* beats. *Dhruva* is another term given to its initial *Mihul* or Pulse of the five *Nimeshas*. They are actually, the determiners of the other *Kalā* or Pulse of their respective groups. The very Sanskrit word ‘*Dhruva*’ more or less, gives the meaning of unchangeable, fixed, firm, unmovable, constant, permanent, and eternal etc. *Mapi* is another common name given by Nata Sankirtana tradition to the first and second fastest beats i.e., 2 and 3 beats of a pulse known as *tānchap Mapi* and *Menkup Mapi* and so on. The Manipuri word “*Mapi*” gives the meaning of a progenitor and thus this very name suggest the idea that each *Dhruva* pulse being the progenitor produces the concern *Margas* (path) as there off springs.
- **Chāṅg/Nimesha:-** The initial or the primary beats (*Dhruva*) within a pulse is broadly divided into five divisions of time measurement i.e., five primary initial beats of 2,3,5,7,9 are known as five *Nimeshas*.

- **Ghāt/Laya:-** There are various sizes of Pulse beat in the *Tāla*. The different size or the speed/tempo of a Pulse beat within the different amount of units is known as *Laya* which is known as *Ghāt* in the Nata Sankirtana music system. This *Ghāt/Laya* has three levels, fast, medium and slow. When the size of a pulse beat increase in its double amount it is known as *Setu Ghāt (Chitra Marga)*. From this double, if the pulse beat is again increase in its fourth times bigger in size from its original beats, it is known as *Bedi ghāt (Bartik Marga)*. And once again if it is increase at its eight times larger in size from its basic beats, it came to be known as *Lambi ghāt (Dakshina Marga)*. Easiest example of this process is 2-4-8-16 and so on.
- **Tāntha/Saśabda Pāta:-** On beats
- **Haidokpa/Niḥśabda Pāta:-** Off beats
- **Kāstha:-** A complete structural form of a *Tāla* is known as *Kāstha*.
- **Yet/Samya:-** Right side
- **Oy/Sanni Pāta:-** Left side
- **Pāda:-** When we do a sound by clapping hands or beating a wood on metallic things it makes a definite movement of our hands. In creating that sound we use a force in two and fro motion. Rising and falling down of our palms to strike with each other signifies the rising sun and setting sun representing day and night. Such movement of our hands to make a beat is known as pulse (*Kalā*). As a day is represented by a pulse (*Kalā*) of a *Tāla* as day and night time where each pulse consist of two equal halves, one for the rising and the other for the falling action. This pulse (*Kalā*) when came in pair is known as *Pāda*. Thus, a *Pāda* represents the structure of a month. As for a month has two equal halves of waning (*Sukla Pakhya*) and waxing (*Krishna Pakhya*) days, a *Pāda* also consists of a

collection of beats in two halves. This represents a lunar month however is created in any desired size according to the nature and demand of the *Tāla*. Hence, the smallest *Pāda* is made of two beats and further four, six, eight, ten beats within a pulse and so on. As human beings stand on the two feet, all the *Pāda* are also made of two equal parts. And further a year is represented by a measurement of a *Tāla*, which consists of two *Pāda* placing on right and left hand side. As a year is the only perfect measurement of earth's time, which consists of two equal halves of summer and winter (*Uttarayana* and *Dakhinayana*), the measurement of a *Tāla* is also made by placing at least one *Pāda* each on the right and left hand sides.

In the right side of a *Tāla* the beats represent by the Pulse or *Mihul* of on-beats and off-beats composition. The number of Pulse or *Mihul* along with the on-beats and off-beats of the right side will be the same on its left side and it is the exact repetition of the right side. In both sides a *Tāla* starts with a *Mihul* or Pulse of on-beat. A *Tāla* is named, such as *Ek tāla*, *Dui tāla*, *Tīntāla*, etc. following the number of on-beat Pulse or *Mihul* on the right side of a *Tāla* and the left side is regarded as the repeat form of the right side of a *Tāla*.

NATA SANKIRTANA: -

There are so many rules and regulations for the ritual performances given by the Indian *Vedas* which has become out dated and remain as only archaic in the *Veda*. It is true that the *Nata Sankirtana* music system is totally different in its practical form from that of the music schools found in India at present but never ever thought that it might have followed the rules of *Veda Sāstra* very strictly until and unless it is proven by the scholars of Manipur. From this we all came to realize that from the very beginning when this music style was invented the pandits

and the experts were mastered in the Vedas and *Sāstras*. The *Vedic Tāla* system which is explained in the *Sāstra* are very much neatly preserve and adopted in the *Nata Sankirtana* process.

The *Nata Sankirtana* music system of Manipur is generally presumed as had been developed along with the timeless and infallible tract of *Vedic Sangeet vyavasthā* (along with the local fragrance of the *Meitei* tradition). This has been evidenced from three broad sections. First, the names and the words like *Audibāsa*, *Rāga*, *Mel*, *Dhrumel*, *Sanchār*, *Bhushnā*, etc. used in *Nata Sankirtana* music are found explained in the *Vedic Sangeet Vyavasthā*. Secondly, *Pāda* structures of the *Tāla punglons* is another proof, and the third one is that the structure of a *Tāla* consist of left side and right side in two equal halves.

During the time of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra Maharaj (1759-61, 1763-1798 A.D.) the Gaudiya Vaishnavism was codified in a new form blending with the already existing elements of *Meitei* culture of Manipur. The *Meitei* society embraces this religion widely by accepting the performance of *Nata Sankirtana*, created by Maharaj Bhagyachandra from the previously existing *Kirtans*, and also by applying the rules of *Sankirtana* given in the scriptures, by observing in every ritual ceremony related to their life from birth to death. *Nata Sankirtana* is performed not merely in the sense where it is regarded as a form of *kirtan* in groups but a well developed system of spiritual practice, a way of *puja*, a process of worship (*Raga Marga*). So, *Nata Sankirtana* is considered as the heart and soul of the *Meitei Gaudiya* Vaishnavism.

The primary sequence of a *Nata Sankirtana* follows a particular structure of *Tāla* series which are unavoidable. The *Nata Sankirtana* Gurus of Manipur of olden times had sound knowledge of *Tāla* and they have invented various *Tāla* compositions since bygone days

following the rules given in scriptures which are use in ritual worship. A tentative sequence of a *Nata Sankirtana* performance is as follows:-

1. **Rāga Houba:-**

- I. **Pungi Rāga** (*Rāga of Pung percussion*): *Rāga of Nata Sankirtana* music had a specific structure which is very unique in its nature. It is very strictly followed till date. It starts with *Rāga of pung* (percussion) which is known as *Pungi Rāga*. It is the *Rāga* of instrument without any vocal sound. When a *Dhruva Mel Tāla* is performed starting from *Dhruva (mapi/prime beat)* by increasing its size in double (*dwiguna*) and forth times bigger (*Chouguna*) continuously making it in three parts is called *Pungi Rāga*. This part is regarded as chanting the name Chaitanya Nityai 3 times after which Shree Radha Krishna are worshipped which is followed by creating an imaginary idol of God staring from toes/legs to waist, waist to neck and from neck to head. Here all the performers *pala* bow their heads showing courtesy.
- II. **Guru Ghat**: *Guru Ghat* is the second part of *Rāga Houba* where the creation of imaginary idol is completed and giving life in it. It is the part of percussion without vocal.
- III. **Eshei gi Rāga** (*Vocal Rāga*): It has two parts. *Rāga* with vocal sound without word and with words. The first one is sung in *ta aa ri ee na ta* without words. This part is composed in three levels and for *Rāga Achouba* three and a half level. The levels are named as *Ghor/low*, *Pancham/medium* and *Drigha/high*. There is an extra small portion known as *Pancham Matek* found only in *Rāga Achouba*. After the part of *Ghor* is sung, the *Panchama* and *Drigha* are followed but in each

end *Ghor* is repeated again and again. In the third, there comes *Rāga* with vocal sound with word. It explains about the particular *Rāga* which also mentions its name at the end. This part of a *Rāga* is called *Bāhon*. It is not found in the *Rāga Achouba*, instead of *Rāga Bāhona* there is *Gaura Chandrika/Bhabi*. The *Rāga Achouba* does not have a *Bāhon* because it is not a *Rāga* of song but a process of prayer, the *Rāga Marga*. Here the performers imaginarily call the God through the medium of music (instrumental and vocal) in the given *Rāga* structure for the oblation the *Nata Sankirtana*. From this rule of *Rāga Marga* structure the *Rāga* of song in *Nata Sankirtana* observe the same structure with slight changes. Being a *Gaudiya Vaishnava* ceremony it is compulsory to perform *Gaura Chandrika* or the remembering of *Gauranga Mahaprabhu*.

IV. **Sanchāra:** when a *Tāla prabandha* is performed starting with large size fourth times increase from its prime beat (*chouguna*), and then triple size (*triguna*), double (*dwignan*) and ends in its basic units of beat is called *Sanchāra*.

V. **Bāhon:** Explains about the particular *Rāga* by narrative its features and mentioning its name.

VI. **Kartik Sanchāra:**

VII. **Rāga Ghor:** The first level of vocal *Rāga*.

2. **Rāga Tāba:** When a *Tāla* begins from large *misra* and decreases in 5 different *Tāla* upto the smallest *Nimesha tānchap* in a *prabandha* repeatedly, it is called *Rāga Tāba*. In this part the performers will worship *Gouranga Mahaprabhu* by singing *Gaurachandrika*.

3. **Mel:** When the structure of the *Tāla* has a *Dhruva* (prime beat) and a *pāda* (beats) for right side and left side, this structure is known as *Mel*.
4. **Tānchap:** The different form of *Tānchap Tāla* in *ekpadi ektāla* structure is performed during this part. Songs of *ShrimadRadha Govinda* were sung by worshipping *Gauranga Mahaprabhu* who is in a state of deep meditation for *Shri RadhaKrishna*.
5. **Menkup:** Here all the *palas* (performers) will walk *parikramā* in anti clockwise direction within the performance area known as *Bedi Koiba* which will follow with the part of *Menkup*. The different forms of *Menkup Tāla* is executed in *ekpadi ektāla* formation.
6. *Beitha* or *Swādhina*: In this stage all the performers will sit down where the first part of *puja* is concluded. Here another *beitha Rāga* comprises of *pungi rāga*, vocal *rāga* along with *bāhon* will begin. Even though this part is little bit relax from the *puja* episode, it is still consist of *rāga*, *kirtan*, *jugal ārti*, *challi prarthana*, *lālsā* and *manashiksha*.
7. **Bijoy:** The concluded part in which *Nityai Pada*, *Sho gosai*, *Nāma thingatpa*, *Haribol*, *Govinda bhaj Radhe*, *Joy Bhai*, *Chaitanya Nityai* are offered.

PHYLOSOPHY OF NATA SANKIRTANA

The Sanskrit word *Nata* is added with the word *Sankirtana* to express the idea of observing the prayer of *Sankirtana*. As the word *Nata* and *Natta* gives the meaning of prayer and

actor or dancer respectively, some used to interpret the *Nata Sankirtana* in the meaning of actor or dancers. But the meaning of the word *Nata* as prayer is quite more appropriate and reasonable in using with the *Sankirtana*.²

The Sanskrit word *Sankirtana* means a *puja*, worship, oblation which is different with the meaning of the Sanskrit word *Kirtana* in the sense of praising or laudation of god or King or great person. The meaning of *Kirtana* does not give any idea of performing a *puja*. An important thing to mention here about the language is that when a prefix or suffix is added to a root word the meaning of the root word sometimes totally changed.³ Eg. When the word ‘San’ is added with the word ‘*Kirtana*’ the meaning of the words ‘*San*’ and ‘*Kirtan*’ lost their identity and turns into a new different meaning. And the word *Nata* is also added in the sense ‘prayer’ which is confused with the meaning of an actor (dance and music). As the *Nata Sankirtana* of Manipur is a way of prayer or *Rāga Mārga*, it will not be improper to term it as the *Mārga Sangeet*.

The aim and objectives of performing the *Nata Sankirtana* according to Gaudiya Vaishnavism, is believed to be the three desires of *Shri Krishna*. In order to fulfill this desires *Shri Krishna* had to incarnate as *Radha*. The three desires are: - 1. The beauty of *Shri Krishna*, felt by *Shrimati Radha* only, even *Shri Krishna* didn’t experienced it. 2. The degree of love of *Shrimati Radha* for the Lord could not experienced by *Shri Krishna*. 3. The blissful happiness in the love of *Shri Krishna* only experienced by *Radha* makes *Shri Krishna* incarnate as *Chaitanya Mahaprabhu*. *Shri Krishna* as *Chaitanya Mahaprabhu* with *Shrimati Radhika* in one body could experience the three desires through *Sankirtana*. For this, in the performance of *Nata Sankirtana Gauranga Chandrika/Bhabi* is a compulsory part and the performers (*pala*) of this *Nata*

² Haorokcham Sanakhya Ebotombi, ‘*Nata Sankirtana*’, Guru Gulapi Nata Sankirtana Academy, Imphal 2009, p-14

³ Haorokcham Sanakhya Ebotombi, ‘*Nata Sankirtana*’, Guru Gulapi Nata Sankirtana Academy, Imphal 2009, p-43

Sankirtana represents the devotees of the *Gauranga Sampraday*. Therefore, *Nata Sankirtana* became compulsory in every ritual ceremony of a family who are *Meitei Gaudiya Vaishnavas*.

The Sanskrit word “*Sankirtana*” means a *Puja*, worship or oblation along with the chanting and singing the name of God and as such it is somewhat different in meaning from the Sanskrit word “*Kirtana*” which means praising, speaking about, narrating, chanting the name of God or King or great person, as explain in the book *Nata Sankirtana*.⁴

Nata Sankirtana is performed not merely as a form of *Kirtana* in groups but also as a system of spiritual practice, a way of *Puja*/worship (*Rāga Marga*). It is considered as a collective prayer, a meditation and a great sacrifice (*Mahayajna* as the Vaishnavas call it). It lasts for about five hours at a stretch with a lot of rituals, movements and rhythmic patterns, strictly after the Vaishnavite faith, coloured with old Manipuri tradition.⁵ So, *Nata Sankirtana* is considered as the heart and soul of the *Meitei Gaudiya Vaishnavism*.

The core purpose of the *Nata Sankirtana* is the devotional service to Lord Krishna. Specific *tālas*, *pada*, *chanda*, *gati* are essential in observing the devotional service as given by *Sāstras*. This devotional service of Lord Krishna (commonly known as Shri Shri Govindaji by the Meitei *Bhaktas*) is divided into eight stages of time during a day known as the *Astakāla*. Before the creation of *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* by Bhagyachandra Maharaj the episodes of *Rāsa Leela* occurs in the night, and it is known as *Ahing Niti*. For this reason the *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* is performed during the night time. In the words of Angana Jhaveri: “The performance of the *Rasa-līla* is allotted the last period in the eight-part time division, known as the *ashtakāla*, of Krishna’s diurnal schedule. It begins at about 7.00 p.m. after the *sandhya-arati* (evening prayer) and ends

⁴ Haorokcham Sanakhya Ebotombi, ‘*Nata Sankirtana*’, Guru Gulapi Nata Sankirtana Academy, Imphal 2009,p-44

⁵ Elangbam Nilakanta Singh, “*Manipuri Dance*”, Omsons Pub., New Delhi, 1997, p-63

early in the morning in time for the *mangala-arati* (Morning Prayer). According to John Straton in his work, *At the play with Krishna*, this shows that the *Rāsa-lila* performances is an integral part of this daily cycle, and that “temple worship of Krishna and the *Rāsa-lila* performance in the *rasa-mandapa* are two arenas of a single dramatic activity.” The image of rotation is also emphasized by the duration of the performance which is related to the setting and the rising of the sun.”⁶

NATA SANKIRTAN AS MAHA YAGYA

The Sanskrit word “*Rāga*” has several meanings such as, colour, caste, psychic pleasure, a portion of Indian music etc. “*Mano ranjate ragaha*”- as Matangi says. It means enlightenment of the mind or what pleases the mind is *Rāga*. In *Nata Sankirtana* music the word *Rāga* is also employed. Here, generally, it means a song which is used at the starting part of a song sequence. But the meaning of the Sanskrit word *Rāga* used in Manipuri *Nata Sankirtana* music does have several meanings. Even though, it means the *Rāga* of a song, it is also used in the sense of the Sanskrit word “*Rāga-Mārga*” too. *Rāga Mārga* gives the meaning of prayer, deep meditation in devotion towards god, path of devotion etc. Here, the word *Rāga* represents both the meanings. The *Rāga Achouba* of *Nata Sankirtana* Music has a unique structure which is designed for the purpose of worship following the rules given by the *Sāstras*. The *Rāga Achouba* is the process in which the performers invoke God through the medium of music (instrumental and vocal) in the given *Rāga* structure for the oblation the *Nata Sankirtana*. *Rāga Achouba* was created with loyal and staunch faith of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra, still treated to be the most important *Rāga* in Manipur by the followers of Gaudiya Vaishnava sect. The imaging and the conceptual designing of the adored and revered body figure of Lord *Gouranga* is known as the *Rāga* itself. So,

⁶ Doshi Saryu, “*Dances of Manipur the classical tradition*”, Marg Pub., 1989, p-34

Rajarshi Maharaj himself with other senior Gurus had the belief that misfortune and bad consequences may befall to the worshippers (audience), the performing artistes and the *karma karta* (the sponsor) as well as the undertaker of the performance, if there had been any lapses or break occurred in the process of *Rāga Achouba*. As such, in the starting of this *Rāga Achouba* all the Gurus and the performers *Pala* had with themselves greatest care and respect to the *Rāga Achouba* with awe. The first structure and nature of *Rāga Achouba* was four *Anuwa* without *Alangkar*. Then followed by *Guru Ghāt*, and just after the percussions of the *Pung* in the rhythms and beats, begins the vocal *Rāga*. Playing in the rhythm of the *Pung* will continue up to ‘*Panchama*’ *Rāga*, and then the rhythm of the *Pung* will be diversified (separated). The *punglon* will be on *Rāga Dirgha* then a back to the last but one step that preceded. Rhythm will be separated again. The first *Sanchar* will be played. After this Gauranga Avatar will be sung, with some proper *Pung* rhythms to be continued into *Kartik Sanchar* beats.

The *Pung* of *Nata Sankirtana* is presumed to be the God Himself by the Gaudiya Vaishnabs and its *bol* or the syllabic sounds of the *Pung* gives various interpretations. ‘*Ghin*’ syllable of *Pung* is considered to be Shrimati Radhika, ‘*Tāng*’ sound is regarded as Shri Krishna. Likewise, the three sounds ‘*Tā*’, ‘*Tak*’, *Tāta* resembles Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar respectively. With slight variations, some Vaishnabs regard the same sounds in different interpretations like ‘*Tak*’ as Chaitanya, ‘*Tā*’ as Nityainanda and ‘*Tāta*’ syllable as Abdeita. In this way, the syllables sounds of *Pung* at the beginning of *Rāga Achouba* – ‘*Ten Ten Tā Tah – Tāng*’ reminds one as if spell ‘Chaitanya Nityai’, and after that ‘*Ghinaghra Dhe Dhen*’ believes to represent ‘Shri Shri Radha Govindaji’. This gives the idea and conception of establishment and the beginning of the *Nata Sankirtana* by chanting the syllables of Shri Chaitanya Nityainanda Radha Krishna and this way the *Nata Sankirtana* begins. *Solāha Nāma* – the sixteen

names i.e., *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare*, this sacred name of Godhead will intoned by the *Pung* in transverse and transpose the grand rhythmic tone in middle sweet note of ‘*Ghinaghra Ghin Tāh Ghin Ten Ten Ten*’ and so on. In the end part of *Bijoy*, the last part of *Nata Sankirtana* in the syllable sounds ‘*Thet Dhen*’ the *Pala* or the performer singers verbally spells ‘*Joi Bhai*’, and in the sound ‘*Ten Ten Tā Tak – Tāng*’ they sing ‘*Chaitanya Nityai*’, in the ‘*Ghinaghra Dhe – Dhe*’ they speak ‘*Bhai Bhai*’ and again in the repeated sound ‘*Ten Ten Tā Tak – Tāng*’ spells ‘*Chaitanya Nityai*’ once more.

After observing acutely the percussion beats and the rhythm syllables of the *Pung* in *Nata Sankirtana* some scholars, researchers advance to state that all the syllables or the language of the *Pung* rhythms had been found to composed on the *Tāla* structure of the ‘*Dhruva Pāda*’ (one *Dhruva* and three *Pāda*) which is known as ‘*Chatuspāda*’. In this *Chatuspāda*, as believed earnestly and faithfully by the *Rishis* and Seers of the Vedic age, there includes the state of ‘*Pranava*’ – evocation and dedication directly to God. And such *Chatuspāda* structure is found only in the Vedic music treatises and could not be found anywhere else. So, the syllable beats of the rhythms of *Pung* had been always regarded as process of worship to God and given deep respect and awe to be divine and holy.

In the *Nata Sankirtana* tradition, as already mentioned in the previous first term report, there are seven parts in the whole practice sequence which are unavoidable. They are known as *Rāga Houba*, *Rāga Tāba*, *Mel*, *Tānchap*, *Menkup*, *Swadhina* and *Bijoy* respectively. The first five parts that is *Rāga Houba*, *Rāga Tāba*, *Mel*, *Tānchap* and *Menkup* are regarded as the most essential parts by the gurus of *Nata Sankirtana*. In the sixth part, i.e., *Swādhina*, one can enclose the *kirtana* part which indicates and differentiates the particular ceremony observing like that of

marriage, *Srāddha*, *Rāsa Līla* and other *Guna Kirtana*, *Nāma Kirtana* and *Līla Kirtana*. The *Bijoy* is the last or end part of the whole process of *Nata Sankirtana* ritual performance which makes the *Sankirtana* complete.

In short it can be said that the six parts (the first five parts along with the last part *Bijoy*) are regarded as the *Sankirtana Māhā Yeigya*, a complete process of worship and prayer, whereas, the sixth part *Swādhina* of the *Nata Sankirtana* sequence which is also a compulsory component, is observed as entirely *Kirtana* part following the *Vedic Sangeet Vyavasthā*. The *Swādhina* part of *Nata Sankirtana* which is regarded as the *Kirtana* episode is also begins with the same process as the *Nata Sankirtana* used to start. Here another *Rāga* other than *Rāga Achouba* is performed. The *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* is included in this part of *Swādhina*. The *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* is a *Līla Kirtana* and it starts with a *Rāga* as a new beginning and is concluded with *Challi Prārthana*. *Challi* is a Sanskrit word which means “*devotion towards God*” or “*proceeding ahead*”. *Prārthana* or prayer is used in the sense of oblation and offer of the dance to the God. *Māha Rāsa*, *Vasanta Rāsa*, *Kunja Rāsa*, *Nitya Rāsa* and *Diva Rāsa* are all the beautiful creative compositions of the great exponents as a complete *Kirtana* part of the *Nata Sankirtana*.

SANKIRTANA AND RĀSA LĪLA:-

The different forms of Vaishnavism in India were built up under a single foundation of the eternal bliss where all the sects search for God and try to understand the God through love and devotion. The devotees try to lead a way of life that can help a person to remain non-egotistic, so that they can attain the enlightenment by leaving behind the entire materialistic world. Religion is not important to reach the God but need a way of life that entirely devoted in love and dedication. It does not believe in religions, but there was formal system of conversation into this *Dharma* (duty). The Vedic culture was the foundation of this *Dharma* and it is known as

Sanatana Dharma. “In Sanskrit *Sanatana* means eternal. *Dharma* derived from Sanskrit verbal root “*Dhri*” which means ‘to hold’. *Sanatana Dharma* literally means that which holds eternally. The main aim of *Sanatana Dharma* is to experience, even for a moment, the eternal presence of the Brahma.”⁷ All the groups follow different ways which may direct them toward a particular goal. Way are many according to believe and the diverse faiths. People’s thought are differ according to places and time.

In Manipur, it is true that the *Meitei Gaudiya Vaishnava* reached the topmost beauty which is also regarded as has attained the highest eminence in the spiritual fervor throughout the country. Still, the *Meitei Gaudiya Vaishnava* also got a unique form and quality which is again totally different from the other sects found in India. The name *Meitei Gaudiya Vaishnava* itself gives the idea that it is a mixed culture of *Gaudiya Sampradaya* and Meitei tradition which was prevalent before the advent of Vaishnavism in Manipur. It was in during the reign of King Bhagyachandra Maharaj when the *Meitei Gaudiya Vaishnavism* was codified mingling the elements of the *Meitei Sanāmahī* culture with the *Gaudiya Vaishnava* customs. The *Meitei* society embrace this culture widely by performing the *Nata Sankirtana* in every ritual ceremony related to their life from birth to death. *Nata Sankirtana* is performed not merely in the sense where it is regarded as a form of *Kirtana* in group but in the concept that of *Rāga Mārga*, a way of devotion, worship, *puja*. So, *Nata Sankirtana* is regarded as the heart and soul of the *Meitei Gaudiya Vaishnavism*, which is an element from the *Veda* itself. Until the present generation, Manipuri society still performs this *Nata Sankirtana* music style which has become the only music system in India who follows the rules given by the *Veda*.

⁷ Pani, jivan, celebrating of life, Indian folk dances, p-6

The *Rāsa Līla* of Manipur is a part of the *Nata Sankirtana* music where everything is same except that it is a *Līla Kirtana*, a visual art form. The performances done at *Govindaji* temple and in other local temples are not a simple dance performance but a kind of worship, prayer, devotion towards the God. That is why without the *Sankirtana* the *Rāsa Līla* cannot be performed in the temples.

The *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* which was performed for the first time during the reign of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra Maharaj on the *Kartik Purnima* in 1779 A.D. came to be known as the *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* of Manipur later called the *Māha Rāsa*. The love of Shri Krishna gleaned from the study of the scriptures can easily be attained by enjoying the *Rāsa Līla* in a short period of time. The *Rāsa Bhangi* or the *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* which was presented at the time of Bhagyachandra Maharaj was based on the book *Shrimad Bhagavata* only. As the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* dance sequence is very small and short many other dance episodes were added to it. *Krishna Avishāra*, *Radha Avishāra*, *Mapop*, *Krishna Nartan*, *Radha Nartan*, etc. have been incorporated and subsequently developed as the *Māha Rāsa*.

Being the foremost form of the *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* based on *Shrimad Bhagavata* the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* is present in all the five kinds of *Jagoi Rāsa Līla*. Without it *Rāsa* performance is regarded as incomplete. Every *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* performed at the temples of Manipur is invariably begins with *Nata Sankirtana* as it is believed that the *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* is born out of the imagination of Lord Krishna Chaitanya when he remembers *Vrindavan Līla*.⁸ As Elangbam Nilakanta Singh writes:

⁸Elangbam Nilakanta Singh, “*Manipuri Dance*”, Omsons Pub., New Delhi, 1997, p-61

The *Sankirtana* invokes the Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the “true *bhakta*”, and describes his desire to experience the *Rasa-lila*; the *bhakta* in audience is privileged to witness it, to identify with a *gopi* and to serve Krishna in *Brindavan*.

This results in a deeply emotional response from the audience.⁹

The performance of *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* at the Govindaji temple follows a specific norm in which materials of conducting a ritual worship (*Puja*) for observing *Nata Sankirtana* are required. There is a tradition of praying the guardian gods of all directions at the front yard of Meitei households near *Tulsi* plant by offering *dhup*(incense), *dweep*(light), flower, fruits etc. one day before the performance of *Jagoi Rāsa Līla*. Lord *Sanamahi*, the household god is also worshipped. The light offered to the *Sanamahi* keeps burning until the performance is over.¹⁰ This tradition is observed in every *Sankirtana Yajna* which is started, with invocation to the deities all around (called *Audibāsa*). This is done by offering of incense, light, sandal paste and betel leaves with units prepared on two plantain leaves for the Lord and the Devi to ward off evil spirits,¹¹ and sometimes offer *Sattra* (Indra’s flag worship called *Jarjara puja*) during the *Audibāsa*.

Scholars have confirmed that the Manipuri *Nata Sankirtana* follows Vedic principles along with Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy. Eg., *Audibāsa* is a process from *Vedic* culture – In order to perform a *Yajna*, the process where all the Gods and Goddesses (*Deva, Devi*) are invited before the performance to take part in the *yajna* are known as *Audibāsa* since *Vedic* times. It is done by purifying the *mandap* or *rangpith* etc. by sprinkling water along with *mantra*. In the

⁹Doshi Saryu, “Dances of Manipur the classical tradition”, Marg Pub., 1989, p-32

¹⁰R.K.Akesana, “Manipur Raas”, J.N.M.D.A, Souvenir, Imphal, 1964, p-50

¹¹Elangbam Nilakanta Singh, “Manipur Dance”, Omsons Pub., New Delhi, 1997, p-63

Nata Sankirtana tradition, the part of *Audibāsa* is followed one or two days before the actual performance. The names of the gods are converted into the Shri Krishna and other *Vaishnaba Goswami*'s name following the *Gaudiya Vaishnabas* tradition. The parts of *Audibāsa* are *ghat sthapan*, *mandali puja*, *dwar puja*, *Vadya Jantra puja*, *Bhandari ghar*, *Jarjar puja*, *diptahuti puja*, *dadhi mangal puja* etc.

As the *Nata Sankirtana* is considered a prayer, a meditation and a great sacrifice, *Mahayajna*, it is necessary to mention the reason how *Nata Sankirtana* is considered as a *Mahayajna*.

There are different forms of *Yajna* where we offer raw foods along with the chanting of the *veda mantras* (hymns) as an oblation or sacrificial gifts, into the fire, water, air, earth and into the space as an offering in order to reach or deliver to the gods and goddesses, or to the deceased ancestors. So, there are various ways to perform a *yajna* viz., offering raw foods burning into the fire, water, worshipping the idol of gods along with establishing an earthen pot along with other materials for an oblation.

Yajna, as conveyed by *Rgveda*, is the priceless foundation stone of *Dharma* and the living world itself of the *Devloka*. It is thus explain as 'spring season depicts *ghee*, summer season represents fire, *Sharada* ritu (Autumn season) as elements of offering an oblation into the fire (viz., milk, grains etc), seven days as seven level of firewood, and three fire sticks being the elements of the *puja* of this living world performing the non-stop offering by the *Devas* to give salvation making the *Jiva atma* (living soul) unite with the *Param atma* (Supreme soul). Such kind of non-stop *yajna* perform by the *Devatas* itself is the first step or beginning point of *Dharma*. Therefore, "in this human life by performing varieties of *yajna* through sacrifices of the

Jiva atma again and again is considered as the highest rank of *Dharma* to achieve the God which is the main teaching of the *srutis* and *smritis*.¹² The five *Maha Yajnas* are known as *Brahma Yajna*, *Pitri Yajna*, *Dev Yajna*, *Bhuta Yajna*, and *Nri Yajna*.

- **Brahma Yajna** is performed by chanting (*Jhap* or *Stom*) hymns into the space/sky (*Ākāśā*).
- **Pitri Yajna** is known for *yajna* which is observed by offering raw foods (grains, fruits, etc.), *Piṇḍa* (ball of rice or flour offered to the deceased ancestors) into the water.
- **Dev yajna** perform through burning of *ghee*, straws, rice etc. into the fire.
- **Bhuta Yajna** is done by sacrificing foods (grains, fruits, cereals, etc.) to the air.
- **Nri Yajna** offering feast or meal to the *Brahmins* as a form of charity.

All these *yajnas* are incomplete without the chanting or reading of the *Veda* hymns. For this reason the *Brahma Yajna* is again considered to be the superior or most qualified among the *Maha Yajnas*. Infact the *Brahma Yajna* is known in different names by its size of the performance.

Hence, this *Brahma Yajna* which is believe as started by the *Sapta Deivya Rishis* perform in the *Deivya tāla* system namely, *Dwipadi*, *Tripadi* and *Chatuspadi* perform as *stomhotra Mahayajna* has been known as *Sankirtana* since the time of *Vedas* which is continuously perform by the *Vaishnavas*.

Since ancient period, from the beginning of *Kali yuga* the followers of *Sanatana Dharma* (“In Sanskrit *Sanatana* means eternal. *Dharma* derived from Sanskrit verbal root “*Dhri*” which means ‘to hold’. *Sanatana Dharma* literally means that which holds eternally. The main aim of

¹² Haorokcham Sanakhya Ebotombi, ‘Nata Sankirtana’, Guru Gulapi Nata Sankirtana Academy, Imphal 2009,p-18

Sanatana Dharma is to experience, even for a moment, the eternal presence of the *Brahma*.”)¹³ perform *Sankirtana Mahayajna* to praise *Sri Hari*, is mention in *Srimad Bhagavatam*. That is – in *Kali yuga* the followers of *Sanatana Dharma* (*Vaishnavas*) perform *Sankirtana Mahayajna* as a *puja* for *Sri Hari* in order to be freed from the rebirth and to fulfill their desire to reach God, for which the souls (*atma*) from *Satya*, *Treta*, *Dwapura yugas* wish to be born in *Kali yuga*.

UNDERSTANDING THE BASIC TĀLA STRUCTURE OF NATA SANKIRTANA:

The core purpose (*Mulla*) of *Nata Sankirtana* is *Krishna Seva* (service of Lord Shri Krishna). *Sangeet* (*Nṛtyam*, *Vadyam* and *Geetam*), *Upasana* and *puja* are performed together in this devotional service of Shri Krishna as *Sādhana*. For this reason *Nata Sankirtana* is accepted as a *Māha Yajna*. For the service of Shri Krishna there are particular *tālas* which were used for the *upasana* and *puja*. The songs which goes with such *tālas* are fixed in a particular *chanda*, *pada*, and *gati* etc., designed under a strict given sequence from beginning to end, performed as *Nata Sankirtana Krishna Seva* on a particular calculated *bār*, *tithi*, *nashaktra*, timing and *ritu*(season).

The *Nata Sankirtana* School of music is purely a ritual form which is entirely used for prayer/*puja* in traditional. The *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* of Manipur, one of the Indian Classical dance itself in a part and parcel of *Nata Sankirtana*.

STRUCTURE OF TĀLA

1. Ekpadi Ektāla

a.  ekpadi ektāla

¹³ Pani, jivan, celebrating of life, Indian folk dances, p-6

b. $\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad} || \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}$ Dwigun (double) of ekpadi ektāla

c. $\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad} || \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}$ Chougun (double of double) of ekpadi ektāla

Ekpadi ektāla doesn't have the prime beat Dhruva. Tānchap and Menkup are performed in ekpadi ektāla structures.

+: represents right side,

O: represents left side.

$\underline{\quad}$: represents up down movement of a Mihul/Pulse (Kalā).

| : represents demarcation between each pāda.

|| : demarcation of two sides.

2. Dwipadi Mel

a. $\underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad} || \underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}$ Dwipadi Mel

b. $\underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad} || \underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}$ Dwigun (double) of Dwipadi Mel

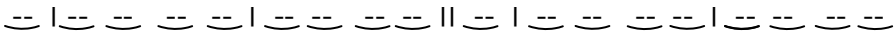
c. $\underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad} || \underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}$ Chougun (double of double) of Dwipadi Mel

When the tāla structure is consist of one Dhruva and one Pāda it is known as Dwipadi Mel.

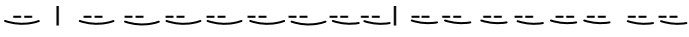
There are two as one Dhruva is regarded as one pāda. Symbol of one Dhruva is $\underline{\quad}$ when it is written in single. If $\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}$ this symbol comes in pair it represents one pāda.

3. Tripadi Mel


a. $\underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad} || \underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}\underline{\quad}$ Tripadi Mel

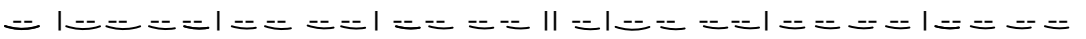
b. 
Dwigun (double) of Tripadi Mel

c. 

 Chougoun (double of double) of Tripadi Mel

4. Chatuspadi Mel

a.  Chatuspadi Mel

b. 
Dwigun (double)

c. 


Chougoun (double of double)

*the Mel tālas written here are tāla forms whose Dhruva symbol remain unchanged when its pāda structure increases in Dwigun and Chougoun. There are also Mel tālas whose Dhruva increases along with its pāda increases.

TĀLA OF BHANGI PARENG ACHOUBA:-

“Achouba Bhangi Pareng is a part of Bhushana Tāla Prabhandha. This Bhushana Tāla itself is Rajmel.”¹⁴ As stated in the 4th chapter of the book “*Bhangi Pareng Achouba*”¹⁵ clearly explains that the word Bhushana as a term given to a beat which comprises of 18 Tānmit or kala (quickest utterable sound). The speed of this unit is similar with the unit runs within a second. On the other hand, Rajmel is used in the situation when the size of a Tāla is increased where the

¹⁴Guru Bipin Singh, “*Bhangi Parengi (Bhangavali)*”, Manipuri Nartanalaya, Calcutta, Bombay, Manipur, 1995, Page-28

¹⁵Haorokcham Sanakhya Ebotombi, “*Bhangi Pareng Achouba*”, Sanchali A centre for performing arts, Imphal, 2007, Page-44

Dhruba (prime beat) does not increase. Here, Rajmel is the structure of the Tāla whereas Bhushana is a name given to the size of a particular beat comprises of 18 units. So, the Rajmel and the Bhushana cannot understand in the same meaning. Another word which is important to know is the word “Mel”. When the structure of the Tāla has a Dhruva (prime beat) and a Pāda (a pair Pulse) together, this structure is known as Mel. It is very important to understand such definitions more clearly and to discuss about the elements of the Tāla.

The present writing style of notation of Nata Sankirtana music could not able to explain all the details of the particular Tāla. When we write down a notation we mention the number of measurement in the name of Mātrā. In the Nata Sankirtana music the word Mātrā is recently added in Tāla notation. This is because there was not culture of writing down the notation for dance and music and everything were handed down in oral tradition. So, in relation to the word Mātrā, it is believed that this word must have been utilized by borrowing from the Desi Sangeet. It is differentiated by the researchers in Manipur that the meaning of the word Mātrā given in Sangeet Ratnakara and that of Nātya Sāstra is different. Infact the music system explained in Nātya Sāstra is termed as Margi Sangeet by Sangeet Ratnakara and the later created music is reffered to as Desi Sangeet. Thus, Degi Sangeet and Margi Sangeet are the coined words much later time from Nātya Sāstra.

In Nātya Sāstra, the word Mātrā is mentioned in the sense of its Sanskrit word which means measure, unit of time, duration etc. and does not denote it as a term. According to him a Kala (single unit of beat within a Pulse) is mātrā, Laghu Guru (beats in a second or Pluse) is mātrā, Kalā (Pulse) is mātrā, and Nimesha is also a mātrā. This word mātrā gives the idea of units of time measurement with the help of which a Tāla is made. Further it is clarify that, for

this reason the smallest unit of measurement (mātrā) is known as Kala.¹⁶ Infact the Tāla system of Nata Sankirtana music school does not match the rules of Desi Sangeet Tāla system and latest studies on Nata Sankirtana shows that many similarities are found in the rules of the Nātya Sāstra Tāla chapter.

For the *Tāla* of *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* I am writing some of the different concepts and ideas of the notation of *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* in the following manner which I have been collected so far.

The first style written in the following is the notation method which is commonly used by the dance *gurus* for many decades employed in the various dance institutions. The details are as follows:-

This particular notation in the following is from *Bhangi Pareng Achouba*(*Punlon*)/ভঙ্গী পরং অচৌবা (পুংলোন) by Nrityaguru Shri Meishnam Amubi Singh, published by Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, 1982, p-1

Bhangi Pareng Achouba – Mātrā 14

BhusnaMel Tāla 2, Phāk 2

(Laya Atappa)

Right		Left	2
+	o	o	Khit Ginna Gara

¹⁶Haorokcham Sanakhya Ebotombi, 'Nata Sankirtana Tāla', Guru Gulapi Nata Sankirtana Academy, Imphal 2004,p-21

Dhin – Dhin – | Dhen ta – | Dhin – Dhen – | Dhin ta – |
 Ten – ta – | Ten ta – | ta – – – ||

In this *BhushnaMel* many other variety of *punglons* (syllables of the *pung*) are there which is not written here right now. It is one of the examples of such *tāla*.

Second example of *BhusnaMel* is from the book *Bhangee Pareng (Bhangavali)* by Guru Bipin Singh, published by Manipuri Nartanalaya, Bombay; Calcutta; Manipur, 1995, p-5

Achouba Bhangee Pareng (Boro Bhangavali)

Bhushna Tāla Prabandha

Tāla – Rajmel – 7 Barnakaal – 2 Tāli

+ 2
 1 2 3 4 | 5 6 7

Tang s tra khit ghinna ghara
 + 2 + 2
 Dhin s dhin s | dhen ta s | dhin s then s | dhin ta s
 + 2 + 2
 Ten s ta s | ten ta s | ta s s s | khit ghinna ghara

The third notation example is from the book *Punglon Bhangi Pareng Mangagi* by Yaikhom Hemanta Kumar, published by Cultural Research Centre Manipur, Imphal, 2011, p-1

Achouba Bhangi Pareng

Bhusna Mel

Mātrā – 7, tanthā – 2

(Bilambit laya)

	+		2	
	Khit ghinna gara			
Dhin - dhin -	dhen ta -			
Dhin - then -	dhin ta -			
Ten - ta -	ten ta -			
Tak - - -				

Next style is from the book *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* by Sanakhya Ebotombi Haorokcham, published by Sanchali Imphal, 2007, p-53

Bhangi Pareng Achoubagi Punglon

Chatuspadi Mel Bhusna

Ghat: 18 Bhanga Tantha

+: represents right side,

o: represents left side.

—: represents up down movement of a Tāla Mihul/Pulses (Kalā).

|: represents demarcation between each pāda.

||: demarcation of two sides.

18: size of Bhusna which has 18 beats.

Example of *Tāla* structure:

+

— | — — | — — | — — ||

o

— | — — | — — | — —

+

Ginna gara | dhin— dhin— | dhen— ta— | dhin— then— ||

o

dhin ta | ten— ta— | ten— ta— | tak— khit—

The above various notations are some of the examples of *BhusnaMel tāla* of *Bhangi Pareng Achouba*.

As far as until now it is known that *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* comprises of four *tāla* viz. *BhusnaMel*, *Tanchap*, *Menkup* and *Challi*. But there is a rule in the *Nata Sankirtana* music system which is utilizing since very long time that when a *tāla* is presenting a *punglon* sequence which is going to change in another *punglon* in the same *tāla* then there is a necessary to give an *inggit punglon* (sign for changing) previously which will followed by *akhaiba punglon* (separating *punglon*). On the other hand, when a *tāla* along with its *dwigun* (double size) and *chougun* (fourth size) is presented by playing various *punglon* sequences then there is not necessary to use the *inggit punglon* (sign for changing) and *akhaiba punglon* (separating *punglon*). This can be seen in the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* *punglon* itself where the dance steps easily represent the *tāla* structure. According to this regulation the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* must follow a single *tāla* instead of comprising four different *tālas*.

THE DANCE MOVEMENT OF BHANGI PARENG ACHOUBA:-

The dance composition of the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* select the movements and gestures to depict the story of *Rāsa Līla* of Lord *Krishna* with the *gopis* in *Vrindavana* by using the traditional styles of gestures. “The mental make-up in the *Rāsa* dance is the *bhakti* or the *bhava-dristi* and all the gestures of the hand in this dance are also the expressions of *bhakti* or the

bhava-mudra. The meaning of such gestures of the devotee-artiste is found difficult for the average mind to fully understand.”¹⁷

The dance movements of *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* is composed by following the structure of the *tāla* which has right side and left side from the beginning to the end. For instance, the first *punglon* of *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* that is *ghinna gara dhin – dhin – dhen ta – dhin – then – dhin ta – ten – ta – ten ta – tak – khit*. For the first percussion *bols* sequence *ghinna gara dhin – dhin – dhen ta – dhin – then –* the dance movements also starts with the right leg which is consider for the right bols, where the *jugalrup tribhanga* position of Shri Krishna and the position of *Srimati Radhika* is perform. And on the left side bols i.e., *dhin ta – ten – ta – ten ta – tak – khit*, here the same *tribhanga* and the *Radha*’s pose will perform for the left side. Mention may be made that usually the bol starts with *khit ghinna gara dhin...* where *khit* comes in the first place, but according to the steps of the dance when divided into the right side and left side it is appropriate to start with *ghinna gara dhin* and the bol *khit* comes at the end of the left side. In the *punglon khit khra khra ten – ta – khit ta – ten – ta – khit ta – ten – ta – khra khra – khrang* the movement starts with *khra khra*, like *Khra khra ten – ta – khit ta – ten – ta –* represents the right side of the *tāla* whereas the remaining *khita ta – ten – ta – khra khra – khrang* represent the movement of the left side. This particular part of *punglon* is also known as *tāla lanthokpa* where only the steps represent the *tāla* movements in the basic pose style and no exact gesture is employed. *Tāla lanthokpa* is also found in the *Mapop* part of the present *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* sequence.

Another *punglon* where we can find the clarity of the right and left side structure of the *tāla* in the dance composition is *khit ghinna gara dhin dhin dhen ta dhin dhin dhen ta dhin dhin*

¹⁷ Surchand Sharma, “*Bhangi in Manipuri Ras Dance*”, Imphal, 1993, p-4

dhen ta dhen. In this composition the left foot took steps at the *bol khit*, and from *ghinna gara* the weight of the body will be shifted from left to the right side, and right foot took a step in the *punglon dhin – dhin –* and vice versa. It can be recognize that in the language *ghinna gara dhin – dhin – dhen ta – dhin – dhin – dhen ta – dhin – dhin – dhen ta – dhen – khit –* both dance sequences for the right and left side will perform one after the other in this same *bol* by repeating it twice. In between each dance parts there is an *inggit punglon* (sign for changing) and *akhaiba punglon* (separating *punglon*) which always starts in the right side. In this manner all the dance sequences of *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* follow this structure when analyze thoroughly.

The reason for being *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* a complicated dance form is that this dance strictly follows the *Tāla* patterns even in composing the dance for both right and left sides and also it is a pure dance form and not a mime which does not express the lyrics of the songs. The dance composition of the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* focus on the movements and gestures to express the story of *Rāsa Līla* and being the movement of dance every gestures will not interprets the words as found in today's dance compositions.

The structure of *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* dance sequence must imitate the story of the *Rāsa Līla* as it was composed based on it. So far the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* is comparing with the *Hakchang Saba* of *Laiharaoba*, there is no comparative analysis ever done on these two dances. By simply watching these dances, it could not able to find out any kind of similarities between the two in its movements. It may be so from the perspectives of their gestures, its meanings and also its theory or philosophies are quite different.

Dance is just the expression of a person's feeling when he or she feels some satisfaction after reading or listening a prose/poem, in his or her own way. It is the only expression through

body movements of the beautiful images or beautiful thoughts which reflects the mind after seeing, listening or realizing by a person. In this world, all the living creatures express their happiness, enjoyment, satisfaction through body movements in his or her style. So, behind the beautiful dance gestures there is a sign of reflecting one's emotion. For this reason dance is regarded as an auspicious poem taught by the *Natya Veda*. In this manner when the *Rāsa Panchadhyay* of *Shrimad Bhagavatam* touches the mind of *Rajarshi Bhagyachandra Maharaj* with satisfaction, he tries to express the unforgettable images in a very beautiful dance form which is known as *Bhangi Pareng Achouba*. Each/ Every single dance gestures clearly reflect the pure devotion, humbleness, polite of the devotees on the contrary to the dance as we see today.

As the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* dance sequence reveals and expresses the story of *Rāsapanchadhyay* of *Shrimad Bhagavatam* one can see and understand from its movements when observed carefully that the dance imitates the poses of *Radha* and *Krishna*, offers flower (*pushpanjali*), worship *Srimati Rādhā Sri Krishna* and the *gopis* surrendering heart and soul to the God. And then come up to the story of *Rāsa* dance as explain in the *Rāsapanchadhyay* through dance by doing the gesture of dancing, playing instruments, playing *karatal/madila* etc. and also the idea of achieving the blessings of *Sri Krishna* only through the blessing of *Srimati Rādhika* is conveyed.

Being the foremost form of the *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* and also based on *Shrimad Bhagavata* the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* is compulsory in all the five kinds of *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* without which the whole dance is regarded incomplete. As the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* has become a small part in the whole *Jagoi Rāsa Līla* the value of the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* seems narrowed.

PROBLEMS IN UNDERSTANDING THE BHANGI PARENG ACHOUBA NOTATION

There was no tradition of writing records for dance and music notations in meitei/meetei society during early days and it was only through oral tradition which was continuing for generation. Instead of keeping written records, the beautiful creations of Punglon, song and dance composed by the gurus were performed and handed down for decades. There is also possibility of influencing Hindustani Music during some earlier generations which makes puzzles in understand the Nata Sankirtana Tāla system in present day.

The tradition of the Manipuri Nata Sankirtana does have its own unique Tāla system based on the Vedic rule. Even though such tradition has been strictly followed in the punglon (meitei percussion playing), song and dancing of the Nata Sankirtana and Manipuri dance, there is no books ever written or published which express the full description of a particular tāla. The present books found for the punglon notation of Nata Sankirtana music is not able to define the structure of Nata Sankirtana Tāla. For this reason, there are varieties of books on tāla notation where the number of beats of a tāla is different. E.g., for the bhangi tāla itself, different ideas and styles are found where the number of units are also different. According to Guru Meisnam Amubi Singh in his book *Bhangi Pareng Achouba (Punglon)*, Bhusna mel of Bhangi Pareng Achouba Mātra-14 and 2 Tāla 2 Phāk i.e., 2 onbeats and 2 offbeats, laya atappa. But according to Guru Bipin Singh in his book *Bhangee Pareng (Bhangavali)* Achouba Bhangi Pareng, Bhushna Tāla prabhandha, Tāla- Rajmel, 7 barnakaal, 2 Tāli. Here some differences is occurred as from the first book Bhangi Pareng Achouba is Bhushnamel which have 14 Mātra with 2 Tāla (onbeats) and 2 Phāk (offbeats). From the 2nd book Bhangi Pareng Achouba is of Bhushna Tāla Prabandha, Tāla is Rajmel which have 7 barnakaal and 2 Tāli (onbeats). So, the question is what

is Bhushnamel and why is it called Rajmel? Again what is the difference between 14 Mātra and 7 Barnakaal? In a book it has 2 Tāla and 2 Phāk where as in another it has 2 Tāli. Why is it so?

In the book *Punglon Bhangi Pareng Mangagi* by Guru Yaikhom Hemanta kumar, it is written as Achouba Bhangi Pareng Bhusna Mel, Mātra-7, tantha-2, (Bilambit laya). So here in this case Bhusna Mel is common and has 7 Mātra as that of 7 Barnakaal but the term is different. Why it is written as Mātra and Barnakaal? Again it has 2 tantha (onbeats) which is same as 2 Tāli but in Bilambit laya. Here, how does the Bilambit laya (laya atappa) is going to measure?

According to Sanakhya Ebotombi Haorokcham in his book *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* it is written as Chatuspadi Mel Bhushna, Ghat-18, Bhanga Tantha. Here 3 new words added. Chatuspadi, Ghat and Bhanga in relation to Bhangi Pareng Achouba. Such variations arises many questions which is very much necessary to analyze and understand. Why this variation occurs itself is a big question. Moreover, Bhangi Pareng Achouba has 4 tālas. Bhushnamel, Tanchap, menkup and challi. But according to Sanakhya Ebotombi Haorokcham Tāla of Bhangi Pareng Achouba is only Mel Bhusna where the challi was added in the end as a prarthana or prayer with devotion.

Regarding the punglon notation of Bhangi Pareng Achouba it is necessary to understand every related question with Bhangi Tāla by the dancers. In order to understand every terms of Bhangi Tāla there came a necessity to learn the basic elements of Nata Sankirtana Tāla system.

Here, mention may be made that the dance students doesn't have the facility of learning the tāla system as the subject is not included in the syllabus so far. The dance students as well the dancers need to have a clear knowledge about the tāla system of Nata Sankirtana Music, every

terms use in this system like mel, Rajmel, Bhusnamel, sanchar, ghat etc., structure of various Tāla, its different forms etc.

The different notations created by many gurus of dance and music have different symbol and different numbers of units. Such variation need to be unified by analyzing and understanding each style by the experts to bring out a codified notation which can be accepted by all.

This research is carried out to show the difficulties face by the dancers for not understanding the Tāla system of Manipuri dance. Without this knowledge the dancers will remain incomplete even after the completion of their courses.



Rituals of the last rehearsal day of Jagoi Rāsa Līla.



Seeking blessings from Rasdhari and Sutradhari by the participants.



Doing rehearsal of Bhangi.



Nata Sankirtana performance before Rāsa Līla.



Some clips of Bhangi Pareng Achouba from Maha Rāsa Līla