



E.Z.C.C.



# रhythms of life

FOLK TRADITIONS OF EASTERN INDIA ■ GOURI BASU



The Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre (EZCC) covering the states of Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Manipur, Orissa, Sikkim, Tripura, West Bengal and The Union Territory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is one of the seven Zonal Cultural Centres set up by the Government of India with a view to culturally integrate the states and Union Territories as a part of the programme of national integration.

Since its inception in 1985 the EZCC has been functioning as a cultural nerve centre, between and among the numerous ethnic cultural centres/groups of excellence in the Eastern part of the country.

Over the past two decades, carrying out the mandate of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, the EZCC's endeavour has been to reach out to the remotest corners of not only the Eastern part of the country but all corners of our nation and to promote consciousness about the bewildering variety and the underlying unity of Indian culture, tradition and heritage among the common people. Cultural interaction between the artistes and the common man over the years has helped to strengthen the bonds between them. EZCC's thrust area has been to support and strengthen the spirit of rural and tribal India. In the last twenty years, the EZCC has been able to infuse among people a conscious appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of its own zone as well as other parts of the country through its manifold programmes of folk, tribal and classical music and dance, documentation and publication, workshops, as well as its exhibitions on arts and crafts.







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FOLK TRADITIONS OF EASTERN INDIA

Compiled and Edited by  
Gouri Basu

## **Rhythms of Life - Folk Traditions of Eastern India**

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*Dedicated to the  
Folk Artistes and Artisans of Eastern India*







## Foreword

I have immense pleasure in my capacity as Chairman of the EZCC in writing the Foreword for EZCC's latest publication "Rhythms of Life - Folk Traditions of Eastern India".

The Zonal Cultural Centres (ZCCs) conceived in 1985 were the brainchild of late Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi, and were intended ".....to show the culture of one region to another, to assimilate the best of and to produce a better new direction....." The various Zonal Cultural Centres have since become an important vehicle not only for national integration, but also for preserving the cultural heritage of our ancient country.

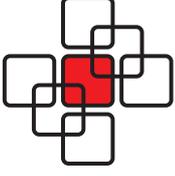
The first Centre, the North Zone Cultural Centre, was inaugurated by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on November 6, 1985, at Patiala. Over the next few years, six more Zonal Cultural Centres came up, and these Centres have ensured that thousands of folk and tribal artistes across the country are provided with an opportunity to keep their art forms alive.

The Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre is one of the seven Zonal Cultural Centres set up by the Government of India to promote, propagate and disseminate the rich folk and tribal heritage of India. Throughout the year, the Centre organizes a number of programmes, comprising both performing and non-performing arts and approaches, which have helped to create an awareness of the rich cultural heritage of the region. In addition, it has also helped provide sustainable livelihood for artistes and artisans.

All this has been a boon for rural folk who tend to guard their art forms zealously and pursue these against all odds. The EZCC's schemes such as *Guru Shishya Parampara*, the *Lok Natyotsav*, National Cultural Exchange Programme etc. have helped revive many dying art forms in the Eastern and North Eastern parts of the country, that come under the EZCC umbrella.

On the occasion of its Silver Jubilee celebrations, the EZCC has documented the folk traditions of Eastern India in a coffee table book format to enable larger audiences across the country to appreciate and understand the rich tapestry of the Eastern and North Eastern region. It has been a Herculean task to prepare such a comprehensive document of the folk traditions of the region, and make this available in a single publication. It is also, possibly, the first of its kind available to the general public. The book will certainly be of great interest to scholars as also to anyone interested in the preservation and promotion of our country's rich cultural heritage.

M. K. Narayanan



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## **Preface**

The Indian civilization, one of the oldest in the world, has a rich multi-hued cultural heritage. While each cultural heritage has its distinct identity, there is an inherent harmony in all of these. On the basis of experience it can be emphatically stated that the outward multi-hued charm of the unique cultural expressions of India is drawn from the ever-flowing integral live heritage of the nation; and it is here that Indian culture stands out.

The eastern part of India has been bestowed with an enormous wealth of the folk art forms, both visual and performing. Folk art is possibly the most beautiful and rhythmic expression of human emotions. It tells about the everyday joys and sorrows of life, rituals, nature and tales of epics and romances. These art forms enthrall all, for they stir the fundamental emotions dormant in us and transport us to a world where simplicity and poetic justice exist.

At the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre (EZCC) we have the opportunity of close interaction with the folk artistes and some experts who share with us the theme, historical backdrop, the associated rituals of their performances as well as their dreams and hopes. Over the past few years, the EZCC has been able to revive many performing and visual art forms which were in limbo.

With an objective to embrace the cultural uniqueness of this region and to rejuvenate the vanishing art forms, EZCC has documented the various folk dances, folk theatre, folk music, folk musical instruments, visual arts and handicrafts in the form of a coffee table book. Much of the information in this publication has been collected from the Directorates of Culture of the member states of EZCC and some of the information has been shared with us by the artistes themselves.

As I leave you with this documentation I hope that this effort will be useful to scholars, researchers and connoisseurs of art and culture in India and abroad.

Director  
Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Kolkata



## Acknowledgements

When I began my journey through the vibrant folk canvas called India, I was travelling light. Today my bags are full. Memories and faces of another world cram every nook of my heart.

My interaction with the folk artistes has been a learning experience on multiple levels: not only have I gained a deep understanding and appreciation for our folk traditions, but their daily struggle to keep the embers of tradition burning is a lesson in determination whereby one witnesses the true contentment borne of the mind and not in plenitude.

I thank EZCC for opening the door to this mosaic of art, and to successive Directors of the Centre for the vision that helped me give shape to the vast storehouse of information that the documentation yielded. This book could also not have come about without the help of a number of talented and knowledgeable individuals, and I would like to express my deepest gratitude to them: the folk artistes and artisans who have shared with me their hopes, dreams and aspirations; Ms Anindita Banerji for going through the manuscript carefully and for all her suggestions; Dr Tarun Pradhan of Rabindra Bharati University for his help on the research on Bengal; Sarabhuj Folk Art Centre for sharing with me photographs of the folk dances and martial art forms of Bengal; Ms Priti Patel, Ms Sucheta Das and Mr Ashim Duttgupta for very generously giving me the photographs that I needed for this documentation; Mr Amitava Mukherjee, who designed the layout of the book; my family for their constant support.

I hope my readers enjoy going through Rhythms of Life - Folk Traditions of Eastern India.

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# Folk Dances of Eastern India

Dance and festivity is an integral part of the Indian ethos. It is a celebration of life itself, an attempt to harmonize with the forces of nature. Man joins Creation in invoking the spirit of *Anandam*, which is the essence of our spiritual quest. The air reverberates to the sound of drumbeats echoing the cosmic rhythm and finds a reflection in the dances of India.

Fast paced, constantly changing and rebelling against all forms of stagnation, is the Indian civilization. India is a land of diverse cultures, owing their origins to one common history. The face of India as seen by the world is one, which reflects diversity, democracy, cultural heterogeneity and camaraderie.

The Indian society is a layered structure with her rich cultural heritage, principles and high ideals of purity forming the different layers. The dance and music of India goes hand in hand with the society, its love for rhythm and its yearning for a simple, pastoral life.

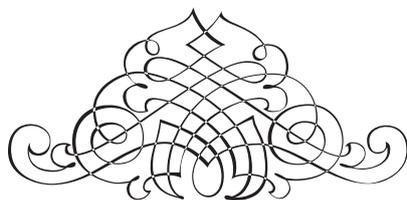
Tribal and folk dances are at once the most primitive and the most sophisticated. Dance is not just the mere execution of a series of movements. It is an expression of joy and evokes a variety of emotions. Perhaps even before man began to speak, he began to dance.

All tribal and folk art forms, mirror their daily activities, like food gathering, hunting, fishing, cultivation and harvesting. Indian folk and tribal art forms are steeped in antiquity and yet have a contemporary feel.

Indian folk dances are a combination of rhythm, expressions and dramatic elements. Many of the dances take their themes from India's rich mythology and folk legends and depict the life, ethics and beliefs of the tribes.

Eastern India is a storehouse of the most beautiful folk art forms, both performing and non-performing. This section is a documentation of the diverse folk dance forms of the region. Many of these dance forms had gone into oblivion. Through the conscious efforts of the Government of India and the State Governments and several non-government agencies, many of the dance forms have been revived and attempts are being made to preserve these rich cultural traditions. Folk dancers from the different parts of the country now get an opportunity to interact with each other and enhance their art forms. In Eastern India, the *Purulia Chhau* dancers of West Bengal have incorporated a portion of the *Singhi Chham* dance of Sikkim into their performance and made their presentation visually more entertaining. The *Gotipua* dancers have incorporated some masked dances eg *Durgatinashini Durga* into their repertoire, possibly an influence of the *Chhau* dancers of West Bengal and Jharkhand.

Many dance forms are seen in more than one state. The *Rabha* dances are seen in the northern parts of West Bengal and in Assam as there are *Rabha* settlements in both these states. *Jhumar* dances are seen in West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha. Dances associated with the celebration of *Holi* are seen in many states. Every presentation has unique features distinct to the particular region it comes from.





# ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

The Bay of Bengal smiles to itself as it touches the sand beaches along the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The dense green forests and colourful birds make the Islands an abode for the peace-loving, non-interfering, happy and cheerful Andamanese and Nicobarese people.

The tribes have their own traditions and culture, social customs and religious practices. Though people from other parts of the country, having different faiths, languages, customs and religions have settled down here, the original inhabitants of the Islands have fiercely guarded their own social and cultural identity. The dances of the people of the Islands do not have a wide variety but they are entertaining and unique in their own way.



# Nicobarese Dance

The creative expression of the *Nicobarese* people is closely associated with the environment. Nature has always been the strongest inspiration for them. The *Nicobarese* tribes living in the Car Nicobar Island of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are among the tribes that have accepted the value of progress. The most important festival celebrated by the *Nicobarese* tribe is the *Ossuary Feast*.





At this feast, the members of the family pay homage to the soul of the departed head of the family. On this occasion, the *Nicobarese* folk dance is organized and all invitees take part in the dance. The festival is celebrated on a full-moon night so that there is sufficient light for the night-long performance. All the people who are invited to the celebrations, join in the dance. The dance is performed in a circular formation. The dancers extend their arms across each others' backs with the hand resting on the next person's shoulder. Both men and women join in the dance but usually in separate groups. The dancers wear the traditional costume consisting of coconut and plantain leaves around their heads and waists. There are no musical instruments accompanying this performance. This folk dance is also performed during canoe-racing and other seasonal festivals. A pig-fight follows the folk dance in the morning.





## Dances of the Great Andamanese



The *Great Andamanese* people appreciate rhythm and time but not pitch or tune. They sing in unison, but not in parts. The key in which a solo or a chorus starts is quite accidental. They can be readily taught any dance step and they can also learn it by themselves from observation. The composer of the song always sings without action or gesticulation and always to the same rhythm. The songs relate to travel, sports and personal adventures, they never relate to love and very rarely to beliefs and superstitions.



# ASSAM

Assam, once known as the Light of the East, is the land of the mighty Brahmaputra, one of the longest flowing rivers in India. The Brahmaputra curves in a serpent-like manner around a land where one not only sees lush green tea plantations and an extravagance of flora and fauna, but also myriad tribes and races that come together to bring about a conglomeration of cultures, values, traditions and beliefs.

# Bihu Dance

The *Bihu* dance is one of the most colourful folk dances of India. *Bihu* is generic to celebration in an agricultural society. For the people of Assam, *Bihu* is not only a festival, but also a time for celebration. The Assamese people celebrate three different *Bihu* festivals, *Bohag Bihu* or *Rongali Bihu*, celebrated in



spring, *Magh Bihu* or *Bhogali Bihu*, celebrated in winter, and *Kongali Bihu* or *Kati Bihu*, celebrated in autumn. The *Bihu* dance is a traditional heritage of Assam and the festival helps to strengthen the unity in diversity among the people of Assam. During the revelry, the banks of the Brahmaputra come alive with the rhythms of the *Dhol* (drum) and *Pepa* (flute made from buffalo horn).

The dancers perform in a circle beginning with a slower tempo, which gradually gains momentum. Drums, cymbals, hornpipes, harps and bamboo clappers, provide musical accompaniment. Even though the festival has its roots in agricultural operations, the songs and the graceful dancing build up an atmosphere of love and romance. The dance is also known for displaying the traditional Assamese handlooms and handicrafts in all their beauty and glory.



# Bohag Bihu or Rongali Bihu



With the advent of spring comes the *Bohag Bihu* or *Rongali Bihu*, a festival of music and dance, when Nature like a young woman blossoms into a radiance of light, beauty and colour. It is in this atmosphere that young boys and girls perform the *Bihu* dance, inviting each other to the land of romance. The *Bohag Bihu* or *Rongali Bihu* not only ushers in the Assamese new year but also the sowing time and the season of marriage. In fact, this festival has its roots in some earlier fertility cult. The *Bohag Bihu* dance is an expression of the joys of spring and the exuberance and vigour of youth. Amidst nature's pristine beauty, young boys and girls perform this dance, accompanied by songs of erotic sentiment, spirited beating of the *Dhol*, soft strains of the *Pepa*, and many other indigenous folk instruments.

# Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu



The *Magh* or *Bhogali Bihu* is also an important festival celebrated after the harvesting season is over. Bonfires, social get-togethers and feasts are an integral part of *Magh Bihu*. Most of the rituals connected with this season's *Bihu* celebrations pay obeisance to *Agni Devta*, the God of Fire. Prayers and offerings are made with the chanting of *mantras*. The origins of *Magh Bihu* can be traced back to the fire-worship festival of ancient times. The *Bhogali Bihu* festival begins on the last day of the Indian calendar month of *Paus* and the actual day of celebration is the first day of the month of *Magh*.

# Kaati Bihu or Kongali Bihu

This *Bihu* festival is not celebrated with the usual pomp with which the other *Bihu* festivals are celebrated. The day of celebration is the last day of the month of *Ashwin* – when the new crops are not ready for harvesting and the previous season's harvest, stored in the granary, has been depleted. The festival reminds people of the scarcity of food. It is a time to offer prayers for a good harvest in the coming season. Prayers are possibly the most significant part of this festival.



Differences exist in the presentation of the *Bihu* dance, depending on the community presenting it.

## Moran Bihu



*Moran Bihu* is a typical form of *Bihu* dance practiced by the *Moran* tribe of Assam. Generally, young *Moran* boys select a place far away from the din and bustle of the city. Here they make a wooden bamboo-house known as the *Bihu-ghar*. The *ghar* is divided into two areas – one for the young boys and the other for the girls. Their songs and dances are woven around the theme of love and yearning. The *Dhol* and *Pepa* provide the musical accompaniment.

## Deori Bihu

The *Deoris* of Assam are a riverine tribe who originally belonged to the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh. They have preserved and maintained their religious beliefs, traditions and practices. The *Deoris* celebrate the *Bohag Bihu* or *Bohagiyo Bihu* and the *Magh Bihu* or *Maghyo Bihu*. The presentation of *Bihu* by this community has a distinct style.



# Mishing Bihu

*Mishing Bihu* is a form of *Bihu* dance associated with the *Ali-Ai-Ligang* festival (seed-sowing festival) of the *Mishings*. The dance demonstrates the various stages of the process of cultivation from the sowing of seeds to the reaping of the harvest. The *Bihu* songs of the *Mishing* tribe have a tell-tale note, a lovely 'eiyoo oh' that rises and falls, as if a cowherd is calling out to his beloved who is busy reaping the paddy. The *Mishing Bihu*



captures the spirit of the festival, of spring, fertility, longing, of the beautiful *kopon* flower (the Assamese orchid) and love like no other. It is a time to sing about *Jonki* and *Panoi*, the Romeo and Juliet of the *Mishings*.

# Jeng Bihu



*Jeng Bihu* is an ancient form of *Bihu* dance from Upper Assam. Only women perform this form of *Bihu* dance on a moonlit night in a place far away from an inhabited area. The word *Jeng* possibly means an obstructive barrier between the performers and the audience.

# Mukholi Bihu

*Mukholi Bihu* dance is similar to the *Rongali Bihu*. It is a time when youngsters meet in the fields to dance, a time when young girls in love weave handkerchiefs for their chosen ones. The young boys invite the girls with *Bihu* songs, the beating of drums and the tunes of the *Pepa* to join them in the open fields. They exchange feelings of love and affection in the season of love, spring. The music of the buffalo hornpipes and bamboo clappers paint a portrait of spring that is not seen anywhere else.



# Kahin Ghuruwa Nach



This is also a part of the traditional *Rongali Bihu* festival of Assam. Young boys and girls attired in traditional costumes perform this dance to the rhythm of the *Dhol*. The dancers very artistically place *thaalis* or plates on their bodies and strike different poses during the performance. The lead dancer places as many as twelve to fifteen *thaalis* on his body while dancing.



# Dances of the Bodo Community

The *Bodos* are one of the largest ethnic groups of the Brahmaputra valley, who like the other communities of Assam have nurtured their own distinctive music and dance traditions. They have contributed to a great extent towards upholding the cultural traditions of Assam.



# Bordoishikla Dance



The *Bordoishikla* dance is a very special folk art form of the community. In *Bodo* language, *Bor* refers to a strong wind, *Doi* is water and *Shikla* is a young girl who is as beautiful as a celestial goddess. Poets and writers have woven many legends around the arrival of the sudden evening storms at the end of spring, at the beginning of the Indian month of *Chaitra*. The storm is imagined to be the beautiful young girl, who has spent her childhood playing in the hills of Assam. After her marriage, she has moved to a faraway land. Distance prevents her from visiting her parents often – she comes just once in the year, announcing her arrival in style, with the *Chaitra* storm. The dance celebrates the arrival of the daughter of the land and is performed to the accompaniment of traditional musical instruments like the *Kham* (drum), *Siphung* (flute) and *Jotha*. The dancers perform with *Khanjanis* or bamboo clappers in their hands, which provide the rhythm for their movements. The colourful costumes worn by the dancers and graceful body movements make the dance fascinating.



# Bagroomba Dance



Lord Shiva, known as *Bathow*, in *Bodo* language, is worshipped by all members of the community. Lord Shiva created the *Panchabhoota*, or the five basic elements of human existence, namely Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether. Through the *Bagroomba* dance the young girls of the *Bodo* community offer prayers to Lord Shiva and the *Panchabhoota*. Wearing colourful hand-woven traditional attire and holding the ends of scarves strung around their necks, the girls look like beautiful butterflies. The dance begins in a straight line but eventually falls into a circular pattern. This graceful dance is performed to the accompaniment of the *Kham* and *Siphung*.

# Santrali Dance

The *Santrali* dance dates back to the pre-*Sankarite* era. The *Deodhani*, the chief priestess of the *Bodos*, realized the importance of a practical knowledge of self-defence for women, and arranged for the teaching of martial art techniques for them. Melody and rhythms were introduced with the *Kham* and *Siphung* to the practice sessions of mastering the techniques, and the scientific learning process evolved into an enjoyable folk dance. This is a folk dance of Assam performed by women of the *Bodo* community, who take pride in referring to themselves as a warrior community. The dance is performed as a part of the *Kherai Puja* celebrations. This is one of the finest and most colourful and rhythmic dances of the state, in which the performers dance to the beat of traditional musical instruments like *Kham*, *Siphung*, *Jotha*, *Charinda* and cymbals. Through the dance they remind the men folk of the community that they are always ready to take up arms should the need arise. For them, the pride and respect of the community will always remain the most important factor of their lives.



# Ranachandi Dance



The *Ranachandi* dance is also a spectacular war dance of the Bodo community. These women of Indo-Burmese origin perform the *Ranachandi* dance to seek the blessings of the Almighty before the men set out for war. Through a simple *Puja* they seek the protection of their men and also vow to take up arms whenever necessary. Wearing colourful traditional costumes, the girls begin the dance in slow graceful movements and end with highly rhythmic martial movements.

# Muchaglangnai Dance

The *Muchaglangnai* dance is an important part of the *Kherai Puja* celebrations. Dressed in colourful attire consisting of the *dekhona* and *aarnia*, the young girls perform this attractive dance to the lively beat of the *Kham* and the melody of the *Siphung*.



# Daothulwangnai Dance



The *Daothulwangnai* dance is the dance of the *Deodhani*, performed during the *Kherai Puja*. The *Deodhani* performs this dance to destroy all aggression and pray for peace, harmony and protection against calamities.



# Dances of the Rabha Community



## Farkanti Dance

The *Rabhas* believe that the souls of the dead are reborn in this world not only as human beings, but also as animals and birds. According to ancient belief, the three birds, *Manchelenka*, *Tandalenka* and *Batiktika* represent the souls of the departed. During the performance of the *Farkanti* dance, these birds are used as symbols of friendship and trust. The *Farkanti* dance is performed after the death of a person, in the presence of the kith and kin of the deceased, his friends and the community. The purpose of the dance is to enliven the sorrowful atmosphere in the deceased person's family. Through the dance, prayers are offered to show reverence and respect to the departed soul.

# Hamzar Dance



*Hamzar* refers to an age-old agricultural tradition of cultivating paddy on land cleared of forests in the hills and plains. This form of agricultural practice is known as *Jhum* or slash-and-burn cultivation and has been practised by many tribes from primitive times. It is still largely prevalent among the *Rabhas*. The poorer sections of the tribal community resort to *Hamzar* for cultivating *Ahu* paddy because they do not have suitable plain land to produce *Sali* paddy. The lure of a higher yield attracts even the comparatively well-off sections of the community to *Hamzar*. The tradition of *Hamzar* has well-defined roles for

the *Rabha* man and *Rabha* woman. While the *Rabha* men clear the land by cutting down the trees of the forest, the women scrub and sweep the land. Both men and women take part in the ploughing of the land and the sowing of the seeds. The men keep vigil at night to protect the farmland. They spend the night on raised platforms known as *Robongs*. During the day, the women take care of the crops by scaring away the birds and insects. Both men and women do the reaping of the harvest. The entire process is very aesthetically depicted in the *Hamzar* dance.

# Dhaowa Dance

Hostilities, struggles and conflicts that ultimately culminate in battles and wars are part of human existence from time immemorial. The brave *Rabha* people have faced such situations innumerable times and have fought many battles with other hostile groups. The *Dhaowa* dance is performed ceremonially, just before the *Rabha* warriors set out for the battlefield. This dance form symbolises the bravery and undaunted spirit of the *Rabha* people that defies defeat or even death.



# Hanoghora Dance

*Hanoghora* is an attractive folk dance of the *Pati Rabhas* living in the south-western part of Kamrup district, named and performed in honour of the God of Fortune.

# Dances of the Tiwa Community



## Langkhon Fuja Mishawa

*Langkhon Fuja Mishawa* is a traditional dance of the Tiwa tribe of Assam. *Tiwa* means enlightened people. The people belonging to this tribe were originally known as the *Laloongs* and they inhabited the western part of the Nagaon district of Assam. The *Tiwas* observe *Beusakh Bihu*, *Magh Bihu* and many other religious festivals. All their festivals start on the first Wednesday of the related month. The *Langkhon Fuja Mishawa* dance is performed during the festivals observed in the months of November, December and January. The theme of the dance is man's relationship with and dependence on nature. The dancers wear colourful traditional costumes and carry decorated bamboo sticks. Singing, drum- beating, and the melodious strains of the flute accompany this very enjoyable and choreographically interesting tribal dance form.

## Barat Dance



The *Barat* dance of the *Tiwas* is associated with the *Usha Barat* festival celebrated on the full-moon night in December. During the festival, young girls of the village fast during the day and celebrate in the evening by performing this beautiful dance. The girls, sometimes wearing masks, begin the celebrations by lighting three hundred and sixty lamps. The tribal king of the region joins the people in their festivities. The celebrations are very grand at Tetelia, home of the *Tiwas*.

# Mishing Gumrak



The *Mishings* are one of the largest tribes in the plains of Assam. *Ali-Ai-Ligang* is their most important festival, held every year in the Indian month of *Falgun*. The dance form associated with this festival is *Gumrak*. The dancers demonstrate various stages of the process of cultivation through their performance. The atmosphere comes alive with the music of the *Dumdum*, *Pepa*, *Siphung* and *Gunggang*. The girls perform this rhythmic

dance, attired in their best *Ribigaseing* and *Ribiyege*. The festival continues for five days, and on all days, dancing and feasting takes place in the courtyards of the village homes. The festival concludes with *Dapan Tipan* or a community feast. The last day of the festival is called *Lilen*.

# Bisuyo Jama Dance



The *Bisuyo Jama* dance is one of the most attractive dance forms of the *Deori* tribe of northeast Assam. In the *Deori* dialect, *Bi* means extreme or excess and *Su* means rejoicing. So *Bisu* indicates the time for rejoicing. The most important festival of the *Deori* community is *Bohagiyo Bisu*, which lasts from a week to a fortnight. Spring is an important time for the *Deoris* who are mostly cultivators. The young boys and girls spend the late evenings dancing to the rhythm of melodious *Bisu* songs. Through this celebration, the *Deoris* pray for the peace and prosperity of the village.

# Domahi Kikang

The *Karbi* tribe of Assam performs the *Domahi Kikang* dance during spring. There are two varieties of this dance, prevalent in the state — the first is performed by the *Karbi* tribe members residing in the hilly areas of Assam and the other is performed by the *Karbi* people living in the plains. The *Karbi* youths carry decorated swords and present a very enchanting dance.

# Zemi Naga Dance



The *Zemi Naga* tribe living in Assam have a set of distinctive dances which imitate the movements of birds and animals. The dancers display much skill in imitating the movements of the bee, the hornbill and the butterfly.

# Jhumur Dance

The *Jhumur* dance is a traditional, highly rhythmic folk dance of Assam and is extremely popular with the tea garden workers. With the passage of more than a hundred years of their settlement in Assam, the tea tribes have developed a synthesized form of dance called *Chah Baganar Jhumur Nach* (*Jhumur* dance of the tea gardens). This dance is performed by the girls and boys together and sometimes by the girls alone. Holding each other by the waist, the dancers sway to interesting beats. Precision of footwork is a noteworthy feature of the dance, which is secular in concept and has a distinct identity. The dances are performed to the rhythmic accompaniment of the indigenous percussion instrument, the *Madal*. The young and old dance together in gay abandon. The costume worn by the *Jhumur* dancers is different from the traditional costume worn for the *Bihu* dance. Visitors to the tea gardens get to watch this beautiful dance.



# Pangba Dance



According to tribal belief, the movement of the stars destines man's fate. One such ancient belief is that during certain movements of the stars, the different gods of diseases enter the human body causing different ailments. Of the many gods of diseases, the most ruthless is the god *Pangba*. When he enters the body, the person experiences immense pain. The tribal communities believe that performing a prayer dance in front of the deity can cure the ailing person. In essence, the *Pangba* is a prayer dance, and is performed to calm down a hostile god. It is a helpless plea of man to the mysterious, unknown and sometimes hostile forces of nature.

# Santhar Dance

The *Santhar* dance is part of the festival of *Baikho Puja* in the *Killa Dibi Khai* tradition. The festival ends with much celebration and the *Santhar* dance is an integral part of it. The dance describes the joys of youth and love. The *Santhar* dance is also a medium for conveying proposals for marriage.

# Oja Pali and Deodhani Nritya



The *Oja Pali* and *Deodhani Nritya*, belonging to the pre-Sankarite period, represent the rich cultural heritage of the state. The *Oja* and *Palis* are actually a group of chorus singers and dancers with the *Oja* as the leader and the *Palis* as his associates. In Assam there are two main variations of *Oja Pali* - the *Vyas Oja Pali*, used mainly for preaching of the *Vaishnava* culture of Assam, and the *Suknani Oja Pali* where the performers sing and dance while reciting the age-old saga of *Manasa Mangal Kabya*. The hymns for this form of dance were composed by the ancient Assamese poet *Sukabi Narayan Dev*. The narratives in rhymed metrical verse were composed mostly between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries and belong to the genre of medieval literature.

The *Deodhani Nritya* is based on a mythological reference where a wife, *Behula*, had to dance before *Goddess Manasa* to get back her husband's life. Wearing a red *mekhala* (the traditional attire of Assamese women) and beautiful jewellery, and leaving their long tresses open, the dancers perform complex steps, like rotation of their heads in rapid circular motions. Dancing with the *Daa*, a sharp weapon used for sacrifice in war, is a striking feature of the dance. The dance has a vigorous rhythm and the dancers often go into a trance during the performance. It is strongly believed that the goddess possesses the *Deodhanis* during the course of the dance. Such dances strengthen people's belief and faith in supernatural powers. Music is provided by the *Jai Dhol*, a cylindrical percussion instrument, which is played by the lead musician, and the *Khutitaals*, which are played by the *Palis*. The performance opens with a *Devi Vandana* and ends with a *Jai Dhol Badan*, which is a celebration of *Behula's* successful journey, in which her desires have been fulfilled.

# Goalparia Dances



*Goalparia* folk songs and dances are an integral part of the lives of the people of Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts of Assam, and are varied in their interpretation.

The *Goalini* dance describes the process of harvesting. The dance, which is performed by the wives of the farmers during the harvesting season, begins with a *Laxmi Baran* or invocation of *Goddess Lakshmi*.

The river Brahmaputra and its tributaries flow through the undivided Goalpara district of Assam. The *Baitha Maro* dance describes a very popular sporting event of this area — boat-racing. Special songs and dances that cheer the boatmen to win the race are associated with this sport.



# Kushan Dances



*Kushan Nritya* is a very popular folk dance tradition of the Goalpara region. The theme song of *Kushan Nritya* is the story of the Ramayana, thus giving the dance a spiritual character. *Lakshmaner Saktisel*, *Ratnakar Dasyur Papkshay*, *Harichandrer Dan* and *Ravan Badh* are the different episodes that are depicted through music and dance.

# Bhortal Dance



The *Sattriya* dance form was introduced in the fifteenth century AD by the great *Vaishnava* saint and reformer of Assam, *Shrimanta Sankara Deva*, as a powerful tool for the propagation of the *Vaishnava* faith. He integrated art and *bhakti* through music, dance and drama. His aim was the upliftment of the Assamese society, which was ridden with religious malpractices. He was opposed to caste privileges and this appealed to the broad tribal base of the state. Through his simple dramas in the *Brajabali*

language, he made the audience aware of the *bhakti rasa* and selfless devotion for the Supreme Being.

The *Bhortal* dance is an innovation of the famous *Sattriya* dance. This invocatory dance is performed with big cymbals. On the anniversaries of the *Vaishnava* saints, the devotees assemble in the courtyards of the *Kirtan ghars* (prayer halls) and sing and dance in praise of Lord *Krishna*.





# BIHAR

When we think of culture, music, art and religion, we at once form an image in our minds, an image of the holy land of Bihar. The history of Bihar can be traced back to as far as the history of civilization itself. *Lord Rama's* wife, *Sita* is known to have been born in Bihar. The city of *Pataliputra* or Patna was founded by the great Mauryan emperor, Ashoka in BC 270. The religions of Buddhism and Jainism, a revolt against Hinduism, were founded in Bihar. *Vardhamana Mahavira* attained *nirvana* in this land and founded the new religion of Jainism. Another prince sacrificed all his worldly treasures and meditated under the *Bodhi* tree in Bodhgaya. He too attained salvation from the continuous cycle of birth and rebirth and founded Buddhism. Today he is known as the Buddha. *Chanakya*, also known as *Kautiliya*, wrote the first treatise on the modern science of economics, called the *Arthashastra* and he too hailed from this land. This land also witnessed the birth of *Guru Gobind Singh*, the tenth and last *Sikh Guru*, who attained sainthood in Bihar.

The tribal and folk songs, as well as the varied dance forms of Bihar, are a representation of the emotional upheavals experienced by the people, as well as their values, hopes, beliefs and traditions. The music and dance forms in Bihar are as many as the numerous tribal groups, filling the state with love, music, art and diversity.

# Karma Dance



The traditional *Karma* dance gets its name from the *Karma* tree which stands for fortune and good luck. The dance begins with the planting of the tree, followed by circular formations around it. In this group dance, there are usually as many men as women dancers. The dancers form a two-tiered formation and the movements are usually backward and forward, towards and away from each other. The dancers swing to the rhythm of the drum and the clapping of the womenfolk.

Later, breaking the formation, the dancers thread in and out and the body movements involve the bending of the torso and the knees. The dancers put their arms around the waists of their neighbours and form semi-circular rows. Each row of dancers sings and dances alternately to the accompaniment of the percussion instruments, the *Mandur* and *Timki*. Drums beat fast and loud and the dance ends on a happy note. The choreography is imaginative and the themes of the songs are contemporary and relevant.



# Kajari Dance

The *Kajari* dance welcomes the beautiful season of monsoon. The young girls of the village dance in gay abandon out in the open to express their joy at the approach of the season of fulfilment. The dance is usually performed in the months of *Shravan* and *Bhadrapad*. The young girls bathed in the romance of the season exchange notes with each other about their beloveds. Rain is, after all, the sublime symbol of fertility, of succulence, of birth and rebirth.

# Jhijhia Dance



*Jhijhia* is a prayer dance that originated in the Koshi region of Bihar and is performed during droughts, when the land is dry and parched and there are no signs of clouds in the lifeless sky. Through the *Jhijhia* dance, the young girls offer their prayers to the king of gods, *Lord Indra*. The dancers pray to the Lord of the Rains for life-giving rain and a good crop. The words of the song *Haali Huli Barsaun Inder Devta* depict the conviction and deep devotion of the dancers as they pray to their god.



# Mukhota Nritya



The Mukhota Nritya is an interesting dance form, not least because the male dancer appears wearing the mask of a woman on the back of his head. As he dances facing the audience, he is a man, and when he turns around, he is a woman. With every turn of his body, his movements change, and he plays both the roles to perfection. Besides depicting the tender moments between a young man and his wife, this dance also makes statements about sorrow and poverty.

# Bhojpuri Jhoomar Dance

*Bhojpuri* music and dance is popular in Magadh and its surrounding districts in Bihar.

*Bhojpuri Jhoomar* is a famous folk dance of the *Bhojpuri* people. With the advent of spring, nature blossoms into a riot of colour and fragrance. The people of this region welcome spring with vibrant songs and dances. This rhythmic dance form is an expression of the joys and sorrows of the people; essentially, a mirror to their lives.



# Jhoomar Dance



*Jhoomar* is a traditional folk dance of Bihar, which is performed by the rural women. There is no fixed season for the performance of this beautiful dance form; it is a dance which is performed at all times. Spring descends on earth with its beauty and spreads joy and happiness all around. The women dance with hearts filled with joy and happiness. The menfolk are invited to join in and they usually provide the musical accompaniment.

# Magahi Jhoomar Dance



The *Magahi Jhoomar* dance is usually presented in the form of a duet, where male and female dancers play the role of husband and wife. They dance in unison, expressing their desires and aspirations. The wife asks her husband for good clothes and beautiful ornaments. The husband promises to give her everything she desires. This vibrant folk dance is performed to the accompaniment of melodious music.

# Jharni Dance



The *Jharni* dance is a ritualistic dance performed by the men of the *Julaha* community during *Muharram*. The dancers use bamboo sticks split at one end. They stand in a circular formation, and move around, each dancer striking the stick of his partner. The sound produced provides the beat for the dance.



# Jat Jatin Dance

The women of the Mithilanchal region perform the *Jat Jatin* dance on moonlit nights during the monsoons. Unmarried girls and young housewives assemble in a courtyard and dance to the accompaniment of a drum, from midnight to dawn. As they dance, they enact in gestures the epic story of the love of *Jata* and *Jatin*. The most dramatic part of the dance is when a wicked boatman breaks through the dancing ring and kidnaps the beautiful *Jatin*. The lovers are separated but as in all folk tales, all ends well and the lovers live happily ever after.



# Jhumeri Dance



*Jhumeri* is another interesting folk dance from Mithilanchal. After the month of *Ashwin*, comes the month of *Kartick* with its clear skies. On the full-moon night of *Kartick*, the young maidens of the village sing and dance to celebrate the turn of the season. The words of the *Jhumeri* song *Kartik Maas Na Akashey Badari* and the graceful movements of the dance cast a spell on the audience.

# Sohar Khelwana

*Sohar Khelwana* is a dance performed by women to celebrate the birth of a child. In India, the arrival of a newborn is celebrated with traditional rituals. The child receives blessings from family members, neighbours and well-wishers. Through the *Sohar* songs, the women compare the newborn to *Lord Rama* and *Lord Krishna*, popular Hindu gods who are the embodiments of virtue. The eunuchs play an integral part in the celebrations of childbirth and take part in this dance.



# Holi Dance (Dhamar Jogira)



Spring arrives, resplendent in the colours of *abir* as the magic of *Holi* sweeps across the land. Commemorative of the victory of good over evil, the festival of colours is celebrated with unabated enthusiasm by the young and old alike. Come *Holi* and the hues of the rainbow deck the air in fine mists, the streets in tell-tale smears and our hearts with the joyful hope that peace and happiness shall reign. The *Holi* dance is a vibrant dance form of Bihar. The accompanying songs are sung in the *Dhamar* style, a semi-classical form of singing.

# Chhath Puja Dance



*Chhath* is the most important and holy festival of Bihar, celebrated in the month of *Kartick*. The *Puja* is unique because it is possibly the only festival in which the devotees worship the setting sun before worshipping the rising sun. The first offering or *Arghya* is done at sunset, after which the worshippers spend the night on the banks of the river Ganges. The next morning they offer *Arghya* to the rising sun, before returning home. This prayer dance is performed with great devotion by the dancers.

## Devas

In the months of *Chaitra* and *Ashwin* (during the *Navaratri* period), *Shakti Puja* is performed. Devotees believe that the *Devi* enters the body of a mortal on hearing the prayers of the *Pujari*. The dance depicts this divine presence in our midst.



## Nachni

The *Nachni* dances with her *Rashik* or male partner, to the singing and clapping of male accompanists. *Nachni* dances are presented at various festivals and special occasions. The *Nachni* is not only the dancer, but also the singer. The accompanying musical instruments include the *Nagara*, *Shehnai* and *Harmonium*.

## Natua

The *Natua* dance begins with an item called the *Natua Kachal*. In this duet performance, the accompanying musical instruments include the *Nagara*, *Dhol* and *Shehnai*. The costumes worn by the dancers are indigenous and attractive.

# Krishi Nritya

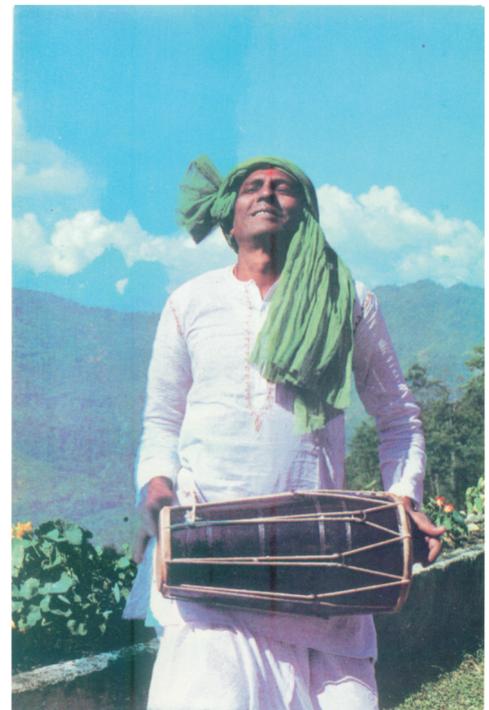


The rains have quenched the earth's thirst. The sight of their fields rich with the golden crop fills the farmers' hearts with joy. They express their happiness through dances, which are rhythmic and enjoyable.



# Kishan Nritya

This dance is an expression of pride of the farmers of Bihar. The dance brings together the farmers of the state in a bond of brotherhood.





# JHARKHAND

Carved out of Bihar in 2000, many treasures of the relatively new state of Jharkhand situated in the Chota Nagpur Plateau are still less known to most people. Many rivers like the Damodar, Brahmani, Kharkai and the Subarnarekha, flow gently, adding to the natural charm of Jharkhand. It is heaven on earth, where hill streams bubble like a young *adivasi's* laughter. It is here that you can hear the sound of silence and taste the elegance of nature. The state is endowed with abundant mineral wealth, flora and fauna. Jharkhand is home to a number of tribal communities since ancient times. No wonder then that the art and culture of the state reflects a vivid and colourful tribal tapestry. The folk and tribal dances of the state are a medium of expressing one's feelings, hopes and aspirations. The dances are very graceful, rhythmic and attractive and are accompanied by vigorous drum beats and melodious songs.

Over thirty indigenous communities co-exist harmoniously in Jharkhand. Some of the major tribes are the *Santhals*, *Oraons*, *Mundas*, *Kharias*, *Hos* and *Cheros*. Rich in culture and traditions, these communities have several colourful festivals. As the tribal communities gave up their gypsy lifestyles, they began clearing forests for settlements. The journey of their life is reflected in the rhythm of the different tribal and folk dances of the state. The *adivasis* of Jharkhand are born dancers and singers. Their songs and music are joyous and depict the festive spirit that prevails whenever there is an occasion for people to get together. The musical instruments of the land and the traditional tribal costumes and jewellery worn by the dancers, add to the beauty of the dances.

# Paika



The *Munda*, *Ho* and *Oraon* communities of Jharkhand perform the *Paika* dance. This dance is a stylized representation of the rituals connected with the preparations for war. The dancers hold bows, arrows, spears, swords and shields and the dance is, in fact, a stylized worship of arms. The martial character of the dance is retained by the use of the shield and sword. The dancers display their skills in handling the sword and shield and the dance reaches a climax with the fast beat of the *Madal*. Previously the dance was performed to welcome guests, but nowadays it is also performed on different happy occasions like weddings. The *Dusserah* celebrations remain incomplete without this dance. The other indigenous musical accompaniments of this dance are the *Dhol*, *Nagara*, *Shehnai* and *Ranbheri*. The *Mundas* originally came from north west India, but later moved to the Chota Nagpur Plateau. They began their settlements here by clearing forests. They were the first tribal people to resist colonization. The *Paika* dance of the *Mundas* symbolizes the great war of their community against the British. Besides their protective chest blades, the dancers also wear colourful headgear, bright waistbands signifying valour, and bells around their ankles as part of their elaborate costumes. This captivating dance form is a martial art with variations throughout Jharkhand, and is an expression of the deep sense of love and patriotism that the warrior dancers feel for their motherland.



# Seraikella Chhau



The *Seraikella Chhau* is one of the three *Chhau* dance forms prevailing in eastern India, in the states of West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand. This dance form is based on martial arts and incorporates the *Veera Rasa* of the Indian dramatic spectrum. The *Seraikella Chhau* dance is an art form which combines popular appeal with sophistication. The nature of the themes is similar to those of the classical dance forms, but it has permeated the rank and file of the people. The dances are usually vigorous, and many dances illustrate stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Other dances depict the moods of animals and their movements and bring alive the daily lives of the people.



# Kharsawan Chhau



The *Kharsawan Chhau* dance is performed without the use of masks, unlike the *Seraikella Chhau* dance. The performers paint their faces and bodies in order to depict different characters. This dramatic dance form incorporates acting and different stories from the epics and legends of *Krishna* are depicted through vigorous dance.

# Kali Jhoomar Dance

The *Kali Jhoomar* dance is a prayer dance dedicated to the Lord of the Rains, *Indra Devata*. The villagers of Jharkhand are primarily an agricultural community. They are dependent on the monsoons for a good harvest. The offering of prayers to *Lord Indra* is done at the end of the rainy season — it is a thanksgiving for a good



monsoon and a prayer for good rains in the following year too. A female dancer dressed in traditional attire, begins the dance and is joined by many male supporting dancers. The men wear a special headgear with peacock feathers. In earlier times, the dance would be performed only on the night of the *Indra Puja*, but nowadays, the performance of the dance does not await the retreat of the monsoons. It is performed on many social occasions like weddings and the birth of a child, as well as on festive occasions like *Dusserah* and *Deepavali*.

# Kiho Dance



The *Kiho* dance is based on *Lord Krishna's Raas Leela*. *Lord Krishna* is undoubtedly one of Hinduism's most popular gods. According to popular legend, *Lord Krishna* would accompany the *gopinis* when they took their cows to the fields for grazing. The young cowherd played the flute and mesmerized the *gopinis* with his hypnotic music. The *Kiho* dance depicts the love of the *gopinis* for *Lord Krishna*. The dance begins with a prayer to

*Dharti Ma*, Mother Earth, followed by prayers to the four directions of the Earth and finally a prayer to *Lord Krishna*. The dance is usually performed between the months of August and December.

# Mallar Nritya

The *Mallars* are a nomadic tribe of Jharkhand who are constantly on the move, spending the night at whichever place they reach at sunset. They have no proper homes and always move with their families — this means that their children do not receive any formal education. Tribal societies from all over the country share some common characteristics by which they can be distinguished from complex advanced societies. They manifest cultural features signifying a primitive level of socio-cultural existence. Tribal societies have remained outside the main historical current of civilization for centuries. The *Mallars* follow Hindu customs and traditions and perform this lively and spontaneous dance on social occasions like the celebration of a birth, christening of infants, weddings and other happy occasions. The dance also celebrates the changing seasons and the beauty of nature. The circular movements of the dance are simple and repetitive, so the entire community can participate. The indigenous *Dholak* helps keep the beat of the dance. The *Mallars* make a special kind of pottery using clay and metal, which they sell to earn a living.



# Data Nritya



The *Data Nritya* is a dance of the *Oraon* tribe of Jharkhand. Traditionally, the *Oraons* depended on forests and forest products for their livelihood, but in recent times, they have become settled agriculturists. They have an amiable nature and live in close association with other tribes. The culture of the tribe comprises a wide range of folk songs, traditional musical instruments, dances and folk-tales. Both male and female members of the community participate in the dances performed at social festivals and gatherings.

According to an old folk tale, two young men were involved in a duel using sticks. Two large monkeys watched them from a distance and as soon as the men left, they picked up the sticks and started imitating the men. Other members of the tribe enjoyed watching the monkeys, who, through very skilful movements, saved themselves from each other's attack. These movements were copied by the *Oraons* and have evolved into the *Data* dance. Another story says that the *Data* dance is actually a show of physical prowess and is performed to win the hand of a girl or impress the bride's family when the groom's family arrives at the bride's house for the wedding ceremony.

*Data Nritya* has two parts - *Data Khel* and *Data Nritya*. *Data Khel* is a competition between young boys to prove superiority in strength. One has to be very alert during the exercise as otherwise there are chances of hurting oneself. *Data Nritya* is performed by the women of the village before the *Barat* or bridegroom's family set out for the wedding ceremony. Holding *Kalashes* (pitchers) decorated with paddy, an auspicious symbol, the women dance to the accompaniment of the *Dhol*, *Dhak* and *Nagara*. Men also join in and there is an atmosphere of joy and happiness all around.

# Korawa Nritya



The *Korawa adivasis* are a hunter-gatherer tribe living in the Palamau, Latehar, Ranchi, Dhanbad, Hazaribag and Santhal Pargana districts of Jharkhand. They also inhabit the Surgya and Jaspur districts of Chhatisgarh. *Korawa* villages are always located on the top of a hill or a mound covered with thick forest. A typical village has a few isolated thatched huts about ten to twelve feet long and eight feet high which are erected with bamboo and wood and plastered with mud. A village may have one clan or several clans of *Korawas*. They form marital and kinship relationships with *Korawas* of other villages. They follow a set of social norms established by the community and those who break these laws are ousted from the clan. The society is patriarchal and patrilineal with patrilocal residence. They are divided into three exogenous groups: *Diti Korawa*, *Danda Korawa* and *Pahari Korawa*.

The *Korawas* celebrate festivals like *Chait Nawani*, *Sarhul Puja*, *Karma Puja* and *Phagu Festival*. Both male and female members of the community perform joyous dances in the *Akhada*, a local community area, during the festivals. The dances are accompanied by the indigenous musical instrument, the *Mandar*, and the rhythmic element is brought in with clapping. Every member of the tribe can perform the dances and this is their way of forgetting for a while, their daily struggles, and bringing some joy into their lives. The dances have been handed down by their forefathers and there have not been any major changes in the presentation over the years.



# Faguwa Nritya



According to legend, *Faguwa* dance was the celebratory dance performed by the people of Dwarka on the day of *Bhagwan Sri Krishna's* birth. There is another popular legend too regarding this dance. *Hiranyakashyap*, an ardent devotee of *Lord Shiva*, worshipped *Shiva* with the greatest devotion, but showed no reverence for the other gods, including *Lord Vishnu*. His son *Prahlad* became a devotee of *Vishnu*, which annoyed him so much that he wanted to kill his son. *Hiranyakashyap's* sister *Holika* had received a boon that no fire could ever burn her. Thus, confident that no harm would come to *Holika*, *Hiranyakashyap* made *Holika* sit with *Prahlad* on her lap, and set them on fire. In spite of her blessing, *Holika* got burnt, but *Prahlad* came out of the fire unharmed. The people of *Dwarka* hailed *Prahlad* as a blessing from *Lord Vishnu* and rejoiced at his miraculous escape, by performing a *Puja* and this dance. Even today, the burning of *Holika's* effigy is an important ritual connected with this *Puja* and dance. At the end of the *Puja*, the priest relights the ritualistic fire and the members of the *Koshta* community perform the *Fagua* dance around the fire. The *Nagra*, *Dhak*, *Shehnai*, *Jhanj* and *Kartal* are the accompanying musical instruments.

# Dances of the Turi Tribe



Nature wears her best clothes in Jharkhand. The bamboo forests of the state have an indescribable beauty. The legend surrounding the dance of the *Turi* tribe is interesting. An old man went to the forest to collect bamboo. As he started cutting the bamboo plants, he saw a big tiger sitting in the grove. The old *Turi* man did not flee in fear, instead he used the implements he had with

him to scare the tiger away. He spent the rest of the day collecting bamboo and returned home in the evening. He used the bamboo to make several articles which he sold to support his family. This old man is a hero of the *Turi* tribe and the members of the community pay their respects to his bravery through the *Turi* songs. The *Turis* worship *Viswakarma* and present this dance on the day of the god's *Puja*. An important part of their attire when they perform this dance is the headgear made from bamboo. The dance is also performed on social occasions.

## Birhor Nritya



The *Birhor* dance also known as the *Dong* dance is the dance of the ancient *Birhor* tribe of the state. These tribesmen inhabit the forested regions of Jharkhand, and live in houses made with leaves and grass. They are followers of Hinduism and pray to several gods seeking protection from the dangers of the forests. All through the year they make sacrifices of different birds to appease their gods.

The *Birhor* dance is performed by the community at weddings, festivals and especially at the *Narkha*, a prayer

ceremony for a newborn. When a member of the community falls ill, they perform the dance to appease the gods. When the illness is serious, a white goat is also sacrificed. The dance is usually performed during the hot summer months of *Chaitra* and *Baisakh*. The *Nagara* and *Mardal* are the accompanying musical instruments.



# Hunta Dance



The hunting dance of the *Santhals* who live in the hilly plateaus of the Chota Nagpur region of the *Santhal Parganas* of Jharkhand is known as the *Hunta* dance. This powerful dance requires a lot of strength and vigour and is performed only by men. The dance depicts the act of preparing for the hunt with bows and arrows, stalking the animal and finally killing it. Mime, slow strong stepping and

measured movements are the distinctive features of this ancient tribal dance.

# Mundari Dance

The *Mundari* dance is a very common and popular dance of the *Mundaris*. All members of the community can participate in this dance. This dance is generally performed to congratulate the newly-weds. *Munda* songs are often mixed with songs in other tribal languages in such a way, that one can rarely identify the pure *Munda* elements in their songs. The remarkable similarity between *Munda* songs and



dances and those of other constituent tribal groups in the culture of Jharkhand, lies in this form of group dancing, performed with the swinging of the dancers' bodies with especially expressive *mudras* or gestural language. The movements of the dance are very repetitive. The dance style has only a few steps. They move forward a few steps and then retrace their steps.

# Barao Dance



The richness and variety of the *Barao* dance and music is remarkable. The *Oraon* community of the state, who are mainly concentrated in the Hazaribagh Goomla area, performs this dance. The high table-land is thickly dotted with hills and hillocks. The *Oraons* call themselves *Kuruk*. The ten lakh-strong *Oraon* population of Jharkhand has folk songs, folk dances, folk tales and some traditional musical instruments, which are unique to them. Both men and women participate in these community dances. There are different songs and dances for different occasions and seasons. Every village has an *Akhada* or performing area in which in the month of *Baisakh* (April – May) all groups

of the village organize a *jatra* (folk theatre) or dance festival. The *Barao* dance is held during this month. The community offers prayers to Mother Earth for a plentiful monsoon, so that a good harvest season may follow. The richness and variety of these songs is remarkable.

# Jitia Karam

*Karam* is the *Oraon's* name for the *Kadamb* tree, which the *Oraons* consider very sacred. They worship the *Kadamb* tree as a deity. The *Oraons* use the *Kadamb* flowers and twigs as decorations. High-pitched sounds and the rhythms of the dance touch the hearts of the people of Jharkhand. Through these songs and dances they celebrate their deep and life-long attachment to the forest which itself appears to them as a deity. Performed in reverence to the vagaries of Fortune, with a branch from the *Karam* tree held in their hands, this is a vibrant dance that displays attractive choreography.



# Jenana Jhoomar

The *Santhal* and *Nagpuri* communities mainly perform the *Jhoomar* songs and dances of Jharkhand. The *Jenana Jhoomar* Dance is a traditional dance of the women, performed mainly during the period of cultivation in the rainy season. This is the time of the year when every member of the tribal community is hopeful of a good harvest. In this hour of joy and expectation, the villagers of the *Nagpuri* community remember the dark days that they have just overcome. Even so, this beautiful dance form

is performed throughout the year, to mark all happy occasions and festivities.

# Lahasuya

The *Lahasuya* songs and dances, accompanied by rhythmic beats of the *Madal*, is a call for rain if there is a drought. Both men and women participate in this dance.

# Mardani Jhoomar

The men of the *Nagpuri* community and southern cultures perform the *Mardani Jhoomar* dance after the harvest. The musical accompaniments include the *Shehnai*, *Dhol*, *Kara*, *Nakara*, *Jhaanj* and *Kartal*. Like the *Paika* dance, the *Mardani Jhoomar* dance is also a semi-martial art form. The dance movements and the accompanying music are martial in character and the mood of the dance is that of the *veera* (valour). Occasionally, one or two female dancers, known as *nachnis*, join in this dance with the men. Though there is no fixed time for this dance, it is usually performed during the harvesting of crops.



# Jhitka & Danga Dance

Both men and women perform the *Jhitka* and *Danga* dances. The dances celebrate different feudal traditions. They are spontaneous expressions of joy and happiness and combine elements of reality and fantasy. The costume and headgear worn by the dancers is similar to that of the *Paika* dancers.



# Domkach



The *Domkach* is a distinctive folk dance of the Chotanagpur area of Jharkhand. The women of the bridegroom's family perform this ceremonial dance after his *baraat* has left for the bride's house. Since most of the men have left with the *baraat*, the women are on their own at home. Through this dance, they keep themselves awake and entertained. Moving in circles, they poke fun at each other and crack jokes through their satiric songs.

# Ghora Naach

The *Ghora Naach* is performed during wedding ceremonies. Men wear loose horse puppets around their waists and dance to the rhythms of indigenous folk instruments.



# Kharwar Tribal Dance



The *Kharwars* are a hardworking and politically conscious tribal group living in the Chotanagpur area of Jharkhand. After completing their day's work, the community relax in the evening by singing and dancing in the *Akhadas* or village community centres. The *Mandar*, *Ghugur*, *Panja* and *Kanoshi* are the accompanying musical instruments typical of the region. The songs describe the natural beauty of the state—with its beautiful rivers, mountains, springs and forests. Through the lyrics of the songs the community members also remember and pay respect to their ancestors. The movements of the dance require a high degree of physical fitness and a sense of rhythm.



# MANIPUR

In Manipur, dance is seen not only as an art form but an integral part of life, a medium of expression, which is closely interspersed with its social fabric. Manipuri dance is purely religious and its aim is to create both for the dancer and the audience, an essentially spiritual experience. Not only is dance a medium of worship and enjoyment, a door to the divine, but is indispensable to all socio-cultural ceremonies. Dance is considered by Manipuris as a form of worship and is accorded great reverence. Manipuri legend has it that when *Lai Guru Sidaba* created the earth, he created seven *Laibangthous* (gods) and seven *Lainuras* (goddesses) and these celestial beings levelled the uneven surface of the earth with their dance. The study of Manipuri dance has been imparted over the ages in the *Guru-Shishya Parampara* through a holistic approach. Here, students are imparted knowledge not only on dance but also on the values of life. Manipuri dance, whether folk, classical or modern, is devotional in nature. The folk dances of Manipur captivate the beholders with their exotic costumes and simple but graceful rhythms. The dances are ritualistic and recreational, religious and temporal. The ritualistic dances are performed at a particular rite, ceremony or sacrifice, and these dances naturally have a spiritual and religious basis.

# Lai Haraoba



*Lai Haraoba* means the Festival of Gods. The traditional *Lai Haraoba* dance, which enacts the creation of the universe, was initially a part of the *Lai Haraoba* festival. The dance is traditionally presented before the shrines of *Umanglai*, the ancestral god of the *Meiteis*, at the village temples. The principal performers are the *Maibas* (priests) and *Maibis* (priestesses), who are considered to be embodiments of purity. They invoke the deity through their repetitive and rhythmic movements, which are highly symbolic. It is essentially a ritualistic dance and is considered to be the precursor of the classical Manipuri dance form as seen today. The *Maibas* and *Maibis*, through their dance, trace the philosophy of the *Meitei* people and describe evocatively their way of life.

The *Lai Haraoba* festival, which mirrors the pre-*Vaishnavite* culture of Manipur, begins towards the end of the year and continues into the new year (April-May). It is celebrated at the shrines of the ancestral forefathers, the *Laibungs*, scattered all over the land. At this festival, people seek atonement for their sins and also resolve to lead a chaste life in the coming year.



# Kanglei Haraoba



It is said that when *Khoriphaba*, the son of *Lavinginthou Soraren*, the Lord of the Heavens, reached the earth in search of his mother, *Konthoujam Thampa*, he was enchanted by the beauty of the earth. He then saw *Thanjing*, *Marjing*, *Wangbren* and *Konbru* (the ancestral gods who guarded the four corners of the earth) performing a dance and requested them to allow him to join in. The gods initially refused, as he had no partner. However, they later allowed him to choose a partner from amongst the gods' divine daughters present in the audience. Blindfolded, he chose his partner with a *Kangjei Kaghu* (stick) and then joined the dance. Though there have been a few modifications, the tradition of *Lai Nupi Thiba*, which means a god's search for a consort, continues till date and is performed by priestesses.



## Pao-Sa Jagoi

This dance is part of the traditional *Kanglei Haraoba*. The word *pao-sa* means conversation. *Nongpok Panthoibi* set out in search of *Nongpok Ningthou*. In the course of her journey, she reached *Nongmai-Ching*, a hillock, where she met *Nongpok Ningthou*. As soon as she greeted him, they recalled incidents of their past life and celebrated by singing and dancing.



# Meibi Laiching Jagoi



Despite the prevalence of the *Vaishnavite* faith, every part of Manipur has a guardian deity, who still commands the devotion of the state's denizens. The rains herald month-long festivities. Through this dance, the *Maibis* invoke the deities and exhort them to bless the entire community.

This dance is usually performed by two *Maibis*, in which they enact the creation of the world. Through this dance, the *Maibis* invoke the deity to initiate the celebrations. Depicting the creation and evolution of life, the dance is an ultimate offering to the guardian deities.



# Thougal Jagoi Laisam Jagoi



In this dance, men and women worshippers present themselves before the deity for an auspicious beginning to the ritualistic duties of the day. Towards the end of this dance, a tug-of-war between men and women is enacted. The dance has been stylized for stage presentations.

## Mao Naga Dance

The *Mao Naga* dance is a popular dance of the *Mao Naga* community of Manipur, who reside in the northern mountains of Manipur. Young girls and boys perform the dance during the annual harvesting and seed-sowing festivals, *Chikhuni*. It involves intricate footwork along with graceful body movements. *Mao Maram Dance (Asharali Odo)*, a colourful dance known for its vocal rhythms and mellifluous movements, is one of the popular dances of this community.



# Kabui Dance



The *Kabuis*, inhabiting the western hill ranges of Manipur, have a rich tradition of dance and music and are well-known for their exquisite costumes. During the *Gang-Ngai* festival, the *Kabuis* perform a series of dances in different stylized forms, accompanied by the sound of heavy drums and high-pitched songs. The boys wield sharp weapons (*Daos*) in their hands and move around in circles, along with girls dressed in traditional costumes. The *Shim Laam* dance and the *Kit Laam* dance are some of dances of the *Kabui Nagas*.

## Shim Laam Dance

The *Shim Laam* dance is also known as the Fly Dance. According to *Kabui* legend, a prophet named *Mhung* was the creator of laws relating to all living creatures on earth. *Mhung* performed a sacrifice called *Jourumei*, to which all the creatures were invited. Each of the species performed their own dance. The *Shim Laam* dance is believed to be based on the dance that was performed by the *Tajuibon*, a flying insect with shiny wings, which moves around from one flower to another, drinking nectar. The dance is performed during the *Gang-Ngai* festival of the *Kabuis*.



## Kit Laam Dance

The *Kit Laam* dance is a colourful dance performed by the *Kabuis* to celebrate a good harvest. This annual festival mainly involves merry-making. The rhythmic dance imitates the movements of the cricket.

## Katabenlu Laam Kabui

The *Katabenlu Laam*, which means Bangle dance, is known for its intricate footwork and rhythmic movements.

## Takin Taremlaam Kabui

This dance is also performed at the *Gang-Ngai* festival of the *Kabuis* in January. Through the dance they pay homage to their ancestors and worship the spirits of the home and hearth.

# Dances of the Kukis



The history of the *Kukis* is deeply rooted in valour, integrity, sanctity and commitment. They have a rich culture and interesting and impressive. Their adventures and poignant numerous traditions that are unique, folklore abounds with tales of heroic romances.

The dances have uncomplicated rhythms and simple repetitive movements so that the entire community can participate. The *Kum Lem E Lem Leme* dance is performed at the end of the year during the *Chavang Kut* and *Mimkut* Festivals. The *Sangol Ken Khai* is a dance that demonstrates the unity and bonds of brotherhood among the *Kuki* people. The *Khup Suonte* is a dance performed at marriage ceremonies, in which the young newly-weds promise to be kind and loving to each other always. The *Sel Pang Lap*, *Achi Seile Sei* and *Lam Gang* are dances performed in honour of a good hunter. The dances are accompanied by a number of indigenous musical instruments like the *Lhemlhei* (a peculiar mouth instrument), *Gosem* (a bagpipe), *Selke* (horn), *Dahcha* (gong), *Theiphit* (whistle), *Theile* (flute), *Pengkul* (trumpet) etc. The musicians sit in a circle and play their instruments and the dancers perform in the centre of the circle.

# Luivat Pheizak Dance

The *Luivat Pheizak* dance is one of the most popular dances of the *Thangkhul Naga* community of Manipur. This dance, which depicts the different stages of cultivation and the simple lifestyle of the *Thangkhul Naga* community, is performed during all traditional festivals. There are no musical accompaniments other than the quadruple tones or notes of different pitches. The dance features colourful costumes, variation of notes from act to act, and the agile movement of hands and legs.

# Mandil Nartan

This is a festival dance performed during the *Jhulan Yatra* in Manipur. The dancers use the *Mandila* or small cymbals to provide the musical accompaniment to their performance. The *Mandil Nartan* depicts *Radha* and *Krishna* on the *Jhula* (swing) surrounded by the *Sakhis* who dance around them.

# Lhou Sha

The *Lhou Sha* is a war dance performed at every confrontation between two villages. The dance form has been preserved as part of the tradition of the *Maring* community of Manipur and marks the conclusion of significant festivals. The dance, which was initially performed by men only, has evolved into a folk art, including the tribe's womenfolk in its ambit.

# Thang-Ta

The art of *Thang-Ta* represents an ancient and remarkable tradition of Manipur. It exhibits the extraordinary technique of combat using the *Thang* (sword) and the *Ta* (spear). *Thang-Ta* symbolises the traditional martial art techniques of the Manipuris. It was customary for all Manipuri men to undergo rigorous training to master this art in order to prepare themselves to respond to a war-like situation. This dance helps provide basic training in warfare and develops personal strength, speed, sensitivity and agility of mind. In appreciation of the various benefits afforded by the dance, the kings of Manipur used to maintain *Thang-Ta* experts in their courts. Training for this dance begins early and is an arduous task. All dance movements of the *Meitis* are said to have originated from





this martial art and are linked to the snake-lore of Manipur. The movements of the *Thang* help to ward off evil spirits, while the *Ta* is held in position to protect. The martial *Meitis* practice three types of Manipuri martial arts — sword fighting, spear-fighting and wrestling. These various forms of self-defence have been transformed into graceful performing arts. A *Thang-Ta* performance begins with *Khurumjaba*, an invocatory item, in which the performers seek blessings from the Lord, the *gurus*, as well as the audience, by holding their instruments, or with bare hands. The philosophy of the Manipuri martial arts is only to defend and not to attack.



The different variations of the *Thang-Ta* include:

## Thang-Chungoi Yannaba

This is a duel fight, where both the warriors carry a sword and a shield. The swordsmen use the *Chungoi* (shield) to protect themselves against possible attacks. The sword and the shield are wielded with agility and precision to thwart all attempts of attack.

## Ta-Kousaba

This dance mainly involves the use of the spear and is performed in an open area. There are nine kinds of *Khausaral* (steps with a spear), evolved by experts over the ages, which have been handed down through generations. In this performance, the artistes select one of the *Khausarals* and present it in the form of a dance. The warrior dancers hold a spear in one hand and a *Chung* (a long shield) in the other. This dance forms part of the *Kwak Jatia* and *Lai-Haraoba* festivals.

## Thang-Ta-Chaieraba

This dance comprises a duel between the sword and the spear. While one dancer carries a sword and a shield, the other wields a spear but no shield. The man carrying the spear performs steps called *Khousaba* under the overarching principle of *Khausaral*. The steps used by the swordsman are known as *Thanghairol*. In this dance, both men try to defend each other's attack.

## Yet-Thang Oi-Thang Yannaba



This fight involves great skill and proficiency as each dancer handles two swords simultaneously. This martial art form is used in battles but has been stylized for stage presentations. It is mainly performed during royal functions and at the *Lai Haraoba* festival.

## Thang Leiteng Haiba

This is a decorated sword play and this dance is only performed by highly-skilled swordsmen. The choreography combines martial steps with complete mastery of the weapon.



## Thang Amaga Aniga Yanaba

In this fight, a man equipped with two swords fights two men at a time, one handling a sword and the other, a spear. The principles and rules of *Thanghairol* are followed in this dance too.

## Chei Khatpa

This dance forms part of the *Thang-Ta* repertoire and is performed using one long stick and two shorter ones. It is a form of *Cheitek Kotpi*, an indigenous Manipuri game.



## Meibul-Thang-Ta

Successive *gurus* of this martial tradition have enriched this variant of the *Thang-Ta*. This dance uses the *Thang-Leiteng* (sword movement) and *Ta-Khousaba* (spear movement) but the weapons are replaced by firesticks. This interesting display of the fire dance, known as *Meibul Haiba*, is a visual treat.



# Pung Cholom



The *Pung*, or Manipuri drum, is the soul of Manipuri dance. The *Pung Cholom*, or Drum dance, is a visual interpretation of the various rhythmic patterns played on the *Pung*. In this dance, the drummer identifies completely with the intricate rhythms he plays on the drum and expresses it through corresponding body movements and footwork. The *Pung Cholom* is part of the music of the *Sankirtana* tradition and is acclaimed as one of the best art forms of the state.

# Dhol Cholom

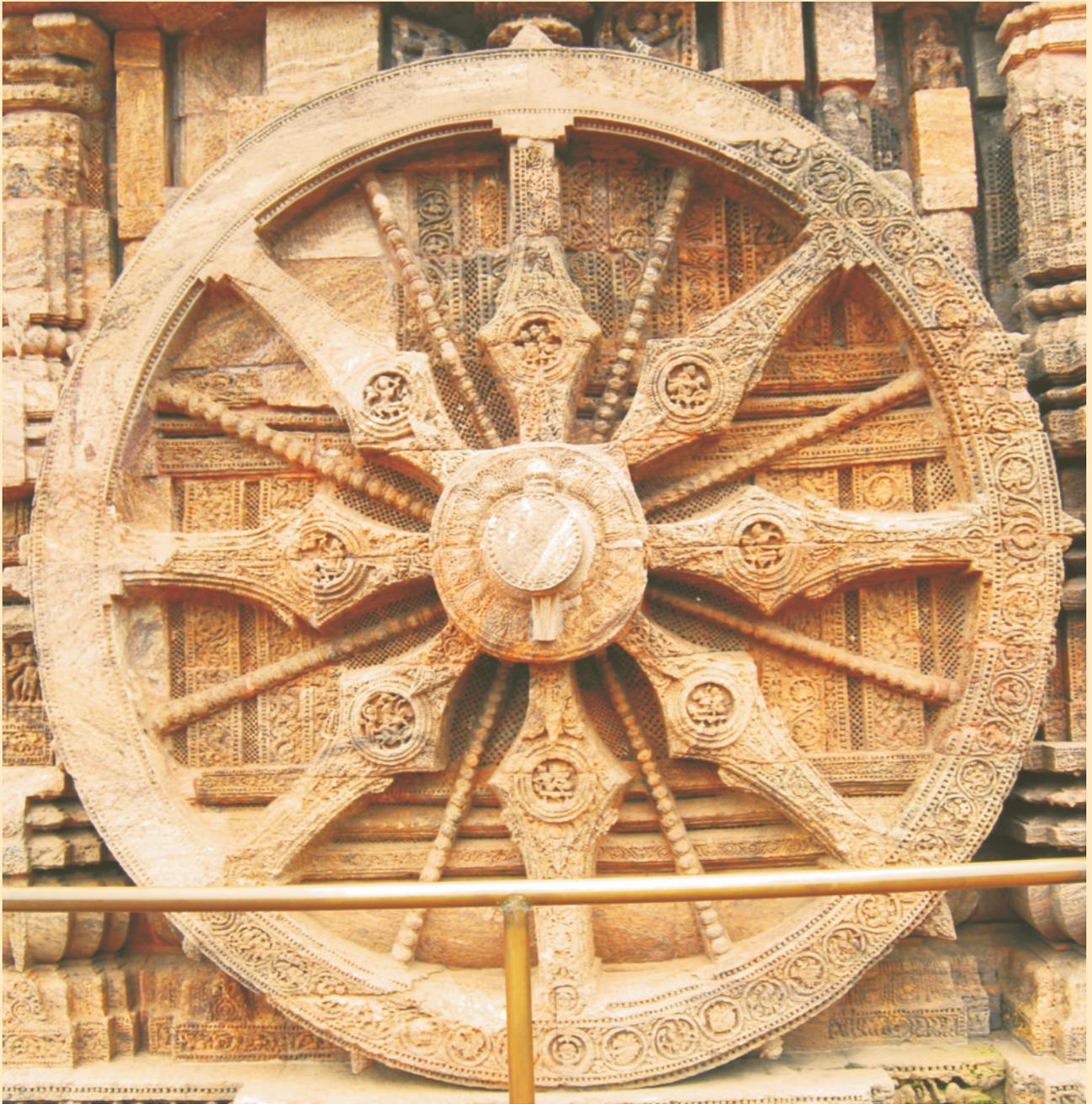


The *Dhol* is a large drum used during Manipuri dances, especially on religious occasions. The *Dhol Cholom* is a form of singing and dancing to the accompaniment of the *Dhol* and is part of the Manipuri *Sankirtana* tradition. *Dhol Cholom*, which involves the intricate interplay of drums, is performed during *Yaoshang*, as the Festival of Colours is known in Manipur.

# Dhol Dholak Cholom



Celebration of *Holi* or *Yaoshang* in Manipur is accompanied by devotional songs and dances. After the advent of Hinduism, *Vaishnavism* became a way of life for the Manipuris. Consequently, *Sankirtana*, or the worship of *Lord Krishna* and *Radha* through the medium of music and dance, became the most powerful expression of *Bhaktirasa*. This *Vaishnavite* tradition of devotional songs and dances is performed as an offering to *Lord Krishna*. *Sankirtana*, now an integral part of Manipuri culture, is performed on all important occasions and festivals. During the festival of *Yaoshang*, *Dhol Dholak Cholom* is performed using the *Dhol*, the *Dholak*, and a variety of other drums. Dressed in colourful costumes, the drummers play a spectrum of rhythms and perform acrobatic feats simultaneously. The dance beautifully combines vigour and grace.



# ODISHA

A veritable melting pot of art, tradition and religion, Odisha is a state rich in music, dance and festivals. Casuarina trees sway in the gentle breeze, the blue of the sky matches perfectly with that of the sea, and the sun plays hide and seek on Odisha's golden beaches. Music and dance is integral to the lives of the inhabitants. Over the centuries, Odisha has nurtured distinctive styles of folk art forms, all both part of and influenced by the magnificent relief and traditions of the state.

# Gotipua Dance



The *Gotipua* dance emerged from the ruins of the *Devadasi* tradition. From the fourteenth century onwards, political unrest and social changes took a toll on the *Mahari* or *Devadasi* tradition. During this time, attempts were made to keep alive the beautiful tradition of dance – thus was born the *Gotipua* tradition. The *Gotipuas* were young boys who were trained in singing, dancing and acrobatics in the village clubs or *akhadas*. They were dressed as girls and performed at temple festivals as well as various social and religious occasions. They also performed at special festive celebrations relating to *Radha* and *Krishna*, like the *Dol Utsav* or Spring Festival, the *Chandan Yatra* or boat ride of *Madan Mohan* and *Radhika* on *Chandan Pushkar* and the *Jhulan Yatra* or Swing Festival. It is believed that the *Gotipuas* began their performance in the later medieval period, during the reign of the *Bhoi* king Ramachandradev. The present forms of *Odissi* dance have been derived to a great extent from the *Gotipua* tradition. Though the dances of the *Gotipuas* are in the *Odissi* style, crucial differences exist in technique, costume and presentation. Interestingly, the *Gotipua* dancers are the singers too.

*Gotipuas* lead a life of rigorous training and exercise under the supervision of their *gurus*. In its present practice, the *Gotipua* dance is more precise and systematic in its conception than in its original form. Its repertoire includes *Vandana*, prayer to God, or a *guru*; *Abhinaya*, the enactment of a song; and *Bandha Nritya*, rhythms of acrobatic postures, which is a unique presentation in which *Gotipuas* dance and compose themselves in various acrobatic *yogic* postures creating the forms of *Radha* and *Krishna*. *Bandha Nritya* is a demonstration of physical prowess requiring great agility and flexibility. This dance form becomes increasingly difficult to execute with age, and therefore, is mostly performed by adolescent boys. Musical accompaniment to the *Gotipua* dance is provided by the *Mardala* (a *Pakhawaj*), *Ggini* (small cymbals), *Harmonium*, violin and flute.

# Sakhi Nata



*Sakhi Nata*, an ancient dance form of Odisha, used to be performed by the *Maharis* or temple dancers of the Puri *Jagannath* temple. Dance was a ritual in the *Jagannath* temple, as it was in many temples all

over India. For this purpose, very young, beautiful and accomplished girls were offered to the temple. These girls, known as *Maharis*, were segregated from society and grew up dedicating their lives to the temple, spending their time in the pursuit of art and culture.

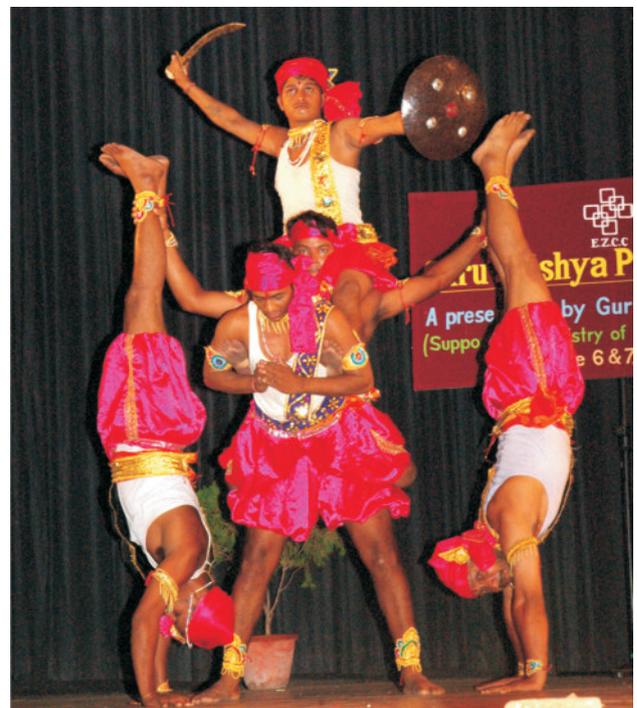
Based on the stories of *Krishna Leela*, and accompanied by songs written by famous Odiya poets like Upendra Bhanja, Gopal Kumar Patnaik and Banamali Das, *Sakhi Nata* would be performed by the *Maharis* on special occasions related to the legend of *Radha* and *Krishna*.

Celebrated in the peak of summer, the *Chandan Yatra* marks the journey of *Krishna* and *Sreeradhika* out of the Puri *Jagannath* temple in a flower-decked palanquin. Centuries ago, when the temple dance tradition was alive, the *Maharis* and the devotees would accompany the deities, singing and dancing alongside the palanquin.

The monsoon ushers in the *Jhulan* festival. The romance of the rains forms an ideal backdrop to the festival of love. *Radha* and *Krishna*, seated on a flower-decked swing, surrounded by the watchful and indulgent *gopinis*, create a radiant image of peace and fulfilment that only love can bring. As the *Maharis* sang and danced, a fragrant ambience was created that transported the believer to the abode of love: *Vrindavan*. Every worshipping *Mahari* was transfigured into an embodiment of *Radha*, in search of her own *Krishna*.

# Paika Dance

The *Paika* dance is a martial art form of ancient Odisha, which has withstood the test of time. *Paika Akhadas* thrive in several villages of the state till today. In the fifteenth century AD, *Gajapati Raja* was believed to have raised an army of *Paika* warriors. The brave *Paikas* raised their voice of rebellion against the British rulers as early as 1817, four decades before the Sepoy Mutiny broke out. Buxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar Mahapatra Bhramarabar Roy led the *Paika Bidroha*. The *Paikas* of Khurda did not allow the British to enter the region and that is why Khurda is known as the last freedom fort of India. The heroism of these warriors influenced the art, architecture and literature of Odisha. The carvings that adorn the Konark Temple



depict the martial prowess of the *Paikas*. Many of the performing art forms of Odisha, namely the *Mayurbhanj Chhau*, *Ghumura* and *Ranapa* dances have been influenced by this glorious martial tradition.

The *Paikas* have found pride of place in Odiya literature too. Sarala Dasa's *Mahabharata* written in the fifteenth century describes this martial tradition of Odisha. Poet Balaram Dash narrates the institution of warfare education in his literary work *Jagamohan Ramayana*.

The dance involves acrobatic movements with *talwars* (swords), *lathis* (sticks) and *dhalis* (shields). Not surprisingly, the dance demands of its performers an extraordinary level of physical fitness. Only through years of dedicated practice do these dancers master the precision and agility that is the hallmark of the *Paika* dance. The dance is often an integral part of *Dusserah* and *Kali Puja* celebrations. The *Chagi*, *Nagar*, *Dhamsa*, *Muhuri* and large cymbals provide the musical accompaniment.



## Ranapa



The *Ranapa* dance, which has its roots in martial arts, is popular in the coastal areas of the Ganjam district of Odisha. In this dance, the artistes walk and dance on the *Ranapas* or stilts. Mock fights choreographed to the rhythm of drums make this dance form unique. All through the dance, the dancers exhibit their skills in balancing on stilts.

# Ruk Mar Nacha



*Ruk Mar Nacha* is another martial dance form of Odisha. *Ruk* means to defend and *Mar* means to attack. Thus the dance is a highly stylised mock fight. It is prevalent in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha and is believed to be the rudimentary form of the evolved *Chhau* dance of the region. Each dancer holds a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left. The group of dancers is usually divided into two and alternately one group attacks while the other defends. The effortless leg extensions of the dancers belie the complex nature of the dance. The *Ruk Mar Nacha* stands out for its rhythmic intricacies. While the melodic base for the dance is provided by a double-reeded wind instrument called *Muhuri*, powerful percussion is provided by a *Dhol* (a barrel-shaped two-faced drum), a *Dhumsa* (a cone-shaped hemispherical drum with one face) and *Chad Chadi* (a short cylindrical drum with two faces but played on only one face with two lean sticks.)

## Mayurbhanj Chhau

The *Mayurbhanj Chhau* is one of the three styles of *Chhau* dance prevalent in the eastern region of the country. While the other two styles, *Seraikella Chhau* of Jharkhand and *Purulia Chhau* of West Bengal, are performed with masks, the Mayurbhanj style does not use masks. *Chhau* dance has a very distinctive character of its own. For its evolution and growth, it has freely imbibed techniques and movements from the prevalent folk and tribal dances of the region, creating a harmonious blend of classical, traditional, folk and tribal styles. The theme of the dance centres around tales from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and legends relating to *Lord Krishna*. The choreography of this ancient rhythmic dance is highly stylized. This dance form flourished under the patronage of the *Maharajas* of Mayurbhanj for over a century. It evolved out of the martial art forms of the area and its ceremonial presentation formed an essential part of the annual *Chaitra Parva* festival, which is held for three



consecutive nights. The dancers are divided into two competing groups, each trying to outdo the other. It has a wide range of intricate movements with acrobatic displays. The dance presents an amalgam of dynamism, precision and elegance, which is at times indistinguishable from visual poetry.

## Pasu Nritya



The *Pasu Nritya*, or the Animal Mask dance, belongs to a majestic folk dance tradition of Odisha, particularly in the Ganjam district. *Ma Byaghra Devi* and *Ma Thakurani* are the popular goddesses of this area. During festivals, when the idols are taken out on the streets (*Thakurani Yatra*), the masked dancers lead the procession in their colourful costumes. *Pasu Nritya* is also an important part of wedding ceremonies where the dancers lead the bridegroom and his family to the bride's house. The different kinds of animal mask dances include dances wearing the masks of lions, tigers, bulls, horse, deer, goats, peacocks, ducks, etc. The movements vary according to the kind of animal the dancers represent. The animal's body is made out of a cane frame, which is richly decorated. Two dancers wear the cane frame representing the animal's body, while their legs become the quadruped beast's legs. The ring master (director) leads the animals around the stage accompanied by the drummers.

# Medha Nacha



This is a masked dance performed at religious processions in the coastal districts of Odisha, during *Dusserah*, *Dol Purnima*, *Kali Puja*, *Ram Navami*, *Sahi Yatra*, and other festivals. Idols are carried in procession, led by these masked dancers. The processions halt at marketplaces and road crossings to perform. Huge masks of demons, and kings and queens, made of paper pulp, are worn by the dancers who move to the rhythm of the *Changu* and *Dhol*.

# Sankha Badan



The Bay of Bengal that bathes the golden sands of eastern Odisha has had a beautiful impact on the lives of the people of the region. The Blowing of Conches or *Sankha Badan* during festivals and religious ceremonies (like *Ratha Yatra* and *Chandan Yatra*) is a very common ritual. In the olden days, conches were also used as bugles in the battlefields. The exponents of this art form can blow two conches at a time for five to six minutes without a break, simultaneously performing intricate body movements.

# Sambalpuri Folk Dances



Western Odisha - a land of myths which owe their origin to the legendary *Goddess Sableswari* - is known for its rich and colourful folk and tribal art forms. A wide range of percussion instruments are used as accompaniments to the *Sambalpuri* dances. Hundreds of quaint musical instruments like the *Sanchar*, *Samprada*, *Ghumura*, *Madal* and *Ghanta Vadya* are also used. A variety of dance styles like the *Dalkhai*, *Raserkeli*,

*Nachnia*, *Bajnina*, *Maelajhoda* and *Chutkichuta*, explore the many moods and shades of human life.

Melodious songs and lilting music characterize the *Dalkhai* dance. The dance is performed by the young unmarried girls of the village, who fast the entire day and pray to the folk goddess *Dalkhai* in the evening, for the well-being of their brothers. The songs describe the everyday life of the villagers and celebrate the beauty of the young girls. The traditional costumes and ornaments worn by the dancers add aesthetic appeal to the dance. The *Dalkhai Geet* (song), *Dalkhai Nacha* (dance) and *Dalkhai Baja* (music) create an atmosphere of gaiety and merrymaking. The accompanying musical instruments include the *Dhol*, *Nishan*, *Tasha* and *Muhuri*. The dance is performed on the eighth day of the full moon night of *Ashtami*. '*Dalkhai-re*' is the oft-repeated word in the songs.

*Nachnia*, a dance usually performed by male artistes only, originated from the Sonepur district of Odisha. The dance is





associated with the ceremony of marriage. The leader of the group of dancers is known as *Gahar* while his companions are called *Palia*. The music, which accompanies this dance, is usually restricted to drums, and is played to a particular rhythm called *Kaharba*.

*Bajnia* is also a traditional folk dance of the *Sambalpuri* tradition. Music is an important element of this fast-paced and cheerful dance form. The men use an array of musical instruments to provide accompaniment to the women

dancers. Often the men join in the dancing as well. The dancers wear colourful local hand-woven *Sambalpuri* sarees and dhotis.

*Raserkeli* is another folk dance of Sambalpur. In this dance too, the women are the dancers and the men provide the musical accompaniment. This dance is performed mainly during wedding ceremonies. The item begins with a musical piece called *Dulduli*. The musician playing the *Dhol* during this dance is called the *Dhulia*. The *Dhulia* and the dancers spread goodwill through their movements and smiling faces.

*Maelajhoda* is another variation of the *Sambalpuri* dance tradition, which is performed by young unmarried girls. The technique of the dance and the musical accompaniments used are similar to the *Dalkhai* dance. Differences exist in the movements of the hands and feet.

The *Chutkichuta* dance is also from Sambalpur. Based on the various ragas of the *Sambalpuri* folk tradition and accompanied by melodious songs, this dance form reflects the rich culture of indigenous art forms in this part of Odisha.

*Durla Nacha* is another traditional folk dance of western Odisha. The dance is an integral part of the wedding festivities of the tribal communities. On the morning of the nuptials, oil and turmeric paste are first offered to the family deity and then to the groom and bride. Singing and dancing accompany the ceremony.



# Danda Nacha

During the sixth century AD, the King of Boudh in western Odisha made several attempts to prevent the rise of Buddhism in his kingdom. To popularise the worship of *Lord Shiva* among his subjects, he used a special form of folk dance called *Danda Nacha*. This dance, which originated as a tool to strengthen Hinduism in the kingdom, is now a very popular folk dance, retaining its religious character at the same time. *Danda Nacha*, also known as *Danda Jatra*, is performed in the month of *Chaitra*. This ritualistic dance to propitiate *Lord Shiva* and his consort *Gauri*, is prevalent in the Dhenkanal, Bolangir, Cuttack, Puri and Ganjam districts of Odisha. This dance also invokes the blessings of *Vishnu*, *Krishna*, *Ganesh*, *Durga* and *Kali*, among others. The ritual is celebrated through dances, songs and physical feats. The dance derives its name from the *Danda*, or the pole, which symbolically represents *Lord Shiva*. The artistes time their steps to the vigorous accompaniment of drums, winning for the dance form the acclaim of being one of the best drum dances of the world. The *Danda* is a unique performing art form, in that it is a synthesis of pure dance, song and drama, comparable to the *Jatras* of Bengal. This dance form attained its peak in the sixteenth century AD. The dancers depict sections from the Hindu scriptures through recitation of verses, singing, narration and enactment. The presentation is a whole-night affair and the artistes keep their audience glued to their seats for a long stretch of eight to nine hours.

This dance form has a varied repertoire which includes the following two most-popular presentations among others:

The *Parbha* serves as the prelude to *Danda Nacha*. It is performed in the *Prathama Prahara* of the night as a sanctifying gesture to set the stage for the main *Danda Nacha*. No songs are sung during the *Parbha* dance. The main *Parbha* dancer, assisted by two supporting dancers, move to the rhythmic beats of the *Dhol* and *Ghanta*. The main dancer personifies *Lord Shiva* through this performance, which has some similarities with the *Tandava Nritya* and *Biravasa*. The dancers fast since morning until they complete the performance in the evening. Rigorous stepping movements and acrobatic feats are characteristic features of this dance. This exhausting dance can only be performed for about ten minutes at a stretch. The fragrance of sandalwood and incense sticks adds to the atmosphere of holiness.





*Chadheya Dance* is also a component of the *Danda Nacha* tradition of Odisha. The leg extensions of this dance form are similar to those of the *Mayurbhanj Chhau* dance. Like the *Chhau*, this dance form contains elements of martial art. The accompanying music too resembles that of the *Chhau* dance. The dance depicts a tribal tradition of hunting and selling birds. The *Chadheya*, or bird catcher, carries a stick in one hand and a noose in the other. He and his wife, the *Chadheyani*, perform the dance to the accompaniment of enthralling music.



# Sanchar Nritya



The *Sanchar* dance is a very old folk art form of Sambalpur, the region of the state where Sri *Chaitanya Mahaprabhu* began his preaching of *Vaishnavism*. *Chaitanya Dev's* teaching of mysticism attracted the attention of the people and spread to other parts of Odisha.

The *Sanchar* dance is also known as the *Bahak Gahak* dance. The principal performer of Sanchar is the *Bahak*, or drummer, who plays the *Mridanga*. The rhythms created by him, known as the *Nad Brahma*, create a wave, which is believed to reach the heavens. The *Bahak* is a singer, instrumentalist, as well as a dancer. The other musical instruments accompanying this dance include the cymbals, *kathia* and *ghungroos*. The *Gahaks* or *Palias* play the other instruments and also provide the vocal support. A minimum of three performers are required for this presentation.



# Samprada Dance

The *Samprada* dance is prevalent in western Odisha and includes singing, playing a musical instrument that looks like the *Mridanga* but is larger in size, and dancing. The lead performer is proficient in *Gayana* (singing), *Badana* (playing of musical instruments) and *Nartan* (dancing). This dance is an integral part of all social and festive occasions of the region.



# Jhumar Dance

The *Jhumar* is another popular group dance of western Odisha performed by both girls and boys. Typical *Jhumar* songs accompany the fast-paced dance. Characteristic movements of the hips and waist mark this dance form. It is performed by the *Mahanta* and *Munda* communities during *Chaitra Parva*, *Karam Puja* and *Kali Puja*.

# Karma Dance

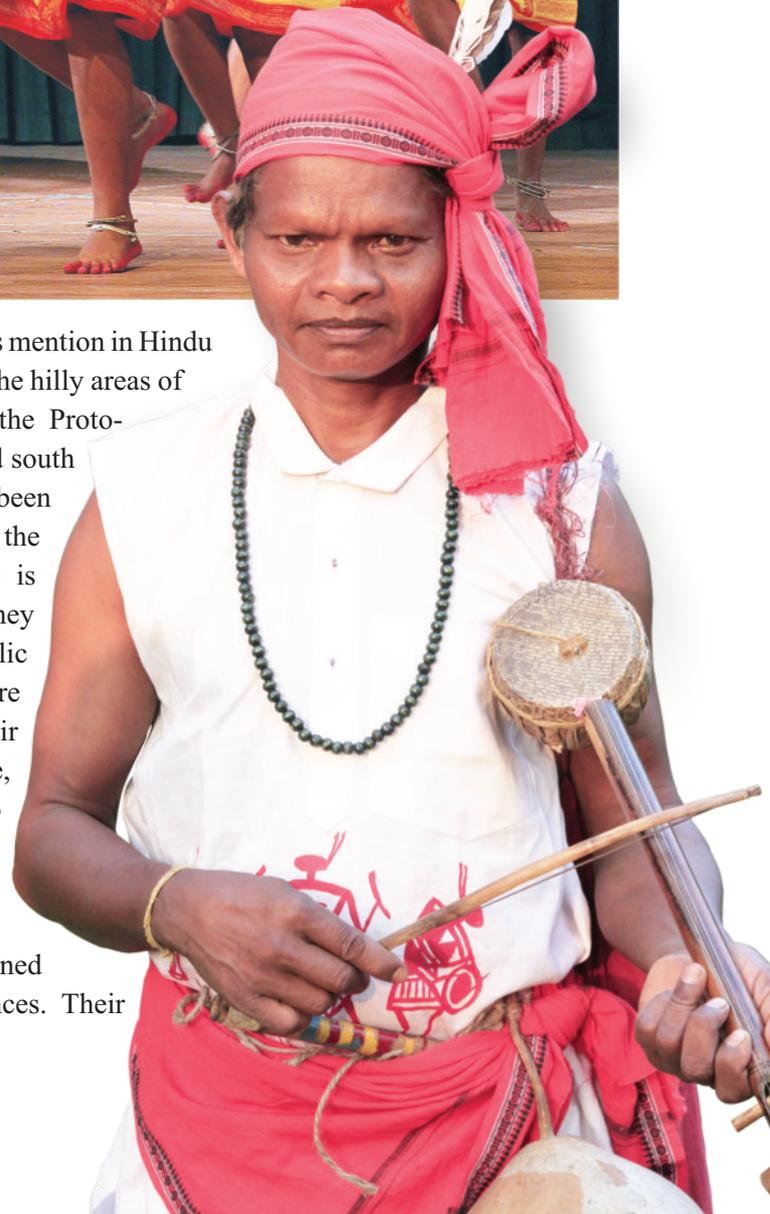


The ritualistic *Karma* dance is performed in honour of Goddess *Karma Sani Devi* or *Karma Rani*, literally meaning, Queen of Fate. The dance is popular in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Sundergarh, Bolangir and Dhenkanal. In the month of *Bhadra*, a branch of the *Karam* tree is cut and carried to the dancing arena in a ceremonial procession. The branch is planted, and starting from the day of *Bhadra Shukla Ekadasi* (the eleventh day of the full moon in the month of *Bhadra*), boys and girls dance around it, to the beat of drums. Different tribal groups perform the *Karma* dance differently. The dance presents a fusion of colour and elegance. The women wear bright sarees with jewellery made from shells and the men wear coloured turbans adorned with a shimmering blue peacock feather. The women dance in concentric circles and the men move with characteristic steps. The indigenous instruments used are rhythmic and melodious.

# Saora Dances



The *Saora* tribe is one of the oldest tribes of India and finds mention in Hindu mythology, classics and the *Puranas*. The *Saoras* live in the hilly areas of *Rayagada* district and bear a close racial affinity to the Proto-Austroloid tribes that dwell mostly in parts of central and south Asia. In the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* they have been mentioned as *Savaras*. *Savari's* devotion to *Rama* in the *Ramayana* is part of the folklore of India. The tribe is sheltered from urban culture and life-style as the area they inhabit is surrounded by hills and there is limited public access to their settlements. They live in the midst of nature and Mother Nature has been the strongest influence in their lives. Their colourful dances include the Spring dance, performed by young women; dances performed to propitiate the deities at the time of planting the seeds; and, dances performed to celebrate a good harvest. The dances are also performed on social occasions like weddings. They have many indigenous folk instruments like horned drums, flutes and clarions, which accompany the dances. Their dances are secular in nature and seasonal.



# Ghumura Dance



*Ghumura* is a folk dance of the Kalahandi district of Odisha. It is named after the main musical instrument, a pitcher-shaped drum called the *Ghumura*, which is tied around each dancer's neck. The dancers play on the drum while dancing. It is performed to the accompaniment of songs, the content of which is varied, ranging from stories of hunting to the everyday joys and sorrows of the people. The dancers execute intricate movements, jumps and pirouettes in a fast tempo. The *Ghumura* dance is popular in Bolangir, Sambalpur and Cuttack. With love as its main theme, the *Ghumura* is a common dance at social functions such as weddings. The *Saora* and other aboriginal tribes mostly perform this dance.



# Bamsarani

The *Bamsarani*, literally meaning Bamboo Queen, is a popular folk dance from Puri. In this dance, little girls exhibit acrobatic movements on crossed bamboo bars as well as on the floor, with admirable accuracy.

# Naga Dance

The *Naga* dancers of Puri perform with a heavy load of weapons, to the accompaniment of battle drums. The dancer carries, among other things, a sword, a *kukri*, a whistle made of horn, an iron shield, and bows and arrows. The dancer's body is covered with *rama raja* (a yellow paste). The vermilion *teeka* on his forehead and the artificial moustache and beard, imparts a look of valour to the dancer. This highly energetic dance displays the strength and skills of a warrior.



# Chaiti Ghoda



*Chaiti Ghoda* is a traditional folk dance usually performed by the *Kaivartas* or the fishermen community residing in the coastal districts of Odisha. The dance has three main participants – the *Rauta*, the *Rautani* and the horse-rider. The accompanists are the drummer and trumpeter. The *Rauta* is the lead singer. The themes of the *Chaiti* songs are culled from India's rich

mythology. Various aspects of human relations also find a place in these songs. While the *Rauta* and the *Rautani* enthral the audience with their soulful songs and witty exchanges, the horse-rider entertains with his energetic dance with the dummy horse, performed to the musical accompaniment of the *Dhol* (drum) and *Muhuri* (trumpet). The horse represents *Ashwini Baseli*, the presiding deity of the fishermen. The performance begins on a full-moon night in the month of *Chaitra*, and lasts for eight days, till *Ashtami*. The artistes wear traditional costumes, complete with a turban. A bunch of feathers in the turban adds to the colour and flamboyance of the costumes. A form of healthy entertainment, this dance also serves as a powerful medium for the preservation of unity and communal harmony among the villagers.



# Kela Keluni Dance

The *Kelas* are a nomadic clan from Odisha. Except for a few months in a year they mostly remain out of their homes. Originally snake charmers and bird catchers who roamed the countryside to earn a living, they are also experts in tight-rope walking and other gymnastics.

Only two people are involved in this dance – the *Kela* and his partner, the *Keluni*. The *Kela* plays a typical stringed instrument called the *Ghuduki*, and is also a singer. The *Keluni's* accompanying dance is fast-paced with swaying movements. Love and humour are the predominant themes of the songs.



# Dhemsas Dance



The *Dhemsas* dance is from the *Koraput* district of Odisha. It is because of the simplicity of the dance form and its willingness to accommodate other forms of dance into itself that the *Dhemsas* has gained its popularity. In its original form, the *Dhemsas* did not belong to any particular tribe — it was a combination of dances of many tribal groups and used as its main musical accompaniment the *Dhumsas* of the *Dombo* community.

Tribes like the *Bhotras*, *Penthras* and *Bhuimias*, accepted this alliance, as they had no instrument of their own, unlike most of the other tribal communities of Odisha. Gradually, the *Dhemsas* dance was accepted and began to be performed by all the tribes despite their strong affinities towards their own dance forms. While it requires a fair amount of practice to perform the other dance forms, it is much simpler to perform the *Dhemsas*.

Over time, the *Dhemsas* has undergone a series of reforms and transformations, with innovations being added for each performance. The *Hindani*, *Palani*, *Tiriatita*, *Mandi Lahakani*, *Jhali Mara*, *Pila Jhulani*, *Karapani*, etc., are unique steps and movements of separate parts of the body, corresponding to different rhythms played on the drums. The rhythms provided by the *Dhumsas*, *Muhuri*, *Tamak*, *Tudubudi*, and other indigenous folk instruments, are alternately slow and fast. The performance is led by the *Batakadani*, or team leader. Girls wearing knee-length *sarees* and tribal jewellery, with flowers adorning their hair, hold each other and move in circular motions with perfectly-matched steps. The men wear *lungis* in the style of a dhoti.

# Kathinacha



The stick dance is common all over India. In Odisha, there are two variations of this dance: one with short sticks and the other with long sticks. The cowherd community of coastal Odisha performs with long sticks on all important occasions, like *Dusserah* and *Dol Purnima*. The accompanying songs describe the childhood pranks of *Lord Krishna*.

The dance form using the smaller sticks is popular in Mayurbhanj and Bolangir and is performed during *Makar Sankranti* and the *Nua Khai* festivals. The sticks are two feet in length and made of resonant wood. When struck against each other, they act as a percussion-like instrument. Following the rhythm of the *Madal*, the dancers increase the speed of various movements until the dance ends in a crescendo of sound produced by the sharp taps of the sticks.

The *Laudi Nritya* is a vigorous and energetic folk dance performed by the male members of the *Yadav* community of *Dhenkenal* district in Odisha. The *Yadavs* are *Gopalas* or cowherds by profession. A group of twelve to sixteen persons perform this traditional dance dressed in traditional costumes, which include the *Pata Pagdi* (the yellow-coloured headgear adorned with peacock feathers), *Ghagudi* (small bells tied around their anklets and waists), and other typical ornaments from the region like the *Bajubandh* (armlets) and *Komarpet* (waistbands). The dancers carry a set of wooden sticks, the *Laudis*, which are struck together to keep the beat of the dance. The lead singer sings the popular songs of the cowherd boys, and the dancers bring alive the songs by enacting the playfulness of *Lord Krishna*. The *Yadavs* believe that this dance was created by *Lord Krishna* himself, who first performed it along with his friends in Vrindavan sometime in the *Dwapar Yug*. The accompanying musical instruments include the drum, *Dholki*, *Jodi Nagara*, *Singha* (a wind instrument made from buffalo horn) and the *Banshi* (flute). The burning incense sticks which are kept in the performing area, creates an atmosphere of devotion. The dance is performed on all occasions related to the *Krishna* legend, particularly *Dol Purnima*.

# Changu Dance

The *Changu* is a rural variety of the tambourine. It is played by the male members of the *Bhuiyan*, *Bathudi*, *Kharia*, *Juang*, *Mechi* and *Kendha* communities. The men sing while playing on the *Changu* and also perform vigorous stunts like leaping into the air and making wide circling movements. The women cover up their person in long, locally-made *sarees*, making a very visually interesting picture as they sway joyously, with only their bangled hands and feet showing.

# Gadaba Dance

This is a popular dance form of the nomadic tribes of Koraput district and is performed during festivals like *Dusserah*, *Poush Purnima*, *Chaitra Parva* and *Gatar*. The *Gadaba* women dance with unusual steps using their heels. Men playing the *Dhol*, *Tamak*, *Khiridi* and *Mahuri* provide the musical accompaniment.

# Koya Dance



The members of the *Koya* tribe perform this dance during *Chaitra Parva*. The *Koya* girls wear elaborate jewellery made of beads and sport decorative caps. The *Koya* boys wear traditional costumes and jewellery. The headgear is fitted with a bison's horn. *Koya* drums and the flute are the main accompanying musical instruments.

# Gond Dance

The *Gond* community of Koraput district performs this dance in honour of the deity *Bhimsen*, accompanied by several musical instruments like horned drums, flutes and many clarions. Silver jewellery and decorative turbans form an essential part of the costume of the dancers. The *Gond* dance is not restricted to any particular time of the year.



# Oraon Dance

Both boys and girls perform the dances of the *Oraon* tribes of Sundargarh and Bolangir districts. The dance, with its own characteristic features, is performed by artistes wearing the heavy tribal jewellery of the region.



# Kond Dance



The culture of Kandhamal district is unique and diverse. The major inhabitants of the district are the *Kond* tribe, also known as the *Kandha* tribe. Fairs, festivals, music and dance form an important part of the culture of the *Kandha* tribe. The most famous dance of the *Kandhas*, is the *Dhap* dance. This dance is an integral part of all major functions, especially the *Nuakhai* festival. The villagers gather together, as one united family, to worship the village deity, followed by an elaborate village feast and merrymaking. The *Mukhia*, or village senior, also joins the dance, carrying an axe on his shoulder. Through this gesture, he symbolically promises to protect the dignity of the women of the village.

*Dhangeda-Dhangedi*, *Krahenda*, *Singha Badya* and *Danda Nata* are the other important performing arts of the *Kandhas*, of which the *Krahenda*, a hunting and warrior dance and the *Dhangeda-Dhangedi*, are the most popular. Drums and flutes are the accompanying musical instruments used.

The *Kandas* observe *Mati Puja*, *Kandula Jatra*, *Chaitra Parab*, *Dusserah Puja* and *Lakshmi Puja*. The *Meriah* or *Kedu* is a well-known festival celebrated by the tribe between February and March.



# SIKKIM

The beautiful hill state of Sikkim is cradled by the majestic Himalayas. Folk songs and dances, which embody the colours and sounds of the mountains, form an integral part of Sikkimese culture. Some of the dances describe the beauty of the natural surroundings, some depict the harvest season, and others are performed for good luck and prosperity. Many of the rural folk dances are based on the social customs and religious practices of the people. Several musical instruments that accompany these dances are unique to Sikkim. With its one hundred and ninety-four monasteries, Buddhism seeps into everyday life, yet it intrudes into nothing. *Guru Padmasambhava* or *Guru Rimpoche* is the patron saint of the state. The breathless beauty of Sikkim's landscape lends an air of magical unreality to it. Folk dances and songs are an ingrained part of Sikkimese culture.

# Singhi Chham



Mount *Khan-chen-Dzongpa* (Kanchenjunga) is the third-highest mountain in the world. This towering creation of nature is sacred to the people of Sikkim. It has been decreed the guardian deity of Sikkim by *Guru Rimpoche*. This majestic mountain stands guard over the land, holding in its crevices the sacred mountain peaks known as the Five Treasures. Its associate peaks look like the legendary snow lion, fierce and fiery, with a gorgeous mane hued in turquoise. The snow lion is considered an important cultural symbol of the state and is elaborately depicted in the *Singhi Chham* or the Snow Lion dance. The snow lion is a mythical animal. The Sikkimese people believe that if one sights the animal it brings good luck. This cultural symbol of good luck comes alive in this dance.



# Yak Chham



High in the mountains, the Sikkimese herdman's best friend on the ragged slopes is the yak. The yak is his sole means of transportation, besides providing him with milk and meat for sustenance during the long winter months.

Its thick mane is woven into cloth that protects him from the biting cold, its rich milk is churned into cheese and butter, and its strong fibre is woven into blankets. This dance depicts the movements of the yak and the simple lifestyle of the herdsmen of the mountains. The dancers don the costume and mask of the yak, and time their steps to traditional songs and instrumental music.



# Dances of the Nepali Community

The Nepalese, the most recent of Sikkim's settlers, are now the dominant community, and their customs pervade everyday life, lending an unusual dimension to the state's already quaint mix of traditions, attire, religion and language.

## Shelo

*Shelo* is a Nepalese folk dance that is performed during *Vasant* or spring. As new leaves and buds appear on the trees, young hearts are filled with love and longing. The young boys express their love to their beloveds. Through their songs, they compare the beauty of the girls with the beauty of spring and propose to them. When after a lot of coaxing, the girls accept the proposals, they dance together with the joy of spring in their hearts.



## Tamang Shelo

*Tamang Shelo* is a traditional Sikkimese folk dance patronised by the *Tamang* community of the state. A traditional musical instrument of the *Tamangs*, called the *Damphu*, accompanies the dance. The spellbinding dance, which is full of fun and vigour, depicts the colourful lifestyle of the people of Sikkim. It is performed during the *Dasain* or *Dusserah* festival, and expresses the joy and happiness of the people. The young and old come together to take part in the dance.



## Maruni Dance



The *Maruni* is a rare dance form that has its roots in ancient Nepalese culture. The songs that accompany this dance have a variety of themes ranging from mythology to everyday life. While some depict heroic events from the lives of *Lord Rama*, *Lord Krishna*, *Lord Shiva*, and other gods of the Hindu pantheon, others

deal with simple day-to-day incidents of the people of the land. The dancers move rhythmically, balancing copper *thaalis* on their palms with lit *diyas* arranged on them. In the olden days, the dance used to be performed

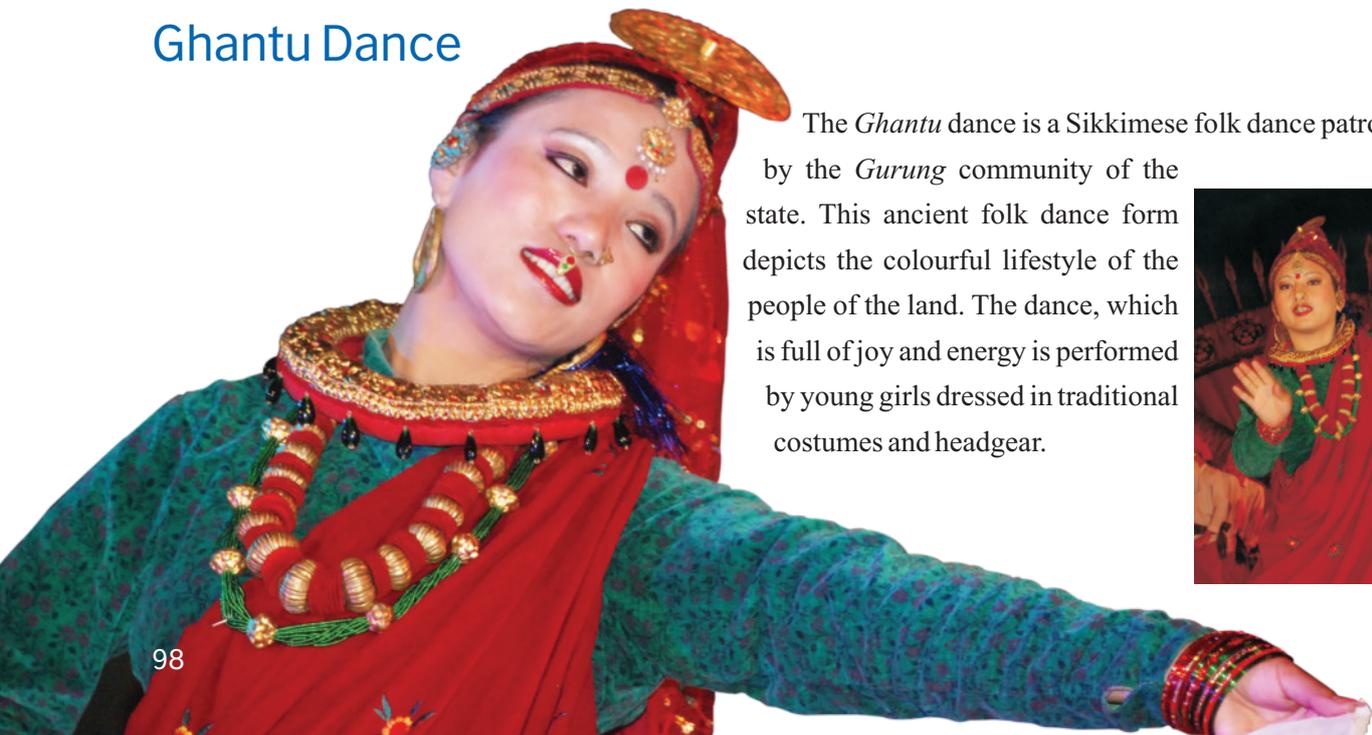




by young boys dressed as girls. Two accompanists, one playing the *Madal (Mridanga)* and the other acting as the prankster, were also part of the troupe. The *Nepali Brihat Shabda Kosh* (Royal Nepal Academy) and the *Nepali Shabda Parichaya (Mahananda Sapkota)* carry elaborate descriptions of the *Maruni* dance. Today both boys and girls take part in the dance, singing as well as playing the instruments.

The *Maruni* is joined on stage by the clown *Dhatu Waray*, who brings an element of fun into the performance. As they dance together, they spread good cheer and happiness all around. Behind the apparent façade of fun and frolic, is a deeper philosophical and religious belief. The clown is secretly worshipped as *Lord Shiva* by the musicians. As they play different rhythms on the *Madal*, like *Dadra, Thokan, Khemta, Lahari Tappa, Samhalo*, etc., they offer their obeisance to *Lord Shiva* through their music.

## Ghantu Dance



The *Ghantu* dance is a Sikkimese folk dance patronised by the *Gurung* community of the state. This ancient folk dance form depicts the colourful lifestyle of the people of the land. The dance, which is full of joy and energy is performed by young girls dressed in traditional costumes and headgear.





## Chandi Dance

*Chandi Puja* is the most important festival of the *Rai* and *Sunuwar* communities of the Nepali population of Sikkim. It is performed when the rains have been plentiful and the sunshine too has been generous, and the fields are filled with healthy crops. The community performs this dance to the chanting of *mantras* and the rhythm of the *Dhol* and cymbals. The dancers imitate the movements of the birds and beasts of the forest.



# Dances of the Bhutia Community



The *Bhutias* are among the early settlers of Sikkim and have retained their own traditions and culture. Folk songs and dances form a vital part of their culture. Some of these songs describe the beauty of the natural surroundings, some depict the harvest season, some are songs of joy and happiness, love and longing, and others are performed for good luck and prosperity. Earlier, these songs and dances were performed in the courtyards of family homes or in a cleared area on the slopes of the mountains. The singing and dancing have been modified to a certain extent to make it suitable for stage presentations. The musical instrument *Nang* is an integral part of the music and dance traditions of the *Bhutia* community.

The dances are varied and beautiful. The *Tashi Sabdo*, performed by young boys and girls, wearing white scarves called *Khadas*, that signify purity, prosperity and peace, is performed on all special occasions. The *Lu Khangthamo* is performed to thank the gods and deities of the three worlds, heaven, earth and hell. Accompanied by melodious songs, the dance is performed on all happy occasions like new year celebrations and house-warming parties. The *Chi Rimu* dance, in which all members of the community participate irrespective of age, describes the scenic beauty of Sikkim. The *Gnungmala Gnunghey* dances are based on devotional songs and hymns, and the *Be Yu Mista* dance describes the natural beauty of Sikkim.

The dances are performed wearing the traditional Bhutanese costume of *Khechan Kho*, or long skirt, and *Pongden*, or apron, over the *Hongu*, or blouse. They also adorn themselves in traditional gold jewellery. The married women tie a striped cloth around their waists called *Pangden*, a sign of their marital status.



# Dances of the Lepcha Community



The *Lepchas* are the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim and they are mostly settled in north Sikkim. They were there much before the *Bhutias* and Nepalese migrated to the state. Before adopting Buddhism or Christianity as their religion, the earliest *Lepcha* settlers were believers of a faith based on spirits, good and bad. They worshipped the spirits of the mountains, rivers and forests, which was but natural for a tribe that co-existed so harmoniously with the rich natural surroundings. Since they believe that they were lovingly created out of Mother Nature, they proudly call themselves *Mutanchi Rongkup* or Mother's Loved Ones. The *Lepchas* have several interesting dances.

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## Kinchum-Chu-Bomsa

Through this popular folk dance the scenic beauty of Sikkim is beautifully expressed. The *Lepchas* of Sikkim thank God for their beautiful land – *Ney Mayal Lyang* – which means a hidden paradise on earth. The snow-covered mountains, the waterfalls, rivers and brooks, luxuriant valleys with vast green meadows, serene monasteries, sacred caves and holy lakes lend sanctity to this wonderful land. The young boys and girls perform this dance wearing their colourful traditional costumes. The dance is accompanied by traditional music and singing.

## Chu Faat

This is an ancient dance of the *Lepcha* community, performed in honour of Kanchenjunga and its four associate peaks. The dance is performed every year on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar. Dancers hold butter lamps and green bamboo leaves during the performance.





## Zo Mal Lok

*Zo Mal Lok* is a *Lepcha* folk dance that portrays the sowing and subsequent harvesting of paddy. It is performed by the *Lepcha* farmers to reduce the drudgery and monotony of working in the fields.



## Damsang – Lyang

The *Lepchas* are a community of very hard-working people. Many of them are involved in agricultural activities for a major part of the year. To lessen the burden of their work, they go around the villages singing and dancing. Through the dances, they depict the graceful movements of different birds and insects.

# Sherpa Dance

Sikkim's *Sherpa* dance is a unique dance form. The costumes and headgear worn by the dancers are similar to Tibetan costumes. The difference with Tibetan dances lies in the foot movements and the language of the songs. The songs praise the colourful flora and fauna of the land and the dances depict the lifestyle of the *Sherpas*. The *Sherpas* are very attached to their land and proud of their heritage. Through their songs, the religious and God-fearing *Sherpas* thank God for the beautiful Mount Everest which protects their land. Through their prayer dances, they pray for peace and happiness all around.



# Denzong Neh–Na

Sikkim is a land steeped in religion. This beautiful land with its bounty of gifts from nature, has received the blessings of saints and sages through the ages. *Guru Rimpoche* had said when he blessed this land, that the people of this land had hidden treasures in the hills and valleys. The hidden treasures were not precious metals or gems, but scriptures of teachings. In the *Denzong Neh–Na* dance, the sanctity of the land is highlighted through the songs and the movements.



# Sangey Chham Dance

The *Sangey Chham* is an annual ceremony observed by all the monasteries in Sikkim. This grand festival lasts for two or three days, on the concluding day of which, the dance is performed. The statue of Lord Buddha and religious scriptures are taken out in a palanquin for everyone to see. People from all walks of life join in the dance. The dancers wear traditional Sikkimese dresses.



# Gayley-Yang Dance

The *Gayley-Yang* dance depicts the hospitality of the people of Sikkim. The young girls of the village perform this welcome dance to receive guests of honour. To pay respect to the guests, locally-made beverages like *Chhang* and *Bangchhang* are offered to them. Melodious songs accompany the dance.

# Nyongri – Nyot



Cultivation of maize is an important agricultural activity in Sikkim. The dance depicts the entire process of ploughing the fields and tilling, sowing the seeds, weeding, and harvesting the crops. Dancers wearing colourful Sikkimese costumes perform the *Nyongri–Nyot* dance. They hold different traditional implements in their hands, making the dance a visual representation of the agricultural process.

# Rechungma

*Rechungma* is a typical Sikkimese folk dance, performed to show gratitude to the Almighty for His continued blessings. It is performed on all special occasions like weddings, childbirth, etc.

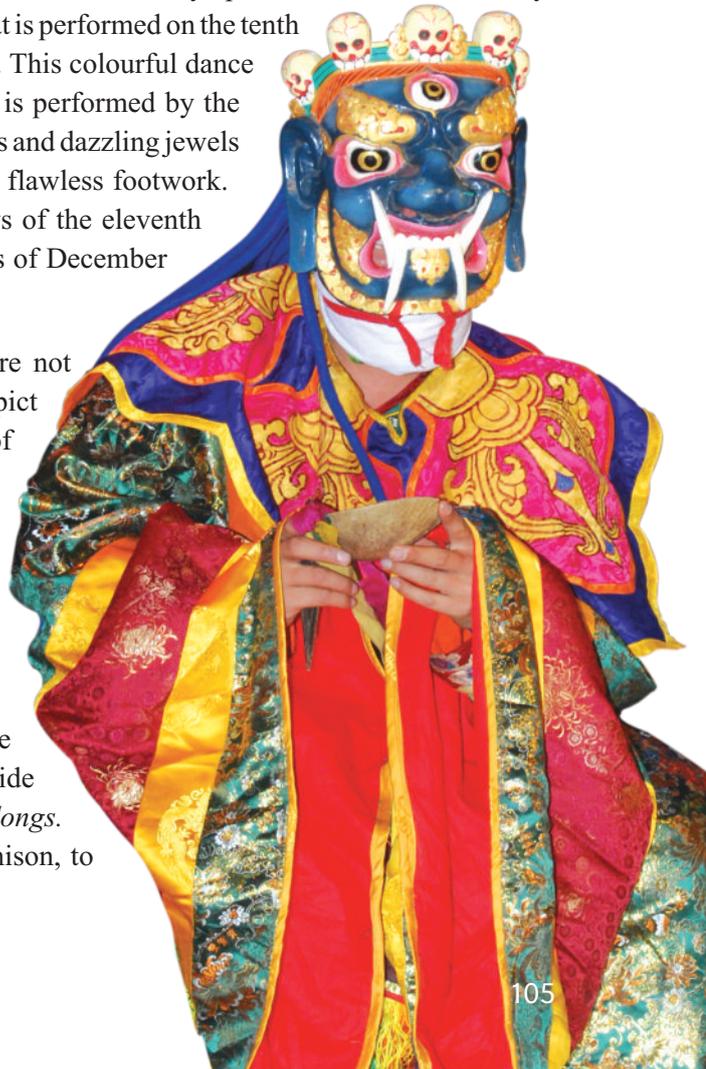
# Masked Dances of Sikkim



Sikkim's spectacular masked dances, the *Chhams*, are performed by monks in the courtyards of the *Gomphas* (monasteries) to celebrate religious festivals. The theme and style of the dances are different, but they all portray the triumph of good over evil. *Gauther* (winter) *Chham*, is performed two days prior to *Losar*, in February. *Rumtek Chham* is the most important religious masked dance that is performed on the tenth day of the fifth month of the Tibetan calendar, parallel to June. This colourful dance represents the eight signs of *Guru Rimpoche*. *Enchey Chham* is performed by the *Lamas* to celebrate religious occasions. Wearing colourful masks and dazzling jewels and carrying ceremonial swords, the *Lamas* exhibit grace and flawless footwork. The dance is performed on the eighteenth and nineteenth days of the eleventh month in the Tibetan Buddhist calendar, parallel to the months of December and January.

*Lama* dances are an inherent part of prayer meetings and are not performed as a form of entertainment. *Lama* dances not only depict spiritual life but also display martial art techniques. The origin of the *Chhams* lies in a dancing cult for exorcising demons and human enemies. The dancers, attired in rich satin and brocade costumes, and wearing vividly-coloured dragon, animal and bird masks, begin their dance with slow movements in large circular formations.

The commencement of the *Chham* is announced from within the *Gompha* by the steady drone of a trumpet-like instrument, the *Kangling*. The notes of the *Kangling* are reciprocated from outside the *Gompha* by the blowing of long copper horns, the *Radongs*. Cymbals, ceremonial drums and gongs, sound in rhythmic unison, to announce the start of the dance.





# TRIPURA

Tripura is justly proud of its rich cultural heritage. Like the Bengali community, each Tripura tribal community has its own dance forms. The tribal communities have cultural activities throughout the year, which play a significant role in instilling a feeling of brotherhood among the members of the community. Likewise, the Bengali community is also particular about nurturing its own traditions. The tribal community and the Bengali community together build up a confluence of cultures.

The traditional folk music of the indigenous people of Tripura – *Reangs*, *Chakmas* and *Lushais* – dates back thousands of years. The *Vasant Raas*, the dance of the Hindu Manipuris of Tripura and the *Hai Hak* Dance of the *Halam* community are some of the more distinctive dance forms.

# Welcome Dance

The girls of the *Lushai* community perform this dance to welcome visitors to their homes and village. Colourful traditional attire is worn by the girls. Flowers are an important accessory.

# Garia Dance

The life and culture of the people of Tripura revolve around *Jhum*, or shift cultivation. *Jhum*, involves selecting a piece of land and clearing it, after which the seeds are sown. By mid-April, when this process is completed, the farmers pray to *Garia*, the god of good harvests. The *Garia Puja* celebrations continue for seven days. The *Garia* dance is an integral part of the *Garia Puja*. The revered deity is worshipped through singing and dancing.



# Jhum Dance



As *Jhum* involves a tremendous amount of physical labour, the cultivators, in an effort to divert their minds, indulge in singing and dancing. The dance depicts their lifestyle, mode of cultivation, culture and traditions. This working song serves as an inspiration for them to work harder.

# Dailo Dance

*Dailo Nritya* is a dance performed amidst great festivity and gaiety. This dance is performed when the crops are brought home. Invitations are sent to neighbours, friends and relatives. The entire community participates in the dance.

# Mamita



A happy feature of the people of Tripura is their love for music and dance. The *Mamita* dance is performed by the *Tripuri* people on the occasion of the *Mamita* festival, the harvest festival of the state. In the months of October and November, during the *Durga Puja* or *Osa Mutai* festival, when the paddy, cotton seeds and oil seeds are harvested, the people are in a joyful mood. After completing their work in the fields

during the day, young men and women of the village gather together in the evenings to sing and dance to express their happiness. The loud singing and rhythmic dancing continues till well past midnight. As they move from house to house in the village spreading the message of love and peace, the heads of the families they visit come out to acknowledge them and to give them token gifts.

# Galamuchamo

The *Tripuri* community, the largest tribal community of the state, performs this dance at the end of the harvesting season. The dance is of special significance to the community. Through the dance the members of the community express their gratitude to the gods for a good harvest. The *Galamuchamo* dance is performed by dancers dressed in traditional attire. The musical instruments played during the dance are typical to Tripura.



# Lebang Boomani Dance



The *Lebang Boomani* dance is the harvest dance of Tripura. In this dance, the dancers aesthetically depict how bamboo clappers are used to catch colourful insects called *lebangs*. It is believed that the number of *lebangs* caught signifies how good the year's harvest will be. The dance is performed by men as well as women. The men clap the *tokkas* or bamboo clappers while the women join the circle waving colourful scarves. The dance is performed to the accompaniment of the *Sarinala* and a drum called *Pung*.



# Hozagiri



Next to the *Tripuris*, the *Reangs* constitute the second biggest group among the tribal population of Tripura. The *Reangs*, like other tribal communities, have a distinct art and culture of their own. Dance forms an integral part of their lives. While the themes of the dances remain almost the same as the other tribes, the dance form of the *Reang* community, particularly the *Hozagiri* dance, is quite different from the others. The movement of the hands and the upper part of the body is somewhat restricted, whereas the movement from the waist to the feet creates a wonderful wave. The dancer stands on an earthen pitcher with a bottle on her head. A lighted lamp is balanced on the bottle. The *Reang* dancers bend and twist the lower parts of their bodies in a rhythmic fashion, without disturbing the bottle and the lighted *diya*. This dance is performed during a festival celebrated annually in the month of April, just before the selection of a site for *Jhum*, to pray to *Mainuma*, the goddess of wealth. The *Reangs* believe that if the goddess is pleased with the singing and dancing, she will bless them with bumper crops.



# Bizu Dance



The *Chakmas* form a major part of the tribal population of Tripura. The *Bizu* dance is a distinctive dance of the *Chakma* community. *Bizu* means *Chaitra Sankranti* or the end of the Bengali calendar year. Through the *Bizu* dance, the members of this community bid good-bye to the year that has just ended and usher in the new year. In its erstwhile form, the *Bizu* dance was performed within the grounds of temples, though today, it has gained popularity as a group dance. The dance is beautifully orchestrated to the rhythm of typical folk instruments of Tripura like *Dhol* (drum), *Baajhi* (flute), *Hengrang* (a musical instrument made from bamboo) and *Dhuduk* (an instrument similar to the *Hengrang*).

# Hai Hak Dance



The *Hai Hak* dance is another dance connected with *Jhum* cultivation and is performed by the *Halam* community. At the end of the harvesting season, the *Halam* community invoke the blessings of *Goddess Laxmi*. They perform the *Hai Hak* dance as part of the festivities.

# Molsom Songs and Dances



The *Molsoms* are a sub-tribe of the *Halam* community. There is no recorded history of where the *Molsoms* came from, how they came and when they settled in Tripura. They belong to the Indo-Mongolian racial family and are culturally closely linked to the *Tripuris*. In recent times, they are found settled in Udaipur, Amarpur, Sonamura, Sardar, Khowai, Gandachara and Kamalpur sub-divisions of the state.

The *Molsoms* have their indigenous dances and music which they have guarded fiercely. Their

stage presentations usually begin with a prayer dance dedicated to their indigenous god *Sengrek*. As agriculture is their main occupation, the dance depicting the entire process of *Jhum* is very interesting, particularly the striking of a fire by friction between pieces of bamboo is quite spectacular.

# Sangrai-Mog Dance



*Sangrai* is a special festival of Tripura. During this three-day festival, the younger members of the *Mog* community move from house to house carrying the pious *Kalpataru* (“wish-yielding tree”) on their heads. This ceremony features singing as well as dancing. Water is carried in an auspicious pitcher and the elders of the community bathe with this water. Fragrant sandalwood paste is applied to the entrances of the houses in the village and the water of green coconuts is sprinkled on every house. In a grand ceremony fragrant water is poured on the roots of the *Bodhi Vriksha*. The dance is performed to the accompaniment of a traditional *Khouyang*.

## Fishermen’s Dance



For the *Mog* community, besides agriculture, fishing is also an important means of livelihood. Using the *Sudha* and *Dulla*, which are different kinds of traps and baskets, they catch the fish. At the end of the day the catch is shared equally amongst everyone. The entire process is very artistically depicted in the Fishermen's dance.

# Wya Dance



The *Mog* community of Tripura celebrates the *Wya* festival on the full-moon night of the month of *Ashwin* of the Bengali calendar year. Young boys and girls stand in rows with lamps in their hands to pray to Lord Buddha. After the worship, they sing and dance on the premises of the Buddha temple. This traditional dance is known as the *Wya* dance or the Lamp dance.

# Gajan



The Bengali community of Tripura celebrates the *Gajan* festival. Prayers are offered to Lord *Shiva* for a happy and prosperous new year. Dressed as *Lord Shiva*, *Goddess Durga*, *Goddess Kali* and *Nandi* and *Bhringi* (the associates of *Lord Shiva*), the performers dance to the beat of drums and sing songs in praise of *Lord Shiva*.



# WEST BENGAL

Bengal, a land of fecundity and prosperity, embraces all within her fold. The varied hues of her rich culture colour her songs, music and literature. The numerous tribes and ethnic groups of Bengal have their own distinctive folk arts, as varied and beautiful as the tribes themselves. The dances are a heart-warming amalgamation of grace and poise. As a traditional art form, folk dances of Bengal have gained immense popularity and recognition over the years. The dances contain themes that range from ritualistic to satirical and from allegorical to social. They involve prayers, offerings, celebrations and odes. Usually performed during festive seasons, or to mark a happy occasion, these dances, ingrained in folk culture, reflect local faith, tradition and custom. The dances encompass a broad spectrum, from invoking the rain gods for a good harvest to depicting mythological events. In fact, some religious festivals are celebrated through songs and dances that characterise devotion, prayer and worship. The dance forms that have evolved from the martial arts depict events from the great Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. These dances are performed round the year on various occasions, at fairs and festivals and religious conglomerations.



# Baul and Fakiri Dance



Bengal, during the post-medieval period, was a divided and closed society. Ruled by religious strictures, Hindus and Muslims led cloistered lives, against which grew a protest that took on the character of a cult. The community of protesters could be identified by the robes they wore (a long saffron-coloured cloak called the *Alkhalla* with a turban of the same colour), the one-stringed instrument or *Ektara* they always carried, and the bells they tied to their perpetually dancing feet. Sometimes the *alkhalla* would be made of different pieces of cloth patched together. They were the *Bauls*, the creators of a phenomenal music tradition that has survived and grown despite the ravages of time. Apart from the expected bamboo flute, they developed a variety of musical instruments like the *Premjuri* and *Dotara*, the *Khamak* and *Goopi Jantro*, the *Kartal* and *Dubki* among others.



# Purulia Chhau Dance



The *Chhau* dance of Purulia district is one of the most vibrant and colourful art forms. Emerging from martial practice, the *Purulia Chhau* is a vigorous form of dance drama that draws its themes from the two great Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

Masks and elaborate headgear are the ornamental apparels of the *Chhau* dancers. The dance is believed to date back to over a century, though the specific date of its origin cannot be definitely ascertained. The dance was patronised by the royalty and landlords of the region. Since its inception, the members of the *Mahato*, *Kurmi*, *Bhumija*, *Deowa*, *Bhuama* and *Dom* communities have sustained this dance form. The dance is an essential part of the *Gajan* Festival, a festival that celebrates the glories of *Lord Shiva*. Today, the dance is no longer restricted to one particular time of the year.

The dance commences with an invocation to *Lord Ganesh*. Then the movements follow the nuances of the story. In *Chhau* dance, the fight between good and evil always culminates in the triumph of good over destructive evil. The dazzling costumes, the rhythmic drum beatings and the sound of the *Shehnai*, characterise the *Chhau* dance. Powerful movements, immense concentration and release of energy are the other features of this dance.



# Santhali Dance



The *Santhals* are an integral part of the folklore of Bengal. The *Santhali* dance form is seen in the districts of Birbhum, Bankura, Malda and Bardhaman. Dance is an integral part of all festivities of the *Santhal* community. Musical accompaniment is provided by instruments like the *Madol*, flute, *Dhamsa*, *Jhanj*, *Kartal*, and occasionally, the *Shehnai*. Dances are usually performed on a full-moon night and are connected with the celebration of certain rituals. A notable feature of the *Santhal* dances is the unison in movement. The dancers stand in a line holding hands and move to the rhythm of the *Madol*. Usually the women take part in the dance and the men provide the musical accompaniment. Simplicity of theme and language is what makes the *Santhal* dances so endearing. Nowadays, *Santhali* men also take part in the dances, most of which are seasonal and reflect the ritualistic life of the *Santhal* community. Each dance form has its own distinctive rhythm and dance style. Some of the popular dances include the *Sohrai*, which is a harvest dance, inviting all the village folk to come out of their homes and join in the festivities, and the *Dasai*, a dance performed just before the *Durga Puja*, when the *Santhali* men go out to the neighbouring villages, where they sing and dance to collect donations of rice and alms. The *Santhal* dance reflects the beauty of rural Bengal and adds colour to the palette of the folk culture of the state.



# Mundari Dance



The members of the *Mundari* community perform these dances on different festive occasions, most of which are related to agriculture. The main festival of the *Mundari* community is the *Karam Puja*. The dances of the *Santhali* and *Mundari* communities are very close in style and form. The musical instruments used by the two communities are also common.

# Gambhira



*Gambhira*, a popular annual festival of Malda district, comprises of songs and dances closely related to agriculture and mythology. Performances depict on one hand, the success, failure or annual production of crops, and on the other, tell stories about mythological figures. Depending on the theme, dancers perform solo, duets or group dances, stepping in tune with the beat of the *Dhak*. Colourful masks



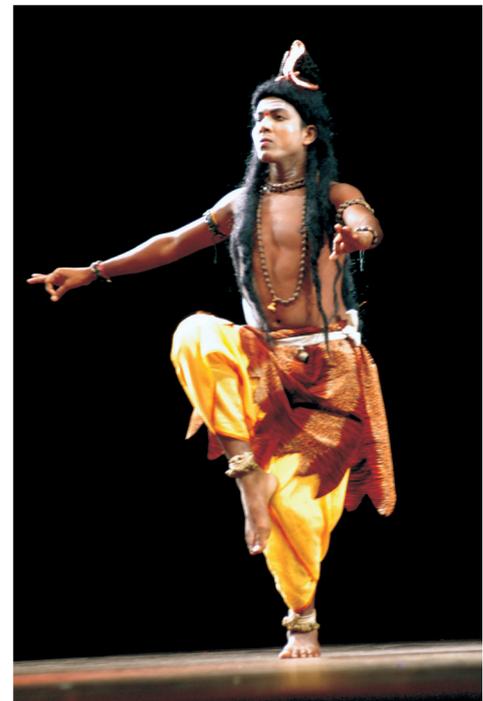
representing gods and goddesses like *Kalika*, *Chamunda*, *Rama*, *Hanumana*, *Shiva*, and even animals and birds, make the performances both charming and entertaining, while retaining the authenticity of this primitive dance form.

In Malda district, *Shiva* is also known as *Gambhir*, and hence

the festival associated with *Shiva Puja* is known as *Gambhira*. The Bengal drum or *Dhak*, and the gong or *Kanshi*, are the main musical instruments accompanying this dance. Dancers tune their steps to the different beats of the *Dhak*, the intricate patterns of their dance blending into the pulsating rhythm of festivity and celebration. The *Gambhira* festival begins with *Agamani* songs. The second day of the festival is called the *Choto Tamasha* and the third day the *Boro Tamasha*. These days are devoted to *Shiva* and *Gauri Puja*. Other popular dances of the *Gambhira* tradition include the *Baan Nritya* or Arrow dance; *Bak Nritya* or Stork dance; *Tapa Nritya*, a dance performed by the fishermen and fisherwomen using a special kind of bamboo basket known as the *Tapa* which is used for catching the fish; and *Kali Nritya*, the dance of *Goddess Kalika*.

## Gajan

*Gajan* is a very popular festival in some parts of Bengal. *Gajan* songs are sung in praise of *Lord Shiva* and *Goddess Parvati*. Singing and dancing is an integral part of this celebration. The dance is performed with great devotion and austerity. The dancers undergo penance with a view to attaining salvation and becoming free of worldly sufferings. Being a festival of austerity, the dancers often fast before a performance. The performance of this *Puja* involves some harrowing rituals and is usually performed by the lower castes of the society. The involvement of the upper castes is limited to bowing down before the lower castes for just this one time in the year.



# Gamira Khel



*Gamira Khel* is a part of *Charak Puja*, offered to *Lord Shiva*. It is organized about four to five days before the actual *Puja* day. Childless couples pray to *Lord Shiva* to be blessed with a progeny. When their prayers are answered, they offer a thanksgiving by sponsoring a *Gamira Khel* performance for the community to enjoy. The dancers, who are all male, wear the traditional Bengali *dhoti*. They enter the performing area and begin their

dance by first offering obeisance to *Lord Shiva's Trishul*. They imitate the movements of different animals, like the cow, dog, cat, and even the frog. They do not wear any special costume to indicate the animals they are representing, but do so just through their body movements. The dance also has many movements showing the everyday activities of the villagers. The storylines are very simple as they cater to a rustic audience, and the enactment of the stories is accompanied by singing and dancing. Simple themes like frogs croaking to welcome the first showers of the



monsoon, the ploughing of the fields by cows, and, going on a fishing expedition, are very popular. This nearly extinct art form is from the Jalpaiguri, Cooch Bihar and Rangpur districts of West Bengal. *Gamira Khel* always begins with a *Puja*, then the festivities cross over from the religious element to the social element.

# Mukha Khel



The *Mukha Khel* dance is a heart warming amalgamation of grace and poise. The dancers who are all male, wear the traditional Bengali *dhoti* and a variety of masks, which are specially made. This nearly extinct art form is from Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar and Rangpur districts of West Bengal. The name of the dance "*Mukha Khel*"- is perhaps derived from what one master mask maker explains as... "We give fear a face and then play with it to overcome that fear."

# Kalika Patari

This dance is based on the story of how *Shiva* calms down an angry *Kalika*, after she has killed the demon *Asura*. This five hundred-year-old dance is performed on *Neel Puja* day, the day before *Chaitra Sankranti*, the last day of the Bengali calendar year. The green leaves of water hyacinths are used to adorn *Kalika's* wild hair, and her body is decorated with black ash from cooking pots. *Alta*-reddened palm leaves make up *Kalika's* tongue while *Shiva* wears a mask of mud. The actors, who fast prior to the performance, then embark on this dramatic performance.



# Bratachari – Raibense



The *Raibense* dance which is performed by a group of male dancers is a part of the repertoire of the *Bratachari* tradition of West Bengal. The *Raibense* dance of ancient Bengal is a significant and authentic reminder that the Bengalis were once renowned for their military prowess. The dance belongs to a living tradition of the war dances of ancient Bengal. *Rai* means royal or kingly, and *bansh* or *bansha* means bamboo. This was used by the infantry soldiers in the Middle Ages. This vigorous dance form includes mock fighting and acrobatics. The *Dhol* and *Kanshi* are the main instruments used. The strident rhythmic notes of the *Dhol* and the clanging of the *Kanshi* generate courage and daring in the hearts of the dancers. No songs are sung or verses recited during this martial dance. Instead, vigorous yells mark the various sectional movements. The simplest costume, a *dhoti* (which is the traditional dress of Bengali men) is worn with a strip of red cloth signifying spirit and valour. Shri Gursaday Dutt, ICS, was responsible for resurrecting

this ancient group dance and modifying it to its present form. The *Bagdi*, *Bauri* and *Dom* communities of Bardhaman, Birbhum and Murshidabad districts, perform the dance.



# Stick Dance or Laghur Nritya

The Stick dance, or *Laghur Nritya*, is another interesting martial folk art form of West Bengal. The stick, which has from time immemorial been used as a weapon of self-defence, is used in this dance. The long sticks not only keep the beat of the dance, but are also used for the acrobatic feats, which are an integral part of this dance form.



# Ranapa Dance



The *Ranapa* is another martial form of dance, where the artistes walk and dance on stilts, accompanied by the *Dhol*, a drum; *Kanshi*, an idiophone; and a pair of cymbals, called *Jhaanj*. As the dancers display mock fights, they exhibit their skills of balancing on stilts, ankle bells tied to their feet. The tradition of stilts was originally employed by the *Samanta* kings' armies of *Lathiyals* to move faster. Eventually, it found use as a means to cover difficult terrain and morphed into the dance form it is popular as today.

# Dhali and Paika Nritya



*Dhali* and *Paika* are two heroic war dances and are performed by a group of dancers. The dances are evocative of the valour and prowess of the people who took part in the wars.

The *Dhali* dance, as the name implies, is the Shield dance. It was the war dance of the *Dhali* (shieldman) troupes in the armies of the ancient potentates of Bengal. In the *Dhali* dance, the spectacular movements are formal and are more in the nature of athletic exercises. It is a dance of high aesthetic value, by virtue of its intricate manoeuvres and ordered formations. Being a war dance, it is not accompanied by any song. This dance form originated and flowered during the reign of *Raja Pratapaditya* of Jessore. After winning a battle, the fatigued and exhausted soldiers would start dancing with their swords and shields in the cantonment area, to inspire themselves for the next war. It is believed that *Raja Pratapaditya* maintained an army of highly-skilled *Dhali* soldiers. Over the years, the dance form has been modified, extending to women dancers as well.

The *zamindars* of medieval Bengal employed *Paikas* to guard their estates and collect their taxes. The people of the *Dom*, *Bagdi* and *Bauri* communities, all of them lower caste, were employed in this profession, and were experts in combat. At the onset of what was potentially ruinous to their *zamindari* system-based livelihood, the British invasion of India, the *Paikas* put up a strong revolt, referred to as the *Paika Bidroha*.



# Pata Dance



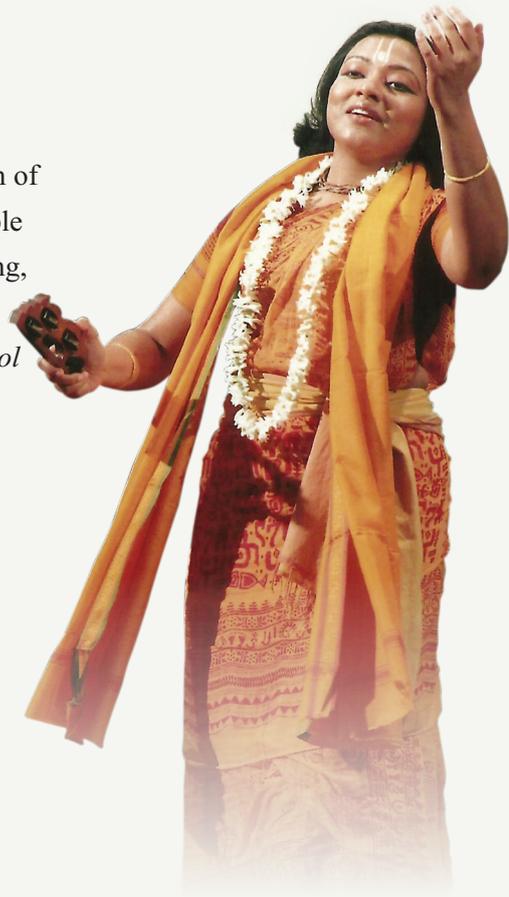
In Bengali, the word *Pata* means “to develop friendships”. After promising each other to remain friends for life, the dancers hold hands and perform the *Pata Naach* or *Soi Naach* in a line formation. The dance is performed as a part of the *Karam* Festival celebrations. The word *Pata* may be pronounced in different ways in the different parts of Bengal, but the presentation of the dance form is similar. This favourite dance of the menfolk of west Medinipur is

performed by the young boys, middle-aged men, and even elderly members of the *Mahato*, *Dom*, *Kurmi*, *Singh* and *Midhya* communities with great vigour and enthusiasm. The dance is performed in the open; a branch of the *Karam* tree is planted at the centre of the performing area; and the dancers, sometimes dressed as women, move around it. The accompanying musical instruments are the *Harmonium*, *Madol*, *Dhamsa* and *Jara*.



# Kirtan Dance

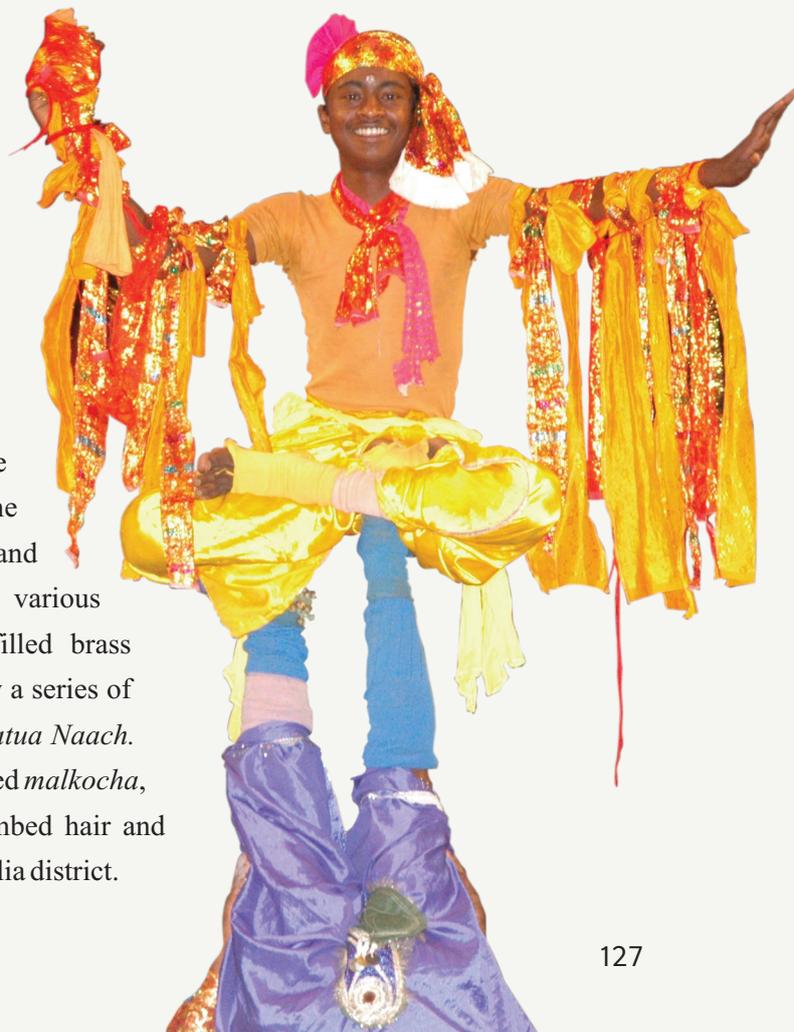
The *Kirtan* dance is the most widely-practised folk dance form of Bengal. The democratic nature of the dance which unites people of the whole village irrespective of their caste or social standing, is its most striking feature. The dance is performed to the accompaniment of the popular percussion instruments, the *Dhol* and *Mridanga*. The great spiritual leader, Shri Chaitanya Dev, gave the dance a national character.



# Natua Dance



*Natua*, an ancient dance form, features in the *Shiv Puranas*. The word *Natua* may have been derived from the name of *Lord Nataraj*. It is believed that *Nandi* and *Vringi*, the associates of *Lord Shiva* were the first to perform this dance during the time of *Shiva's* marriage with *Durga*. This highly acrobatic dance form involves many tricks with fire and is usually accompanied by the beats of a *Jai Dhak*, the instrument which is said to have been created by *Lord Shiva*; the *Dhamsa*, and *Kanshi*. The dance is usually performed during *Charak Puja* and occasionally during weddings. The dancers exhibit various physical contortions and exercises and lift water-filled brass containers with their teeth. The dance form is basically a series of strenuous exercises, even though it is referred to as *Natua Naach*. The skilled performers wear *dhotis* in a typical style called *malkocha*, tie colourful scarves on their hands, and have uncombed hair and coloured bodies. The *Natua* dance is mainly seen in Purulia district.



# Dances of North Bengal

The different communities of Mongolian origin living in India include the *Mech*, *Rava*, *Garo*, *Toto*, *Limbu*, *Tamang*, *Sherpa*, and *Dukpa* tribes.

## Bagpa Dance



The *Bagpa* dance is the dance of the *Tamang* community, a small population of which can be seen in north Bengal. The *Tamangs* are followers of Buddhism and this dance is presented by the Buddhist *Lamas*. According to legend, when *Guru Rimpoche* first tried to establish Buddhism as a religion, his efforts were resisted by the *asuras*. He had to fight the strength of the *asuras* and this is depicted in the *Bagpa* dance. This dance is performed as an auspicious beginning for all religious and social occasions of the *Tamangs*. It is also performed as a prayer dance asking for protection from natural calamities. The chanting of Buddhist hymns and the music of the indigenous musical instruments that accompany this dance give an ethereal air to the performance. Three types of wooden masks are worn, representative of the forces of nature. Fourteen different kinds of rhythms are heard in these night-long performances.



# Rabha Dances



The women of the *Rabha* community perform the *Rabha* dances, which are popular and rhythmic. The men provide the musical accompaniment, playing the *Barangshi* (a bamboo flute), *Hem* (a drum with two faces), *Dandi* and *Barding*, (idiophones made from bamboo), and *Karnal* (a rare tribal instrument made of bamboo and buffalo horn). The *Rabha* women have different dances for different occasions, like the '*Fai Nang Ning Mein*' or Welcome dance, the '*Braisar Pridan*' or New Year's dance, and '*Larai Lunge*' or War dance. The dancers depict the daily life of the community and embody the merriment that enlivens all their festivals.



# Chaibari Nritya

The *Chaibari Nritya*, as the name suggests, is a dance mastered by the tea garden workers of northern Bengal. The dancers, with their intricate costumes and jewellery, make for a picture-perfect sight in the breathtaking backdrop of the verdant tea gardens. The melodious music adds to the charm and beauty of the dance.

# Domphu Nritya

The *Domphu* is a musical instrument used by the Nepali community settled in North Bengal. The *Domphu Nritya* takes its name from this traditional instrument. The dances give expression to the joys, hopes and aspirations of the community through this colourful folk dance.

# Kukri Nritya

The *Kukri Nritya*, also from North Bengal, is performed by the girls, as they ceremoniously hand over their traditional weapon, the *Kukri*, to their brothers, before they set off for the war.

# Mech Dance



The *Mech* dance is another popular dance form of North Bengal, the land of forests, mountains and turbulent rivers. In this dance form, which originated in Jalpaiguri district, we see and feel the inner rhythm which pervades the simple life of the tribal people living in harmony with nature. There are several variations of the *Mech* dance.

*Bagroomba* is performed by the *Mech* women at spring festivals. The colourful costumes used by the dancers are evocative of butterflies.

*Chal Jhumgre Gele Nai* is a war dance which is rhythmic and martial in character.

In the *Mesa Glang Nai* dance, performed by the *Mech* women, the youth of the community are exhorted to be industrious and hard-working. The young members of the community are reminded that they must always retain the purity of their minds and bodies. This dance is performed as the women pluck flowers for the *Kherai Puja*. They carry small bowls in their hand to collect the flowers.

# Rajbanshi Dance

The Rajbanshi dance is performed by the *Rajbanshis*, another of the many tribes of North Bengal. The lives of the people belonging to the *Rajbanshi* tribe revolve around the Teesta River, which they worship as a goddess. The Teesta flows down the snow-capped peaks of Darjeeling, through the dense forests of Jalpaiguri. It then charts a turbulent course through the lush scenery of Coochbehar, finally meeting the Bramhaputra in Bangladesh. This graceful dance is performed to invoke the blessings of the river goddess. The *Dhol*, *Kanshi*, *Kartal* and *Mukhabanshi* are the instruments that accompany this invocatory dance.

# Jhumur Dance



The *Jhumur* dance is one of the liveliest folk dances of Bengal. Several variations of this dance have emerged from Purulia, Birbhum, Bankura and Bardhaman. This is an elaborate dance, choreographed and performed by professional artistes. Here lies its essential difference with forms like the *Santhal* dance. The dance is performed by girls while the boys play the *Dhol* and *Madol*. This entertaining dance is performed on stage and during road shows. Heavy make-up and ornate jewellery form part of the costume of the *Jhumur* dancers. This

secular dance form is accompanied by fast-paced and cheerful *Jhumur* songs.

The sensuous *Nachni* is an offshoot of the *Jhumur* dance, depicting the love of *Radha (Nachni)* and *Krishna (Rasik)*.



# Bhadu

As the rains pour down on the red earth of Bengal, voices rise in praise of *Bhadreswari Ma*, invoking her blessings for a good harvest. Originating from the districts of Bankura, Purulia, west Bardhaman and Birbhum, the *Bhadu* dance is performed mainly during the monsoon. The dance draws its name from the Bengali month of *Bhadra*, when the monsoon showers drench the earth. The *Bhadu* Festival celebrates the transformation of Princess *Bhadreswari* into a cult figure. Legend has it that the princess was the only daughter of Neelmoni Singh Deo, the *Kashiraj* of Panchakot. She was dearly loved by the villagers of



Panchakot and even worshipped as *Bhadu* – the goddess of crops. Tragedy struck as the princess waited for her marriage to the Prince of Bardhaman. As she waited for her groom, dressed in her bridal finery, she received the tragic news that the prince had been killed in an encounter with dacoits on the way. Unable to bear her sorrow, she took her own life. During the festival, *Bhadreswari* or *Bhadu* is invoked by the villagers, seeking her blessings for an abundant harvest. The women of the community, both married and unmarried, perform the *Bhadu* dance. The unmarried girls pray for a loving husband while the married women pray to Mother Earth to be blessed with children.

# Tushu

When we think of harvest songs in Bengali folk culture, we think of *Tushu*. *Tushu* songs, originating from the districts of Bankura, Purulia and Medinipur, have similar features. The daily lives and relationships of the villagers form the theme of this genre of songs. Quarrels between the women in a family find a mention in *Tushu* songs.



*Tushu* songs being associated with harvesting always refer to the householder's wealth – 'ghee made from the milk of thirty-two cows', 'rice made from fine paddy', 'pots of ghee and gur' are some of the expressions used. The villagers pray to the folk goddess *Tushu* for prosperity and ask for her blessings, so that their own homes and the homes of their children are filled with prosperity.

# Sarigaan



This is a dance intertwined heavily with the highly rhythmic songs of rural Bengal describing harvesting, roof-making and other monotonous and routine activities of the simple rural folk. The people sing these songs as a way to battle boredom while working.

The *Sarigaan* is also sung during boat races, a very popular recreational activity practiced by the men during the monsoon. The women sing and dance while the men race, urging them on and revelling in the festivities.

# Nabanna

*Nabanna* is a ritualistic dance performed after the autumn harvest. It is part of a religious ceremony associated with cultivation and harvesting. The dance is an expression of the happiness of the farmers' families after a successful harvest. A special religious ceremony is held on the day the new rice is eaten.



# Dhamail



*Dhamail* is a folk dance performed by the married women of rural Bengal. The women arrange themselves in a circle, around a certain object of prayer, clapping to the beats of the song. While praying to the Sun God, a lit *diya*, symbolising the sun, is kept at the centre. The clapping brings a rhythmic element into the otherwise slow-paced dance.



# Noila Broto

Farming is an integral part of the lives of villagers in rural Bengal. After a day's toil, the villagers often sing and dance as a welcome break from their daily routine of labour and hard work. In most parts of rural India, agriculture is still dependant on the rains. *Noila Broto* is a traditional ode to the rain goddess, *Megh Kanya*. This prayer dance, involving



rituals and offerings, celebrates the arrival of the first monsoon clouds. The farmers and their wives pray for a good monsoon that will bring forth an abundant harvest of crop, ushering in prosperity and happiness.

## Bou Nritya



This is a part of the traditional *Badhu Baran* ceremony of Srihatta. *Bou Nritya* enacts the custom of asking a new bride to dance, a process of helping her shed her inhibitions. The dancers wear ornaments typical of this region and drape the sari in a different way. The distinguishing feature of this dance is that the dancers never lift their feet off the ground during the entire performance. Through this dance of initiation, the new bride is welcomed into her new family.

## Ganga

The fishermen community of rural Bengal pray to *Ganga Devi* in the month of *Chaitra*. Through their prayers and dances, they appease the goddess, so that she bestows blessings on them throughout the year.

# Beder Naach



*Beder Naach* is a dance of the snake charmers or *Bedes* of Bengal. The dance gives expression to the daily lives, customs, hopes and aspirations as well as the pains and tribulations of this sect of people of rural Bengal. The *Bedes* were a nomadic tribe who moved from place to place, earning their living by singing their songs and displaying acrobatic tricks – with fire, knives, sticks and ropes. These worshippers of the Goddess of Snakes, *Ma Manasha*, used these reptiles for a variety of tricks. Through their songs and dances, the fearless *Bedes* sold snake venom and talismans to the villagers, promising them that these would keep evil away.



# Guba Dance



The word *Guba* is possibly derived from the word *Gubguba*, which is the name of a folk musical instrument used by the *Bauls* and the *Fakirs*. The *Gubguba* is also known as the *Khamak* or the *Anandalahari*. The dance originated in the Bagri area of Murshidabad district. *Vaishnav* beliefs prevail in the area as it is close to Nadia, the birthplace of *Sri Chaitanya*. In this area, several auspicious socio-religious events, like the *Rathayatra*, begin with the performance of the *Guba* dance. Chanting of the *Krishna Leela* accompanies the rhythmic variations of the dance. Indigenous musical instruments like the *Gubguba*, *Dubki*, *Jhanj*, *Kartal* and *Ghunhur* are the accompaniments of this dance.





# Folk Theatre of Eastern India

India has a colourful and rich folk culture, best portrayed through the art of folk theatre, which reaches out to a large cross-section of the population. Historically speaking, folk theatre came into existence in the different parts of the country, using the languages of the different regions in which they emerged. Initially, they were purely devotional in nature and revolved around religion, local legends and mythology. Later, with the changing times, it became more secular in content and began to focus on folk stories of romance and valour and biographical accounts of local heroes. Though mythological stories and medieval romances continue to be the main thrust of folk theatre, it has acquired a timeless appeal by improvising with symbolic references to the current socio-political happenings. All traditional folk art forms are a reflection of the ideals and aspirations of a society, its ethos, emotions and fellow-feelings as well as its determination to survive.

The history of folk theatre is the history of creative endeavour. Folk theatre consists of five basic elements - music, lyrics, songs, dances and acting, and there are no frills.

The text for folk plays is always evolving as it is constantly being re-written by the actors and musicians. Folk theatre is flexible in structure, which provides space for improvisation and experimentation. The performers help each other with their make-up and they do not have the means to wear expensive costumes. The directors in folk-theatre are not authoritarian in their approach to the dramatic production. They explain the structure of the play to the performers, but in the course of the presentation the performers change the dialogues and even add new materials to the given format. Performers enjoy freedom on the stage which makes the structure of the play a rather flexible one, and in each performance, the given structure of the drama undergoes transformations. Whereas incompetent actors cannot make use of the advantages of this flexible system of production, the gifted ones excel and lift the drama to a higher level of aesthetic experience. A relaxed form of centralization is accompanied with a notion of decentralization in the folk dramatic forum. The text becomes a form of composite formation during the actual performance. So there are no prompters and no rigorous rehearsals.

Audience participation is an important part of folk theatre. The actors frequently converse with the audience in the course of the play. The stage is quite often just an empty space, which the actors manipulate with their dialogues, gestures, singing and dancing. Elaborate make-up, use of masks, music, dance, chorus singing and loud dialogue delivery differentiates folk theatre from modern theatre.

Besides the more popular folk theatre forms, there are many forms which are undocumented and unexplored. Well-known theatre directors have included elements of folk theatre into the mainstream, thereby giving folk theatre a better platform. However, folk traditions never die, they only undergo changes and transformations.



# ASSAM

Assam has had a rich tradition of theatre since the days of *Srimanta Sankaradeva* (1449-1568), when it was known as *Bhaona* or *Ankia Nat*. The operatic one-act play depicting the legends of *Krishna* in all its splendour, is structurally a beautiful synthesis of the classical and folk traditions of the region. *Srimanta Sankaradeva* developed this art form in the fifteenth century to get messages across to the illiterate masses. The *Sutradhar* is an important character who links the different sequences of the *Ankiya Nat*. The *Ankiya Nat* begins with the entry of the *Sutradhar* to the rhythmic beats of the *Khol*. Intricate footwork and fluid dance postures are an integral part of the *Ankiya Nat*. The *Sutradhar* narrates the portions of the storyline that are not dramatised on stage and also recites the initial *Bhatima*, using different *hastamudras* or hand gestures to explain the subject-matter of the verses.

The performance, called *Bhaona*, starts with an introduction in Sanskrit, followed by an eulogy to God in four different sequences, that includes playing of the *Dhamali*, benediction, introduction of the story or *Nat*, and finally, moral instructions or *Mukti-Mangal Bhatima*. The play starts with the playing of the drums accompanied by big and small cymbals. Masks, made of paper, bamboo and textiles, are an important part of *Bhaona*, as these give the different characters special facial expressions. Though it was *Bhaona* that popularized the theatre tradition in Assam, there were various forms of folk art that incorporated dramatic elements even before the time of *Sankaradeva*. Even today, these folk performing arts have a special place in the hearts of the people of the state.



# Oja Pali

The *Oja Pali*, a part of the classical tradition of Assam, belonging to the *pre-Sankarite* period, represents the rich cultural heritage of the state. It is difficult to ascertain when, where and how the *Oja Pali* first started but references to *Oja Pali* are found in classical Assamese literature. The *Oja* and *Palis* are actually groups of chorus singers and dancers with the *Ojas* as the leaders and the *Palis* as their associates. It is the oldest and the most distinctive form of folk drama in Assam. An *Oja Pali* troupe usually consists of five to six persons. The *Oja* recites verses from the scriptures to the accompaniment of gestures and body movements, while the *Palis* repeat the verses and provide musical accompaniment with cymbals and other indigenous musical instruments. The *Oja* is proficient in singing, dancing and acting. The chief of the *Palis* is known as the *Daina Pali*. The *Daina Pali* is also adept in singing, dancing and acting. He not only repeats the words of the *Oja* but also explains them to the audience with a touch of humour.



The *Oja Pali* art form can be classified into two broad groups from the thematic as well as the structural points of view:

- a) Epic-based *Oja Pali*
- b) Non-epic-based *Oja Pali*

Again, epic-based *Oja Pali* can be further sub-divided:

- 1) *Biyahar Oja Pali*
- 2) *Ramayan Sangeeta* or *Ramayan Gowa Oja Pali*
- 3) *Bhaura* or *Bhauriya* or *Bhaira Oja Pali*
- 4) *Durgavari Oja Pali*

- 5) *Sattriya Oja Pali*
- 6) *Panchali Oja Pali*
- 7) *Duladi Oja Pali*

Based on the Indian *Kathakatha* tradition, *Biyahar Oja Pali* is considered as the oldest among all the forms of *Oja Pali*. *Biyahar Oja Pali* recites verses from the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* and illustrates them for the entertainment of the audience. This *Oja Pali* art form is highly artistic and appears to be *Nattyadharmi*.

*Ramayan Gowa Oja Pali* is the recitation of verses from *Valmiki's Ramayana*. In a few districts of Assam like Darrang, there is no difference between *Biyahar Oja Pali* and *Ramayan Gowa Oja Pali*.

The distinctive feature of *Bhauriya* or *Bhaira Oja Pali* is dramatic performances.

*Durgavari Oja Pali* recites verses from the *Geeti Ramayana*, composed by Durgavar, who was a contemporary of Sankaradeva.

*Sattriya Oja Pali* is usually performed within the confines of the *Sattras*. This type of *Oja Pali* recites verses from the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavata* and the *Puranas*. Unlike in the other forms of *Oja Pali*, in the *Sattriya Oja Pali* the *Oja* never plays the cymbals.

*Panchali Oja Pali* is unique in its own way, as the dances are performed with five different kinds of footsteps. The dancers recite verses from the *Bhagavata Puranas*.

*Duladi Oja Pali*, also known as *Duladi Gaan*, recites verses from the *Bhagavata Puranas*, to the accompaniment of the *Khuti Taal* or *Manjira* (small-sized cymbals).

Again, the non-epic-based *Oja Pali* can also be sub-divided:

- 1) *Suknani Oja Pali* or *Rang Gowa Oja Pali*
- 2) *Bisahari Gaan Gowa Oja Pali*
- 3) *Mare Gaan Gowa Oja Pali*
- 4) *Padma Puranar Gaan Gowa Oja Pali*

*Suknani Oja Pali* recites verses composed by *Sukabi Narayan Deva*. These verses describe the powers of Goddess *Manasa*. *Suknani Oja Pali* is also so called because it is a worship of Goddess *Suknani*. The singing of *Vandana*, or the invocatory item, with the offering of *Puja*, is the main part of *Suknani Oja Pali*. The *Vandana* is followed by the recitation of verses of *Shiva-Manasa* and *Behula-Lakhindar* lores.

*Bisahari Gaan* or *Bisahari Oja Pali* is another popular form of *Oja Pali*, usually performed inside the premises of the *Kamakshya* temple and also at a few other places of Kamrup district. This type of *Oja Pali* is performed in front of the idol of *Bisahari*. *Bisahari Oja Pali* usually recites verses of the *Behula Lakhindar* lore composed by the *Panchali* poets, namely *Mankar* and *Durgabar*.

*Mare Gaan* is a popular form of *Oja Pali*, from Goalpara and south Kamrup districts. *Mare Gaan* has a close connection with *Deodhani* dance and is accompanied by recitation of verses from native folk epics. In *Mare Gaan* too, the *Oja* never plays the cymbals. The *Mare Gaan Gowa Oja Pali* is popular mainly among the *Bodo Kacharis* and the *Pati Rabhas* of the greater Chaygaon and Boko areas.

*Padma Puranar Gaan*, another popular form of *Oja Pali*, is in vogue in the districts of Goalpara and south Kamrup. This particular *Oja Pali* recites verses mainly to worship the snake goddess, *Padma*.

Although the songs, verses and music play an important role in an *Oja Pali* performance, the success of a presentation also depends on the movements of the head, hands, eyes and feet of the actors. The *Oja Pali* presentation is a triple symphony of *Geeta*, *Vadya* and *Nritya*.

# Putula Naach (Puppet Theatre)



It is difficult to say when the art of puppetry first made its appearance in Assam, though it is known that it was prevalent before the advent of *Sankaradeva*. In the two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, there are metaphysical references to puppets. The puppet performances are closely associated with religious and ceremonial events and temple festivals. In Assam, puppet shows are mainly performed during religious festivals like *Durga Puja*, *Lakshmi Puja*, *Basanti Puja*, *Raas Mahotsava*, *Sabha Mahotsava* and *Dol Yatra*.

Puppet Theatre is more popular in Lower Assam compared to Upper Assam. The puppets are made of *sola* pith or soft wood. The head and hands are covered with clay or cow dung and painted. Usually they have no legs and are covered with cloth, so that they can be glided easily along the floor of the stage.

A Puppet Theatre group has at least five persons, including the *Bayen*; the *Sutradhar* or *Oja* (who is the producer, director and co-coordinator of the show); his two or more helpers, who are called the *Jogali* or *Bhari*; and, the *Nachua* (or manipulator of strings) who remains behind the screen. The chorus, with the *Khol* (drum) and cymbals sit in front.

Mythological themes and stories from the epics continue to be the most popular themes. Animal figures which are usually the mounts of the gods and goddesses are an integral part of the Puppet Theatre. Stage props like thrones, chariots, boats and painted backdrops add colour to the performances.

The stage is small and simple. A frame is put up with a few bamboo posts. Within this frame there is a small platform, measuring about ten to twelve feet in length and three to four feet in breadth, raised to about three feet from the ground. The upper and lower portions are covered, leaving about three to four feet open along the length of the platform. The manipulators stand behind a black screen at the back of the platform. Experts can manipulate up to four or five puppets at a time.



A traditional show starts with the playing of special rhythmic patterns on the *Khol*, followed by the singing of the *Vandana*, an invocatory item. Then the *Kalu-Bhelu* or *Kalua-Bhelua* appear on the stage. These two puppets sweep the stage floor and make it ready for the actual performance.

Most of the puppeteers are farmers by profession and they have their maximum number of performances in winter, when they are free from their agricultural chores. They are also seen at village fairs and festivals and social occasions like wedding ceremonies.

# Dhulia Bhaona

*Dhulia Bhaona* is an important form of folk drama in north Kamrup of Assam. Like other forms of folk drama, *Dhulia Bhaona* is also predominantly a dance musical with endless improvisations. The performance of *Dhulia* has two stages. In the first stage the *Dhulias* sing and dance to the rhythm of beating drums and clapping cymbals. In the second stage they enact a dramatic scene from a known mythological episode.

*Dhulia Bhaona* may be classified into three categories from the functional point of view:

- i) *Sabha Gowa Dhulia*
- ii) *Biya Gowa Dhulia*,
- iii) *Puja Gowa Dhulia*

The *Sabha Gowa Dhulia*, popular in the north Kamrup area, is performed during religious festivals. The beating of drums of various sizes, the dancing movements, the costumes and the dramatic performances attract people of all classes. The performances are based on mythological stories. Humour is an integral part of the performance. Use of masks is another important feature of this *Dhulia* performance.

In Assamese, *Biya* means marriage. The *Dhulia* performed at wedding ceremonies is known as *Biya Gowa Dhulia*. Earlier, the presence of a *Biya Gowa Dhulia* troupe was a must at all weddings.

*Puja Gowa Dhulia* is usually performed at different *Pujas* celebrated all through the year.

Interestingly, the classification of these *Dhulias* is not rigid, as all forms may be performed on different occasions.

A *Dhulia* performance begins with different musical beats known as *Badi Dhulia* and *Tali*, followed by a display of acrobatic skills, known as *Kusti*. After the *Kusti*, the *Dhulia* troupe presents a skit called *Song*, a satirical dramatic performance. The dialogue and the theme are drawn from contemporary society and is laced with humour. The main drama is presented after the *Song*. The themes of the drama are also drawn from the epics and *Puranas* but with a modern storyline and dialogues.



# Kamrupia Dhulia



Kaihati, a remote village situated in the undivided Kamrup district of Assam (presently Nallsari) is well-known for its rich folk-cultural heritage. The *Kamrupia Dhulia* performance is one of the most popular performing folk art forms of this little-known village. The inhabitants of Kaihati belong to the *Kaiwarta* community. Facilities of formal education are yet to reach this remote area, as a result of which most of the villagers are illiterate. The first *Dhulia* troupe of Kaihati was formed in 1803 AD by *Sri Sri Hardeva*, a *Vaishnava* preacher of the medieval period.

One of the popular presentations of *Kamrupia Dhulia* is *Mahisasur Badh* or the slaying of the demon god *Mahisasur*. The demon king *Rambhasura*, who was childless, was looked down upon and pitied by society, even though he was the king. An offended *Rambhasura* prayed to *Shiva* and asked to be blessed with a progeny. *Shiva* answered his prayers but not unconditionally. *Rambhasura* would get a son, but if the son became cruel and tortured worldly mortals, he would be killed by goddess *Parvati*. *Rambhasura's* son was born from a buffalo mother (*Mahish*) and named *Mahishasura*. As he grew up, he became very powerful and started torturing worldly beings. True to his word, *Shiva* had him killed by *Parvati*, who took the form of goddess *Durga*.

This story is presented in the form of a folk theatre. The performance is based on dialogues with a touch of humour and dramatic actions. The actors do not follow any written script. All dialogues and actions are composed on-the-spot. As a result, no two performances are ever exactly similar.

# Khulia Bhaona

Similar to *Dhulia*, *Khulia Bhaona* is another interesting folk drama form of Assam. Most of the performers on stage play the *Khol*, a small drum, and hence are known as *Khulias*. The chief of the troupe is the *Oja* while the others are the *Bayan*, who is a skilled musician, the *Khulias* and the *Talis*, who play the cymbals. The *Oja* conducts the entire performance with a whisk in his hand. The performances of *Khulia Bhaona* are based on the stories of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.



Usually the performance begins with the playing of *Khols* and cymbals. The *Oja* sings in praise of *Lord Krishna*, and recites refrains and verses. The conversations that take place between the actors are interesting. Occasionally, the *Bayan* takes on the role of explaining the difficult parts of the verses in a simpler manner. In addition to the main actors, there is the *Bahua* or a buffoon who keeps the audience entertained with his comical remarks and gestures.

# Nagra Nam or Nagara Nam

*Nagara Nam* or choral singing is another folk art form of Assam, performed as a part of religious festivities. A *Nagara Nam* troupe usually has about twenty-five persons. The *Nagara* and the *Bhortal* are two essential musical instruments for a *Nagara Nam* performance. *Benu* (a kind of scraper instrument) and *Karal* (a kind of idiophone) are also used in some areas. In a *Nagara Nam* performance, the number of *Nagaras* being used may vary from two to twelve pairs. While presenting *Nagara Nam*, the participants are seated in a circle with the *Pathaka* or leader in the centre. *Nagara Nam* is a comprehensive art form that combines *Geeta*, *Pada*, *Nritya*, *Katha* and *Vadya*.



# Kushan Pala

The *Kushan Pala* is a folk art form popular in the undivided Goalpara district of western Assam, in the Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar districts of north Bengal, in the Purnia region of Bihar and in the western region of Meghalaya. It is also popular in the Rangpur and Mymensingh districts of Bangladesh, Tuochi region of Bhutan, and Jhapa region of Nepal. This ancient, traditional and religious art form draws its themes from the *Ramayana*. In the *Kushan Pala* we find a union of song, dance, narrative and dialogue. The word *Kushan* is derived from the Sanskrit word, *Kushilab*. *Kushilab* was the first preacher of the *Valmiki Ramayana*. It is believed that the *Kushan* play and dance are derived from songs from the great epic, sung by the sons of *Lord Rama*, *Kush* and *Luv*.

There are two types of *Kushan* play or dance, based on the musical instruments accompanying it — *Bena Kushan* and *Dotara Kushan*. The number of performers in a *Kushan* play or dance is fifteen to sixteen. They are designated by different names such as *Mul* or *Geedal* or *Kushani*, *Pali* or *Pail*, and *Dohari*, *Bain*, *Chukuri* or *Chokara*.

The *Mul* or *Geedal* is the main singer of the *Kushan* play. He has to be proficient in singing, dancing, theatre and playing of different musical instruments. There are three or four *Palis* or musicians in the *Kushan Pala*. The chief *Pali* is known as the *Daina Pali*. The *Dohari* is the main assistant to the *Geedal*. The *Dohari* must not only be proficient in singing, dancing, acting and playing of musical instruments, but should also have presence of mind. The cast also includes one or two *Bayans* who play the *Khol* or *Mridanga*. Either a young boy dressed as a girl or a young girl plays the role of the *Chukuri* or dancer. The different musical instruments used include, apart from the *Bena*, the *Khol*, *Mandira*, *Sarinda* and *Bansi*.

The play opens with the *Kholabar* or Opening Concert. This is followed by the *Abahan* or the *Rama Vandana*. The dancers then perform the *Saraswati Vandana*. This is followed by the enactment of the *Saptakanda Ramayana*.



# Bhari Gaan



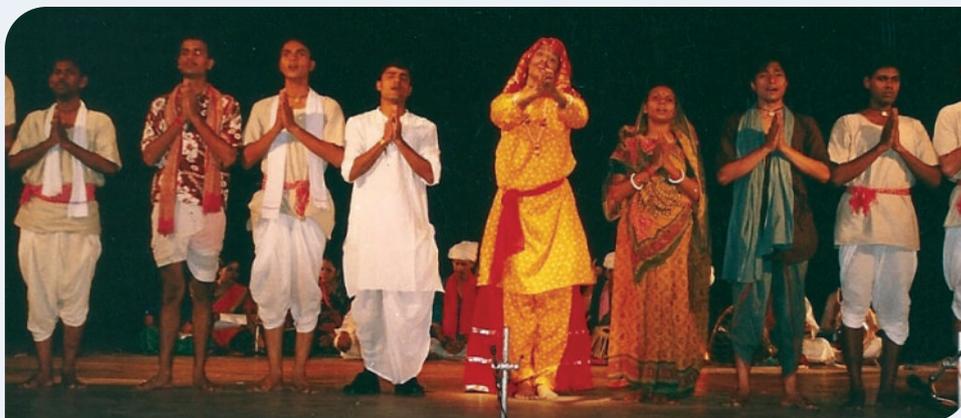
*Bhari Gaan* is another type of folk drama popular in Goalpara. This drama too draws its themes from the *Ramayana*. The leader of the troupe, the *Mul*, recites verses and dances with a whisk in his hand and his associates, who are called *Palis*, provide the musical accompaniment with the *Khol* and cymbals. The *Mul* gets across the idea of the theme through dramatic gestures. He never explains anything through dialogue. Besides the *Mul* and the *Palis*, the other important character in *Bhari Gaan* is the *Ketua* or clown. The use of masks is a distinctive feature of *Bhari Gaan*.

# BIHAR

Theatre is an important vehicle through which the culture of Bihar expresses itself. The intrinsic appeal of the folk theatre forms of the state lie in their spontaneity. Some of the forms which are rich in tradition are *Bidesia*, *Reshma Chuharmal*, *Behula-Bisahari*, *Bahuda Godin*, and *Raja Salhesh*. All these theatre forms have originated in the *Anga* or *Ang* area of Bihar. In the presentation of many of the plays the *Nautanki* style of acting is used. *Nautanki* is a very popular folk operatic theatre performance of northern India, in which there are intense melodic exchanges between the performers. Often a chorus is also used.



# Bahuda Godin - Natua Dayal Singh



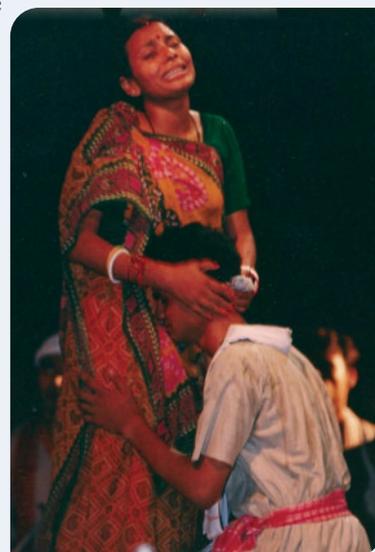
*Bahuda Godin – Natua Dayal Singh* is a four hundred and fifty-year-old folk tale of Bihar that describes how the river Kamala was made to change its course, to flow through village Bakri, before meeting the river Ganges. *Bisambhar Bankari Ram* of Rajbhora village and *Dukharan*



*Sahani* of Bakri village were traders who met at the *Mandi* (wholesale market) and became good friends. They expressed a desire to cement their relationship through the marriage of their yet to be born children. Soon afterwards, a son, *Dayal*, was born to *Bisambhar* and a daughter, *Amroti*, was born to *Dukharan*. By the time the children were of marriageable age, both *Bisambhar* and *Dukharan* were no more. *Bisambhar's* brother, *Bhim Mal*, wanted to honour his brother's wishes and took the marriage proposal to *Dukharan's* widow, *Bahuda*, who agreed to go ahead with the wedding but laid down a condition. *Bhim Mal* and

*Dayal* would have to change the course of the river

Kamala, which flowed through Rajghora and make it flow through Bakri too. *Bhim Mal* agreed to the condition but did not do anything about it. Instead he arrived in Bakri with his *baraatis* for the wedding. *Bahuda* stopped the wedding procession and told them that the marriage could not take place as the condition had not been fulfilled. Under pressure from the villagers *Bahuda* was forced to allow the *baraat* to proceed to the wedding venue. An expert in black magic, *Bahuda* took her revenge by converting the *baraatis* into birds and killing them. Though *Bhim Mal* and *Dayal* escaped, *Bhim Mal* was turned blind by *Bahuda's* black magic. By then the marriage had already been solemnized. *Dayal* went to work in Moirang Bangal and came in contact with magician *Hiriya Jhiriya*, who taught him enough magic to counter *Bahuda's* powers. *Dayal* returned to Bakri to fetch his wife, but *Bahuda* once again reminded him of the condition of the marriage. While *Bahuda's* magic killed the people in the wedding *baraat*, *Dayal's* magic disrobed the women of Bakri. The ruler of Bakri, *Tant Sen Man Sen* asked *Dayal* to explain himself. *Dayal* mesmerized the ruler with his dance and asked for his wife as his reward. *Tant Sen* intervened in the dispute and both *Bahuda* and *Dayal* agreed to honour their promises. As in most folk tales the story ends on a happy note with the *baraatis* being brought back to life and *Dayal* returning to Rajbhora with his bride.



# Bidesia

*Bidesia*, a people's play, is from the Bhojpuri region of western Bihar. The *Bidesi* stands for all those young men who, due to lack of opportunities, have had to leave home and look for work in unknown places. They leave behind young wives who sacrifice their marital lives for the betterment of their families. This migration of labour has been happening since colonial times. Shiploads of men from the region have gone to British colonies of Trinidad, Mauritius and Surinam in search of a livelihood. They left, never to return, breaking all ties with their families. Even today, they move to bigger cities in search of work. The play draws attention to the women who



are forced to stay away from their husbands for extended periods of time. The men are often able to re-create a parallel life for themselves in the cities, but the wives they leave behind are lonely and depressed and pine for the life that has been destroyed. It is out of this situation that a play evolved and had its first performance in 1917. The talented actor-director, Bhikari Thakur, called the play *Bidesia*, and soon the play spawned many variations on the same theme, and acquired the status of an independent theatre form. The play has soulful singing, and the central character is a desolate woman whose only choice in life is to continue waiting.

*Bidesia* is the voice of the migrant people, not just from Bihar, but from all those under-developed parts of the country, who are forced to leave their homes in search of work, by placing their family relationships at stake.

# Reshma and Chuharmal

*Reshma and Chuharmal* is based on a real-life story of the young lovers from Mokama, a town on the outskirts of Patna. The events described are believed to have taken place in the Bhojpuri and Magadh regions. This is a beautiful story that shows how true love can break the rigid barriers of the caste system, so prevalent in the region. *Chuharmal*, of Anjani village, was from a *Dusadh* family, who belonged to the lower castes. *Reshma* was from a family of *Bhumihars*, an upper caste Hindu *Brahmin* community. The story, which has become a part of the folklore of the region, has many conflicting variations, but most say that, as this marriage was unacceptable to society, it had a very tragic end. Every year in the month of Chaitra, the *Dusadhs* recite this story as a folk ballad and enact it as a *Nautanki* named *Rani Reshma Chuharmal ka Khela*, at a fair, held at Charadih near Mokama in *yadgiri* or remembrance of the *Dusadh* hero of the story. The manner in which the story is remembered by the *Dusadhs* makes it an important element of their identity. It is a story of the glorious past and the rich traditions of the *Dusadhs*. *Chuharmal* is a hero and a god, who in the folk legends of the region, is a symbol of the victory of the *Dusadhs* over the *Bhumihars*. The *Bhumihar* community is not very happy about the *Dusadh* community's interpretation of the story.

# Raja Salhesh

The most important reference to Mithila is in the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*, as *Sita* was the daughter of King *Janak*, who ruled Mithila from Janakpur. The last king of the *Janak* dynasty was dethroned, and Mithila remained without a king for several hundred years. A leader was elected by the people, making Mithila the first democracy in the world. There was no significant ruler in Mithila after *Janak*, till the fifth or sixth century when *Jayawardhan Raja Salhesh*, who was a *Dusadh*, became the king. He defended the region against attacks by the Tibetans several times, and was given the title *Shailesh* (King of the Mountains) from *Jayawardhan*, which in local dialect came to be pronounced as *Salhesh*. During a hunting spree *Salhesh* had killed a deer belonging to King *Kulheswar's* daughter, *Chandravati*. *Kulheswar*, who was the king of Pakaria, in present-day Nepal, was annoyed and asked *Salhesh* to play a game of dice with him on the condition that if *Salhesh* lost he would have to look after *Kulheswar's* estates as his *paheradar* (guard). *Salhesh* lost and *Kulheswar* sacked his former *paheradar*, *Chudamal*, and asked *Salhesh* to do the job. This annoyed *Chudamal* who became obsessed with taking revenge. He dug an underground tunnel from his home to the palace and stole *Chandravati's* jewels. *Kulheswar* accused *Salhesh* of the theft. Two sisters from the *Mali* community, *Dauna* and *Kusuma*, came to *Salhesh's* rescue and helped him to identify the thief. *Salhesh* was freed. *Salhesh* is worshipped as a god in Mithila, and the main celebrations are held in the Indian month of *Asad*. A *Salhesh* shrine always faces east and the snake goddess *Bisahara* is also worshipped within the shrine. The *Dusadhs* were at one time thieves and they would pray at the shrine before going on a mission. King *Salhesh's* life story is beautifully depicted through this folk theatre form.

# JHARKHAND

In Jharkhand the concept of folk theatre does not exist. Street plays, highlighting contemporary social issues are being performed in open air theatres, for the past several years. These plays have now been stylized for stage presentation. Unlike the folk plays of the other states of the country which are known by distinct names, the traditional theatre form of Jharkhand does not have a particular name. The different festivals of Jharkhand - *Karam*, *Sarhul*, *Mage*, *Tusu*, *Baha* - are depicted through these plays. Music and dance are integral to the presentations. The imaginative performers try out many novel ideas of presentation to make the plays interesting.



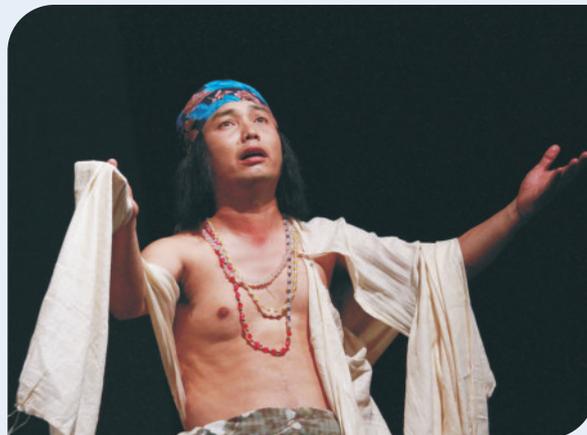
# Karam Parv

Jharkhand's most popular folk festival is *Karam Parv*. Dance, music, singing and prayers are an integral part of the festival, which begins with the advent of the new moon in the Indian month of *Bhadra*. Through the celebration of this festival brothers and sisters express their love and affection for each other. Sisters pray for the well-being of their brothers. Seven days before the actual day of the *Karam Puja*, the young girls of the village go to the river bank and carry home silt from the riverbed in baskets. They use this to make idols of *Gauri* and *Shankar* and also symbolically sow seven kinds of cereals in this silt. They then light a lamp there. The idols are brought to life through prayers and singing. On the day of the *Karam Puja* the brothers fast till the ceremony is completed. The boys carry the branches of the *Karam* tree to the area where the idols have been established. Then the sisters sit around it and pray for the well-being and prosperity of their brothers, and tie the sacred thread around the branches. The social and religious aspects of the *Karam Dharam* festival are described by the elders of the village through singing and dancing. The songs also describe the beauty of nature; man's dependence on nature, particularly on the cow, fish, horse, water bodies, plants etc.; and the affectionate relationship that should exist among siblings. The prayers of the sisters protect the brothers throughout their lives and keep them in good health and a happy frame of mind. People who do not observe the festival may have many problems. The songs give an impetus to the younger members of the community to continue with the ritual. This *Puja* is an integral part of the lives of the people of Jharkhand and important for the social structure of the state. The play is based on the history of the *Karam Dharam* festival.



# MANIPUR

Manipur is one of India's smallest states, but has contributed significantly to the cultural heritage of our country. The culture of Manipur is an amalgamation of varied cultures and traditions. With the advent of *Vaishnavism* in the state, singing and dancing became an intrinsic part of all forms of worship. All performing folk arts of the state, dance, music and traditional theatre, maintain a restrained structure in their presentation. Dance has always played a major role in Manipuri society. People have danced from time immemorial to please the nature gods in the *Lai Haraoba*, the festival of merrymaking of the gods.



# Lai Haraoba

The *Lai Haraoba*, which enacts the creation of the universe, is a part of the *Lai Haraoba* festival. There are many dramatic elements in this presentation. The stories of *Nongpokningthou* and *Panthoibi* are enacted here. *Nongpokningthou* and *Panthoibi* were a young couple in love. When *Panthoibi*'s father *Khaba* went looking for her, *Nongpokningthou* hid himself in a tiger's skin. *Khaba* got *Panthoibi* married to another man but she remained engrossed in her love for *Nongpokningthou*. On hearing this, *Nongpokningthou* set off to meet her. They met at Imphal and were united for life. According to another version of the story, *Panthoibi* was married to a king belonging to the *Khaba* clan. One day, while in the fields, she set her eyes on *Nongpokningthou* who was out hunting. They fell in love, and expressed their feelings only through their eyes, there was no verbal communication. There are two versions of the end of this story. In the first, *Khaba* had a duel with *Nongpokningthou* in which the latter was killed. The other ending is happier, in which *Khaba* realizes that *Nongpokningthou* and *Panthoibi* are incarnations of the gods and allows them to go their way.



# Shumang Leela

*Shumang Leela* is the oldest form of folk theatre in Manipur. It is believed to have started as comic skits performed by the jesters employed by the feudal royalty of Manipur in the nineteenth century. This is mainly a courtyard theatre and is performed in an open courtyard or any other ground surrounded by the audience on all sides. The *Shumang Leela* is now also performed as a proscenium play. The themes of the plays are varied and can range from the social and political to the depiction of religious and mythological tales. The presentations are stylized to suit the audience. Light and acoustics are sparingly used.

The first half of the twentieth century was the golden period for *Shumang Leela*. Male singers who could sing in both male and female voices were in demand to be a part of the troupe. For a long time all the character roles of a *Shumang Leela* presentation were done by men. Later, all-women *Shumang Leela* groups also started performing this genre of folk plays. Nowadays, some troupes have both men and women, but this is not a general norm. *Shumang Leela* performances always draw large crowds from all sections of society and so this performance is not only a means of mass entertainment but also an important tool for mass education. Various public awareness programmes like drug abuse, insurgency and inter-communal harmony have been effectively dramatized through the *Shumang Leela* performances. Contemporary world events like the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York, local events like the tragedy of the *Naga-Kuki* clashes in Manipur, and even classics like well-known Bengali author Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Devdas*, have been successfully presented through *Shumang Leela*. Enactment of contemporary incidents of violence, clashes between the police and insurgents, stories of manipulation, intrigue and revenge, are now the major themes of the presentations.



# ODISHA

Odisha has several indigenous folk plays, which are still being practised and performed by the rural people. Most of them have a religious base with the *Puranas* as the main source material. The *Rama Leela*, *Rama Natak* and *Lankapodi Yatra* draw its inspiration from the *Ramayana*; the *Krishna Leela* from the *Bhagavata*; and, the *Prahallad Natak*, *Bharat Leela*, *Suanga*, etc., draw their themes from the *Mahabharat* and other *Puranas*. *Yatra* originally performed plays based on mythological stories and historical events, but now has included social plays into its repertoire. Many of the folk plays of Odisha have originated in the undivided district of Ganjam, Koraput, Kandhamal and Bhadrak, for which south Odisha occupies a vital position in the folk play tradition.



The inhabitants of this region are dedicated to their cultural and religious traditions. Though there are differences in the life-style and the traditions of the tribal communities and the other people, both are rich in their cultural heritage. The folk plays prevalent in Odisha are divided into two streams: (i) Theatre and (ii) *Leela*. Theatre, such as *Prahallad Natak*, *Rama Natak*, *Desia Nata* and *Mughal Tamasha* is performed in the style of drama. *Leelas* such as *Rama Leela*, *Krishna Leela*, *Radha Prem Leela*, *Bharat Leela* and *Lankapodi Yatra*, have a religious element in it.

The folk plays are associated with the festive occasions celebrated by the different rural institutions. These folk plays are written in dramatic form and in most cases, it is enriched by dance.

Odisha has had several religious cultural influences – the *Bhagavat* or *Krishna* cult came from the south and the cult of *Rama* came from the north. Several religious centres were set up all over the state and the epics were written on palm leaf manuscripts. In every village, a *Bhagavat Tungi* was set up, where the priest as a regular evening ritual, recited episodes from the *Bhagavat*, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* for the village audience. The religious folk dramas of Odisha, *Ram Leela* and *Krishna Leela* evolved from these recitations.



# Rama Leela



The performance of the religious play, *Rama Leela*, connected with the worship of *Lord Rama*, is prevalent all over the country. In Odisha, it is the most popular form of folk theatre, deeply rooted in the mass religious culture of the people.

Ancient temples of Odisha of the seventh and eighth centuries AD have sculptures depicting incidents from the *Ramayana* – *Ravana's* lifting of the *Kailash* mountain, the killing of the golden deer *Maya Mriga*, the killing of *Bali*, the abduction of *Sita* by *Ravana*, etc. The sculptures are found engraved

on the walls of *Shiva* temples, as during this time, there were no temples dedicated to *Rama*. It is long after this that literature on the *Ramayana* became popular. This goes to substantiate the fact that the people of Odisha were aware of the different episodes of the *Ramayana* before it became popular literature, possibly through the medium of religious discourses.

*Jatra* festivals in Odisha have from the very beginning, had the main characters of the *Ramayana*, such as *Rama*, *Lakshmana*, *Ravana*, *Hanuman*, *Parasuram* etc coming out in a procession, with movements set to the rhythms of *Lok-Vadya* (folk instruments). Later, songs and dialogues were added to the presentations to make the processions more dramatic. *Sahi Yatra*, a seven-day festival celebrated in Puri every year, starting from the day of *Rama Navami*, is a festival in which the main characters of the epic come alive. On each day, a particular *Sahi* or street brings out a procession depicting characters from a particular *Kanda* (episode) of the *Ramayana*. The procession, with the image of *Rama* carried on a palanquin, starts from the *Akhada Ghara* or village Club House in the early afternoon and proceeds towards the *Jagannath Temple*. The performance takes place at the *Jagannath Ballava Math*.

*Bichitra Ramayana*, popularly known as *Bisi Ramayan* in Odisha, was written by *Biswanath Khuntia* of Puri, in the form of songs, with specified *ragas* and *taalas*. He perhaps began the first performance of *Rama Leela* sometime in the early eighteenth century. The songs, some in direct speech and some in the narrative style, continue to be very popular in the villages and one can hear the village folk singing them in chorus during work and at times of leisure.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, more than twenty *Rama-Leela* plays were written in Odisha. Most of the writers were from south Odisha, particularly from Ganjam district.

According to the scholars, *Rama Leela* written by *Bisya Sadasiva*, *Raghunath Das*, *Gangadhar Pradhan*, *Bipra Janardan* and *Kalpatara Das* are very popular among the villagers.



# Lankapodi Yatra – Mask Theatre

The *Lankapodi Yatra* of Bisipada is very colourful and elaborate, and is celebrated for fourteen days. It is in the form of pantomime and uses decorative wooden masks. Bisipada is a big village in the tribal district of Kandhamal. This is the home of the great tribal leader *Chakara Bisoyi*, who fought against British colonisation for a long period from 1842 to 1855 AD. After the rebellion was crushed, one *Dinabandhu Pattanaik*, *Tahasildar* of the British administration, started the enactment of *Rama Leelas* with the villagers, to win them over. This form of *Rama Leela*, popularly known as *Lankapodi Yatra*, was started in Bisipada during the year 1855 AD. Since then, it is being performed regularly. The *Lankapodi Yatra* is based on *Sree Ram Charita Manasa* written by *Bipra Janardan*. Of the seven *Kandas* of the *Ramayana*, only six are performed and the last, *Uttara Kanda*, is simply recited to musical accompaniment.

The peculiarity of this play is the extensive use of heavy wooden masks. Besides the main characters of *Rama*, *Lakshmana* and *Sita*, all the other characters also wear appropriate masks. The total number of masks used in this play is about seventy. All the actors of the play are ordinary village folk. They observe austerity for the fourteen days of the performance. Like in *Danda Nata*, all the participants are known as *Bhaktas*.

The festival is now organized by the village committee, under the benevolent patronage of the villagers.



# Krishna Leela



The beginning of the sixteenth century marked a period of religious resurrection in Odisha. *Sri Chaitanya's* visit and his religious teachings of mysticism immediately touched a chord in the hearts of the people of Odisha. *Prataparudra Deva*, the King of Odisha, became a disciple of *Sri Chaitanya* and extended royal patronage for the propagation of his religious thought. Under the deep spell of *Vaishnavism*, a number of Odiya poets emerged, who wrote countless songs pertaining to the *Leelas* of *Radha* and *Krishna*. They added music to their songs and specific *talas* for each song. These songs gave birth to *Krishna Leelas* in Odisha.

*Krishna Leelas* centre around the immortal love story of *Lord Krishna* and *Radha* and the *gopinis* of Vrindavan. It is known by different names in different areas. In north Odisha it is called *Gopo Leela*, in Puri it is *Rahasa Leela*, and in Ganjam it is called *Krishna Leela*.

*Krishna Leela* is devotional in nature. There is no place for humour or any lightheartedness in it. Young boys play the roles of both the male and female characters.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a number of *Krishna Leela* plays were written in Odisha. Leelas written by the authors, *Harihar Sarangi* of Gautami, *Raghunath Parichha* and *Madhusudan Panigrahi* of Paralakhemundi, and *Laxmi Narayan Deo* of Badakhemundi, are still popular in different parts of the state, particularly in the district of Ganjam.

# Radha Prem Leela

The origin of folk plays in Odisha started with the *Rama-Leela*, which was a mass religious culture, but its excellence expressed itself in *Radha Prem Leela*, a form of *Leela* prevalent in south Odisha, which describes the divine love of *Radha* and *Krishna*. *Rama Leela* and *Krishna Leela* are more exhaustive in nature, but in *Radha Prem Leela* the devotional spirit and love of *Radha* for *Krishna* is narrated. The theme of the *Leela* is taken from the *Bhagavat*, *Brahma Baibarta Purana* and *Geeta Govinda*. The name of *Krishna Chandra Rajendra* is mentioned in the concluding part of the *Leela*, but the verse play was actually written by *Sri Viswambara Rajendra Deva* of Chikiti in the last part of the nineteenth century. The presentation of *Radha Prem Leela* is very attractive with twenty to twenty-five young boys taking part. The performing area is a village street, where the *Kunjias* or stages are set up on two sides and the centre is used by the director, singers and musicians.

*Radha Prem Leela* is considered one of the best folk theatre forms of the state.



# Bharat Leela



*Bharat Leela*, also known as *Duari Nata*, is an extremely popular form of folk play which has its origins in south Odisha, particularly Ganjam district. The main reasons for the popularity of this two hundred year old art form is the use of easily understood colloquial language, indigenous musical instruments, folk songs and humour.

*Bharat Leela* is a form of folk theatre, an example of presenting stories from the epics with expressive acts and dances. This spectacular art form which includes some of the most colourful folk dances of the region is prevalent in the Ganjam district. Its main theme is taken from the *Madhya Parva* of *Vyasdeva's Mahabharata*. The uniqueness of our great Indian epics lies in their intrinsic dynamism. The intervening centuries since their composition has not made stale their infinite variety. Rather, it has lent itself to several interpretations through the ages. The small incident of *Subhadra Parinay* (wedding of *Subhadra*), a beautiful part of the epic, is the primary theme of the performance. In the play, *Lord Krishna*, suddenly appears and plays the role of the mediator between *Arjun* and *Subhadra* and helps the love to progress to a positive end. The story is narrated by the *Duari* or *Sutradhar* who is believed to be *Lord Krishna* himself. *Krishna* had very intelligently orchestrated this marriage of his sister to the banished *Arjuna*. *Krishna's Pat Rani Satyabhama* took *Subhadra* to *Arjun* who abducted her: this was the only way in which marriage to a banished prince could take place. The element of drama and the exaggerated movements makes this a very entertaining art form.

# Prahallad Natak

*Prahallad Natak* is another very popular form of traditional theatre from southern Odisha, particularly the district of Ganjam. A five-tiered spectacular wooden step with a throne placed on the highest level is specially erected for the performance. In the villages, the actors perform on the ground, surrounded on three sides by the audience, sitting on the same level. The fourth side is blocked by the steps known as the *Saptaloka*.

The story of *Prahallad Natak*, as the name suggests, is the story of *Prahallad* and is taken from Hindu mythology. *Prahallad*, who is a devotee of *Lord Vishnu* is instructed by his father *Hiranya Kashyapa* to stop worshipping his god. *Prahallad* does not obey his father. This angers *Hiranya Kashyapa*, who makes various plans to eliminate

his son, but each time *Prahallad* escapes unhurt. Frustrated, *Hiranya Kashyapa* tries to kill *Prahallad* himself - but *Lord Vishnu* dramatically appears in his fourth incarnation of *Narasingha* (man-lion) and kills *Hiranya Kashyapa* and blesses his devotee.



The language used in the play is a mixture of Sanskrit and colloquial Odiya. The dance style is a combination of traditional, classical and acrobatic styles. Like in all other folk theatre forms, the actors wear elaborate costumes and use stylized rhythmic gestures and mime. Music is the dominant feature of the play, but the dialogues in prose and song form, the dances and the recitation of *slokas* is also important. The presentation is in the style of opera, with nearly a hundred and twenty songs, each set to a particular *raga* and *tala*.

Like the *Sutradhara* of Sanskrit drama, here the *Gahak* plays the role of the interpreter of the play. He sings praises of the gods and goddesses, describes the events which are not being enacted on stage and explains the episodes being presented on stage. An important aspect of this play is the use of the mask of *Narasingha*. The mask is offered daily prayers in the *Kotha Ghar* or rehearsal room and sometimes also in the temple.

The accompanying musical instruments include the *Mardala*, *Mukhaveena* and the *Mandiras*. The district of Ganjam has been like a bridge between the northern and southern parts of India. So the music and culture of the region has influences from both the north and the south. Strains of Hindustani classical music and Carnatic music can be heard in the traditional music of *Prahallad Natak*.

This traditional folk art form is being propagated and passed on to the younger generations through the village clubs or *Akhadas*. The farmers, after completing their day's work and young children after their school hours, gather in the *Akhada*, to learn this traditional art in the *Guru Shishya Parampara*.

This entertaining folk theatre form has been influenced by its contemporary forms from the other parts of the country, like the *Ankiya Nat* of Assam, *Khyal* of Rajasthan, *Yakshagana* of Karnataka, *Veethi Natakam* of Andhra Pradesh, *Bhagavad Mela* of Tamil Nadu, *Kuttiya Attam* of Kerala and *Machha* of Madhya Pradesh.



# Rama Natak



*Rama Natak* is a very popular form of folk theatre in southern Odisha. This folk play was an important part of the culture of the people of the region during the first half of the twentieth century. It is difficult to ascertain the exact time of the origin of this play. In 1900 AD, *Agadhu Padhi* of village Lathi in Ganjam district wrote the first script of this play and the musical score was prepared by *Mahanta Ramadhina Das* of *Haridakhandi Math*.

*Rama Natak*, as the name implies, is the story of *Rama* and begins with *Rama Banabasa*, or the exile of *Rama*, and ends with *Ravana Badh* or the killing of *Ravana*. The entire performance takes place in the field or on the main village street, so that everyone can watch the enactment. A wooden stage having five tiers is erected. On the uppermost tier, decorative chairs are placed for the royal characters. The lower tiers are meant for the characters of humbler origins.

The play continues for more than eight nights. Under the patronage of its pioneering music director, *Mahanta Ramadhina Das*, *Rama Natak* was first staged in the village, Haridakhandi. Later, this play was staged in the adjoining villages of Behrampur like Lathi, Mahuda, Sulunda, Sorolo, etc. The number of characters in this play is more than fifty. As in several folk plays, the role of the *Sutradhar* is very important.

The style of presentation, acting, stagecraft and costumes of *Rama Natak* are influenced by *Prahallad Natak*.

# Desia Nata

*Desia Nata* is an indigenous form of folk play prevalent in the undivided district of Koraput, which is largely populated by a tribal population, comprising the *Parajas*, *Gadabas*, *Gonds*, *Koyas*, *Bondas*, *Jhodias*, etc. As the folk play is performed by the *Desias*, or local people, in the local language, it is called *Desia Nata*. The most popular presentations are *Gandabadha*, *Subhadra Haran*, *Rukmini Haran*, *Sasirekha Haran*, *Kumbhasura Badha*, etc. The unique feature of the costume of the actors of *Desia Nata* is the variety of multi-coloured masks, which are worn like a helmet. Earlier, they used *Dhau* (red-coloured earth), *Sadheikala* (carbon-burnt coconut shells) and turmeric powder to create these colourful masks, but, now-a-days, chemical colours are used.

The most important person of *Desia Nata* is the *Nata-Guru*, who combines in himself all the qualities of a playwright, director, actor, singer and instrumentalist. An important feature of the performance is the distinctive music, which is always of a high standard. A band of chorus singers joins the *Nata-Guru* to create the theatrical atmosphere.

As in most folk plays, there are no specific stage arrangements required for *Desia Nata*. Usually these plays are staged in the courtyards of temples or other places of worship. The play starts at midnight and ends in the morning.



# Mughal Tamasha

*Mughal Tamasha* is a satirical play on the Mughals. Peculiarly, the tradition of the play is confined to a few villages surrounding the town of Bhadrak. This multi-lingual play has songs and dialogues in Persian, Urdu, Hindi, Odiya and Bengali. This folk theatre form was inspired during the early part of the eighteenth century, when the Marathas were ruling over Odisha. This was a time of Hindu supremacy and people could fearlessly criticize the Muslim rulers. Many of the *Mughal Tamashas* were written by well-known poet *Bansiballav Goswami*, who was born in 1728.

Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babar entered India through the Khyber Pass and proceeded towards Delhi. In 1526, he defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the First Battle of Panipat and established Mughal rule in India. Babar sent Mirza Saheb to the different corners of the country to establish the political and social foundations of Mughal rule. In order to ensure a strong foundation for the Mughal rule, Mirza Saheb established many rules and regulations. These would be read out to the common people in the form of a song to make it more interesting. Since the time Mirza Saheb came to Bhadrak, there have been several legends about him in Odisha and many of these are presented in the form of a *Mughal Tamasha*. A *Mughal Tamasha* has no definite plot and most of the characters are unrelated.

Before the beginning of the play, loud music is played with the *Muhuri*, *Dhol* and *Jodi Nagara*. As the characters come to the stage, humour is provided through the dialogues. Being a musical, songs and dances are an important part of this entertaining folk theatre form.

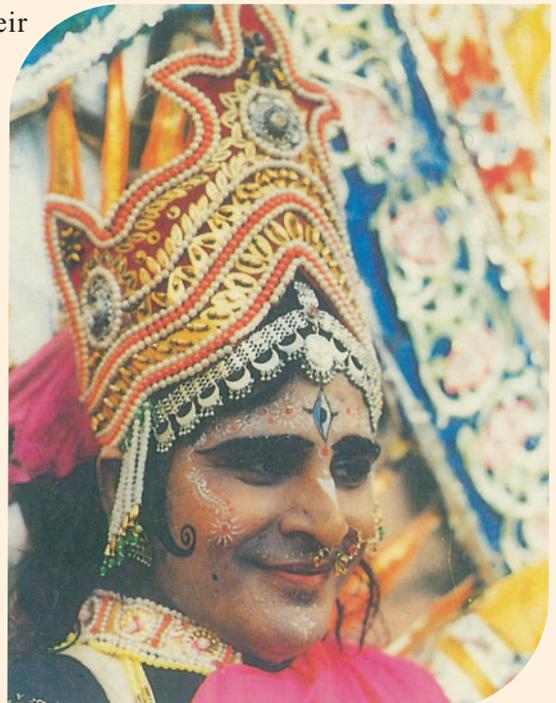


# Sahi Yatra



*Sahi Yatra* is a unique form of processional theatre, which is performed in the bylanes of Puri. *Sahi* means an alley or back-street and *Yatra* is movement or procession. So *Sahi Yatra* is the enactment of life through the streets. There is no authentic history about the growth and development of *Sahi Yatra*, but the first reference to this folk theatre form is found in the Sanskrit play *Anarghyaraghava*. *Sahi Yatra* is performed continuously for three days in early spring. It is also performed during the different *Beshas* or festivals related to *Lord Jagannath*. People from all levels of social strata join in the performance as actors, singers, instrumentalists or just as a part of the audience. The main character of this organized procession is the *Naga-Saja*, who represents a particular manifestation of *Lord Jagannath*. Wearing a papier mache crown decorated with a paddy stalk, a tiger skin around his chest and anklets made of bark, he moves rhythmically and

sometimes even vigourously. Characters like the *Kela-Keluni*, *Shabara-Shabari* and *Burha-Burhi* bring in some comic relief to the colourful procession through their performances. *Shabara-Shabari* are a tribal husband and wife who depict real-life situations through humour and satire. Stylized bull-fighting, which is powerful, ferocious and fascinating is also a part of the performance. It provides entertainment to the children and adults alike. There is also a real fight of well-fed ferocious rams. The rams which belong to different *Akhadas* are properly fed and looked after all through the year. The spontaneity of the performance, in which a member of the audience can join in the singing, dancing, or acting whenever he wishes to, and again go back to being a spectator, is what makes *Sahi Yatra* so special.



# Jatra



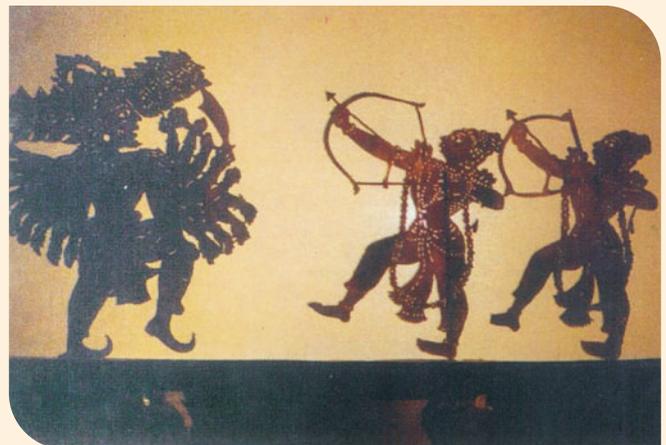
*Jatra* in Odisha, as in the other states of eastern India, particularly Bengal where it originated, is a combination of music, dance, acting and singing. *Jatra* was at one time the most important medium for propagating religious values. Even today, the themes are predominantly religious, mythological and historical. The stage is simple, with the audience sitting all around it. The musicians sit just outside the performing area. There are no stage props, except for a single seat, which serves different purposes during the course of the *Jatra* – it may be a throne, a bed or even a way-side bench. The dialogue delivery is loud and exaggerated. Wearing glittering costumes and flashing their swords, the actors deliver their dialogues with loud thundering voices to the accompaniment of the cymbals. Sometimes, the actors also depict subtle emotional moods, like love, sorrow, pathos, but characteristically with an element of exaggeration. An added attraction of *Jatra* is the melodic traditional music, songs and dance sequences

# Ravan Chhaya

*Ravan Chhaya* is one of the oldest performing art forms of Odisha. Scholars regard this unique form of historic art as one of the most beautiful contributions of Odisha to the composite Indian culture. In this traditional shadow puppet theatre, leather puppets are played by hand and are visible behind a screen, but unlike in an ordinary puppet show, the puppets are played by performers who lie on the ground, so that they cannot be seen. Deerskin is used to make the puppets.

The episodes depicted in *Ravan Chhaya* are mainly from the *Vichitra Ramayana* of *Bishwanath Kuntia* and the show has to be organized over a period of about twenty nights to present the entire epic. The performance used to be quite a common feature in some villages of Odisha in the bygone days.

The play begins with an opening concert, after which obeisance is paid to *Lord Ganesh* and *Shri Ramchandra*. Then the performance begins as per the storyline of the episode being depicted.



# SIKKIM

Most of the plays of Sikkim revolve around their customs and rituals that are diverse and ethnic. They are performed in an open space without any technical aid. The culture, ethos and traditions of the three major communities of Sikkim, the *Lepchas*, the *Bhutias*, and the Nepalese, have given rise to a composite genre in Sikkimese theatre.



# Balan

*Balan*, a traditional folk play of Sikkim, of social and religious importance, is performed by the members of the *Gorkhali* community on all social and religious occasions, particularly *Dusserah* and *Diwali*. According to popular belief and superstition, if any family member is unwell or is facing problems, financial or otherwise, then sponsoring, watching or participating in a *Balan* presentation will ensure better times for the family. A *Balan* performance also brings good luck to childless couples.

The tradition of *Balan* is believed to be rooted in India's great epic, the *Mahabharata*. The first performance is believed to have taken place in the *Dwapar Yug*, when *Draupadi* had organized this religious play to pray for the prosperity of her five husbands. Even today, before presenting a *Balan* performance, the *Pandavas* are remembered with reverence. *Balan* performances also portray episodes from India's other great epic, the *Ramayana*. Through the poetic verses of the play, important episodes of the *Ramayana*, like the birth of *Sita*, her marriage with *Lord Rama*, *Rama's* exile, *Hanumana's* role in the Battle of *Lanka*, the killing of *Ravana*, etc., are presented through music and dance. The narrator, who has an important role in the presentation of the play, describes the incidents before they are enacted on stage. *Balan* is an important and integral part of the lives of the people of the *Gorkhali* community.



# TRIPURA

The once powerful kingdom of Tripura finds a mention in the epic *Mahabharata* and in the *Ain-i-Akbari*, a sixteenth century detailed document recording the administration of Emperor Akbar's empire. The conquests of the kings of Tripura ensured that its territory constantly increased and the empire sheltered people of many races. The nineteen tribes that inhabit the state include the *Tripuris*, *Reangs*, *Chakmas*, *Mogs*, *Jamatias*, *Noatias*, *Lushais*, *Kukis* and *Garos*, among others. The majority of the tribes speak *Kokborok*. The cultural activities of the tribal communities of Tripura centre around music and dance.



# Folk Theatre Forms of the Chakma Community

Among the tribal communities of Tripura, only the *Chakmas* had some folk theatre forms which were their own. The social life patterns and religious beliefs and practices of the *Chakmas* are different from the other tribes of Tripura. Their language is also related to Bengali. In all *Chakma* folk theatre presentations, particularly the *Baromashis*, Bengali is extensively used.

**Chatigang Char Pala** is the enactment of the *Chakma* community leaving the hills of Chittagong in present-day Bangladesh, to come to present-day Tripura, where they eventually settled. Composed around 1200 AD, during the reign of the *Chakma* king *Saramalya*, the play describes the pain and heartbreak experienced by them when they had to leave their old abode.

**Genkuli** is a song and music-based folk theatre presentation, in which the community recount their past days of glory.

**Radhaman-O-Dhanapati Pala** presents in narrative verse, the life story of *Dhanapati*, daughter of the ancient *Chakma* king *Sadengiri* and his wife *Kaputi*. The *Pala* is presented through songs and recitation of rhymed verses.

The **Baromashi** folk plays are based on the folk-lore of the *Chakmas*. The different *Baromashi Palas*, namely, *Meyabi*, *Kiyabi* and *Tanyabi*, describe the love stories of the young *Chakma* boys and girls, their unions and also their poignant separations.



# Jatra

Tripura merged with the Indian Union in 1949. After Independence, several people from the erstwhile East Bengal moved to Tripura, bringing with them the Bengali culture. Thus, we find in Tripura, the mainstream Indian cultural elements co-existing with tribal traditions. Between the fifties and eighties, several *Jatra* troupes came into existence in the state and *Jatras* became a main instrument of mass entertainment. The members of the Tripura royal family were *Jatra* enthusiasts.

During the reign of *Maharaja Ratna Manikya II* (1685-1712 AD) the travellers from Assam, namely *Arjundas Bairagi* and *Ratna Kandali* visited Rangamati, the capital of Tripura at that time, as the messengers of the King of Assam. From their reports we learn that, when they went to visit *Maharaja Ratna Manikya II*, he was resting, after having taking part in a folk-drama, *Kalia Daman Pala*.

*Tripur Sen* edited the book, *Tripura Desher Katha* based on *Tripura Burungi* which was written by *Arjundas Bairagi* and *Ratna Kandali*. Sen's book quotes from *Tripura Burungi*, where the messengers from Assam have written about the heritage of folk culture and folk drama, and about the participation of the *Maharaja* and other renowned drama personalities of the capital, in the performances.

*Maharaja Birchandra Manikya* was a great poet, and a renowned singer as well as a drama enthusiast. *Maharaja Birendra Kishore Manikya Bahadur* (1909-1923AD) first established *Ujjayanta Natya Samaj* and subsequently the *Pushpabanta Natya Samaj* at the new capital of Tripura, Agartala. By doing this, he awarded royal honour to the folk drama and theatrical performances of the state. He also helped in popularizing folk culture among the ordinary people of Tripura.

*Maharani Pravabati Devi*, the wife of *Maharaja Birendra Kishore Manikya Bahadur*, patronized another drama unit, namely, the *Mahila Natya Mandal*. As a result of repeated organized performances, drama did not remain confined to the premises of the royal palace. It came down to the arena of the common people. Two *Jatra* groups also came into being at Agartala, namely the *Kansari Patty Jatra Party* and *Acharjya Para Jatra Party*.

Till 1970, *Jatra* groups from West Bengal would visit Tripura very regularly. *Ambika Natya* and *Bholanath Opera* were reputed *Jatra* troupes of Tripura. Besides, there were many smaller opera troupes which performed *Jatras* in the villages, often travelling to inaccessible areas. The Tripura *Jatra* artistes mainly performed plays that were written for productions in Kolkata, as there were very few playwrights in the state. Tales from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Manasa Mangal* and *Chandi Mangal*, as well as some popular historical tales and celebrated love stories, were regularly performed.

This art form is by the people and for the people. The ordinary rural people are its patrons, its playwrights as well as its actors.

The *Palas* popular in West Bengal like *Krishna Jatra*, *Rama Jatra*, *Ramayan Pala Kirtan*, *Shiva Jatra*, *Chandi Jatra*, *Bhasan Jatra*, *Bisahara Jatra* and *Chaitanya Jatra* are also very popular in Tripura. *Dhap Jatra* is performed regularly in the rural areas.

## Folk-lore based Dramas

Folk-lore based dramas are also enjoyed by both the tribal and non-tribal people of Tripura. The folk dramas of Tripura are generally written based on religious and social events and are staged in a simple manner. In this art form, music is the dominant feature. Besides the depiction of religious events, stories on the hopes and aspirations of the people, their happiness and sorrows, love and affection, and pangs of separation, etc., are also popular themes.

# Plays based on the Krishna Legend

In Tripura, performances of *Krishna Leelas*, like *Maan Bhanjan*, *Nauka Vilas*, etc., which are a part of the *Krishna* legend, have always been popular.



## Maan Bhanjan

The story of *Maan Bhanjan* describes *Radha* waiting for her divine lover. But *Krishna* does not come – he spends the night with *Chandrabali* and the other *sakhis*. *Radha* is very disappointed. In the morning, *Krishna* returns and asks *Radha* to forgive him. Here the famous *ashtapadi* or verse from *Geet Govindam*, *Dehi Pada Pallava Mudaram* (“I offer flowers at your feet”) is sung. The play ends with the union of the celestial lovers.



## Nauka Bilas



*Nauka Bilas* or “Voyage on a Boat” is a devotional dramatic presentation set to the melody of *Padavali Kirtan*. It is an excellent example of a folk art form rich in music, dance and acting. *Sri Krishna* was bound by promise to fulfil *Kalindi Jamuna's* desire to see the *Milan* of *Radha* and *Krishna*. *Devi Mahamaya* helps *Krishna* to build a beautiful boat. *Krishna*, in the guise of a boatman, takes up the oars of the boat. The *gopinis* of Vrindavan, along with *Radha* get into the boat to cross the river to go to the market in Mathura. They will sell their milk, butter, cheese, cream and curd at the market. *Mahamaya* herself also boards the boat in the guise of *Buri Mai*.

*Krishna* says that he is very hungry and feasts on the milk products that the *gopinis* are carrying, and lies down to take a nap. The *gopinis* take up the oars. Soon the boat is in trouble. The *gopinis* request the sleeping boatman to help them. The boatman shows his true self. The *gopinis* are delighted. The union of *Radha* and *Krishna* creates a picture of true bliss. *Jamuna Devi's* desire is fulfilled.

## Puppet Theatre

Puppetry historians tell us that nearly two thousand years ago, in ancient India, the only form of theatre was Puppet Theatre, which narrated the stories of great kings and heroes. The *Sutradhara*, or manipulator of strings, finds mention both in Sanskrit Drama and Philosophy. The unique quality of Puppet Theatre is based on the fact that the puppets are designed and created by the artiste as they originate in his imagination. Stylization in the form of simplification, exaggeration or even distortion, may be used.



Tripura is a treasure trove of folklore, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, and songs. Myths are woven around several things: gods and deities, demons, witches, human beings, flora and fauna, the solar system, speech patterns of communities, and birds and animals. The Puppet Theatre brings alive the folklores and myths using mainly string puppets. Themes popular at village fairs are mythological tales. Sometimes the Puppet Theatres are commissioned by the State Government to convey health alerts and health advice to the villagers.

# WEST BENGAL

The Bengali folk plays were basically written in five dialects and their sub-dialects. Scholars have referred to the presence of more than twenty forms of folk theatre in the northern part of Bengal alone, which includes the *Pala* of *Manasha* (which is performed throughout Bengal), *Kushan* (elsewhere known as *Ramayana Gaan*), *Choor Chunni* and *Palatia Gaan*. In the furthest part of south Bengal, one can find forms of folk theatre like *Bhar Jatra*, *Bonbibir Pala*, *Nachani*, *Sibayan*, *Krishna Jatra*, *Natua*, *Peerer Gaan*, etc. The central part of Bengal offers *Alkap*, *Leto*, *Gambhira*, *Domni*, *Bolan* and *Egdil Peerer Gaan*. Various forms of folk theatre like *Manasa Mangal*, *Krishna Leela*, *Bonbibir Pala*, *Sibayat*, *Gambhira*, etc., are associated with religious issues and rituals, but what is found in all these forms is a folk interpretation of the sanctioned beliefs of the Vedic or Islamic religion. In *Gambhira*, an interrogation of the existing social system, one finds metaphors of secular philosophy. What is more, Muslims played a crucial role in the production and performance of *Gambhiras*. With a marked emphasis on humour and fun, the folk theatrical forms like *Leto*, *Khan*, *Bhar*, *Gunai Jatra*, *Alkaap*, etc., delineate the problems of man's day-to-day existence.



Folk theatre of Bengal has its distinguishing features. There is no hierarchic separation between the performers and the audience. The audience sits around the performing area at the same level. The shift from one scene to another is not done by the dropping of a curtain, but through the use of music. The actors display their innovative skills in the creation of the stage props. The musicians performing on the occasions of *Puja* and *Muharram* are also connected with agricultural activities, handicrafts and small-scale businesses. The same performers take part in different forms of folk theatre like *Malabecha Gaan*, *Manasa Mangal* and *Egdil Peerer Gaan*. Though folk theatre of Bengal deals with religious issues as a heterogeneous form of cultural expression, it is not fundamentally connected with religion. The Harvest Festival and comical presentations of day-to-day problems occupy a place of importance in folk drama. Humour plays a pivotal role in all forms of folk theatre in Bengal.

# Palatiya

*Palatiya* is a folk theatre form of north Bengal which has love and romance as its main theme. A *Palatiya* performance is based on a gentle romantic tale that combines a religious subtext with a commonplace story. A *Palatiya* performance can be of three types – *Khash Panchali*, *Rang Panchali* and *Man Panchali*.

*Khash Panchali* is the enactment of a scandalous love affair that has taken place either in one's own village or in a neighbouring village, may be in the recent past or even a long time ago. The enactment of this social folk play is in the local dialect, and hence not understood outside the region.

*Rang Panchal* is a folk theatre form prevalent in the rural areas of the Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar and Darjeeling regions of north Bengal. This folk form takes a look at the humorous side of life, and the characters are created keeping this in mind. In *Rang Panchali*, the stories are not based on real-life situations but are imaginative. In north Bengal, love songs were known as *Ranger Gaan*, and thus in *Rang Panchali*, love is the predominant theme. Plays like *Kazir Bichar* (“The Judgement of the Kazi”), *Ghataker Bidai* (“The Matchmaker's Departure”) and *Morol* (“The Village Chief”) are very popular with the village audience as in these plays important people in the village hierarchy, like the *kazi*, the matchmaker and the village chief are portrayed in a lighter vein.

*Man Panchali* is based on historical and mythological tales, with an element of rural life incorporated into it. *Man* means “dignity”, and a respectful atmosphere is created for the presentation of this genre of *Panchali*.



# Bolan



The Indian month of *Chaitra* marks the end of the Bengali calendar year. *Chaitra* is dedicated to the worship of *Lord Shiva*. According to popular belief, *Chaitra* also marks the anniversary of *Shiva's* marriage with *Parvati*. Once the festivities associated with *Neel Puja* and *Gajan*, popular Hindu religious festivals dedicated to the worship of *Lord Shiva*, are over, several *Bolan* groups get ready to present their new productions. Music and dance are an integral part of these productions. *Bolan* folk theatres are popular in Nadia, Murshidabad, Birbhum and Bardhaman districts.

# Gambhira



*Gambhira* has its origins in the worship of *Lord Shiva*, the third god of the Hindu Trinity, who is also known as *Gambhir*. This popular folk theatre form which describes the glories of *Shiva*, originated in the Malda district of the state.

Initially, *Gambhira* was of two kinds: the primary *Gambhira* and the narrative *Gambhira*. The primary *Gambhira* would address gods and goddesses, and describe human joys and sorrows, and sometimes, important events of the year. In the narrative *Gambhira*, every character would represent a social problem. *Gambhira Utsav* became popular after the decline of Buddhism in the seventh and eighth centuries and was widespread during the reign of the *Sena* dynasty. The current form of the folk drama emerged during the reign of the *Palas* in the tenth century. A *Gambhira* performance is structured as a dialogue interspersed with songs. Both prose and verse are used for the dialogue. Social and contemporary problems are reflected through witty dialogues, songs, dances and jokes. Facts related to the year's harvest, as well as the mango crop for which Malda district is famous, are described in the songs. Music and dance are integral to a *Gambhira* presentation.

A *Gambhira* performance has four parts. The *Mukhapad* or Introduction is followed by the *Vandana* in which *Shiva* is eulogized. One of the performers dresses up as *Lord Shiva*, who allegorically represents the feudal king or the government in today's social context. The other characters wear worn-out clothes and rags as wristbands and headbands and represent the poor masses. Using a wonderful mix of song, dance and satire, they tell *Shiva* about their woes, concerns and worries. The folk form is thus a traditional tool used by the common people to voice their grievances as well as their aspirations. The next part is the *Charyaari*, meaning four friends, in which two or four performers talk about social and political issues through dialogue and songs. Disapproval and criticism is conveyed through the use of humour and wit. The last part is called 'Report', where the performers elaborate on the events of the past year.

*Gambhira* has always been used as a tool for community education. It played an important role in mobilizing mass involvement for our Freedom Struggle. Social and political themes were popular during the First and Second World Wars. The performers belong to both the Hindu and Islamic faiths.



# Domni

*Domni*, a popular folk theatre form of Malda, originated in the Deeara region, on the banks of the river Mahananda, in the north-western part of the district. Several families from Purnea, Bhagalpur, Mithila, Darbhanga and Gaya of Bihar, and the Santhal Parganas of present-day Jharkhand, have been living in this area for many generations. Most of the people living in this region belong to the *Santhal* and *Munda* tribes. The fertile soil of the region and prospering indigo plantations boosted the influx of people to this region.

The local dialect of this area is *Khottai*, which is a mix of Bengali, Bhojpuri, Maithili and Urdu. The social traditions of the region have been enriched through the assimilation of the cultures of the diverse communities living in the region. The multi-cultural demography of the area is reflected in this art form. The language used in the play is *Khottai*. *Domni* has never gained popularity as a folk theatre form as the language of presentation can be understood only by the local population.

The performers of this poor man's comedy are uneducated and belong to the backward classes. The art form is used as a means of relaxation by the villagers after a hard day's work. There is no written script, and the dialogues, song and humour are all extempore. Through the *Domni* presentations, the actors voice their hopes and aspirations and also talk about their woes and worries in a humourous manner. Plays on social and political issues and stories of natural calamities are also popular. The drama begins with the *Asar Vandana* or the overture, in which tribute is paid to all the gods and goddesses, to the accompaniment of the *Harmonium*, *Dhol*, *Khol* (drums) and *Kartals* (percussion). This is followed by the main body of the drama known as the *Nachari* or *Lachari*. The *Nachari* starts with the dance of the *Chokras*, who are male actors dressed as women. Jesters and comedians bring humour and satire to the presentations, and make them more enjoyable.



# Alkaap



*Alkaap* is an unusual folk performance popular in the districts of Murshidabad, Malda and Birbhum in West Bengal, and Rajshahi in Bangladesh. A traditional form of mass communication, *Alkaap* was used to raise awareness about social injustices and taboos. Several opinions exist about the origin of *Alkaap*, but most agree that the beginning of this art form was in the late nineteenth century. It is a composite performance which combines acting, dancing, singing and recitation. The *Alkaap* broke away from religious festivals early in its history to become a poor rural cousin of the city-bred *Jatra*. Usually, an *Alkaap* performance has no written script, with the actors making up their dialogues extempore. Songs and dances are an integral part of the performance. 'Al' is comedy, 'Kaap' is play. So *Alkaap* is a comedy play. The main theme of *Alkaap* is the criticism and evaluation of different aspects of social life through comedy and satire. *Alkaap* originated as a form of expression for the lower classes of a village society, but an *Alkaap* troupe today is comprised of higher and lower caste Hindus and also Muslims. The composition of the troupe, as well as the themes chosen for the performances, bear testimony to the fact that today *Alkaap* is totally secular in nature. *Alkaap* always begins with a distinctive music and

ends with a note of moral victory – which is actually the victory of common people. Different gods and goddesses as well as famous people are honoured by the chorus singers. This is followed by a song of the *Chokras* who are young men dressed as women. The play ends with a poem or a song.

An *Alkaap* troupe has ten to twelve men, who are led by a *Sarkar* or *Guru*, but the main attraction is the *Chokra* who entertains the audience with his singing and dancing. There are no written scripts for *Alkaap*. The actors use their presence of mind to make up dialogues on the spot. Direct interaction between the audience and the actors makes this folk theatre form interesting. The *Sarkar* enters the performing area first, singing a *Vandana* or hymn. He then recites verses that introduce the main theme of the drama. Then a woman or a young man disguised as a woman enters, who sings in praise of *Saraswati* or any other deity. This is followed by a humourous rhyme and a musical performance by women or *Chokras* mentioned above. All these lead to the crux of the *Alkaap* which, in terms of the acting style and the themes, emphasize the role of laughter and fun. Sometimes we see a mime show in *Alkaap* which is intended to extend the length of the dramatic performance. *Alkaap* is an art form which expresses much by using very little. Humour is used in a very ingenious way to get across more serious messages.



# Edgil Peerer Gaan

*Edgil Peer* was a religious mendicant who lived in Basirhat and wrote songs to propagate the Islamic faith. There are many musical groups in Nadia and Murshidabad whose wonderful enactment of *Edgil's* life has made *Edgil Peerer Gaan* a formidable form of folk theatre. The popularity of this folk form is not as widespread as the other folk theatre presentations.

## Khon Pala

*Khon* is one of the most popular genres of folk theatre in West Bengal, which originated in the Dinajpur area of north Bengal. Dance, music and dialogue-based acting are the main features of this presentation. As the play is performed for a rural audience, the themes are mainly related to the everyday lives of a rural population.

*Khon* means a particular moment. It can also mean a festival, festivity, recreation, leisure or joy. *Khon* songs are thus songs of joy and happiness, sung to welcome the festive season or just to lighten one's burdens. On the night of *Kojagari Purnima* (full-moon night in *Ashwin* or *Kartick*), *Devi Lakshmi* is worshipped. Fairs are organized on this occasion in the villages, and *Khon* is presented either as a play or just as a song recital. This is the time of the year, when the farmer community of the state have some time on their hands as the sowing of the paddy has been completed. The performances take place mainly during *Durga Puja*, Bengal's most important festival, and during the *Nabanna* festival, when the rice from the new harvest is eaten ceremoniously for the first time. Performances also take place on other social occasions.

One of the main themes of *Khon* is to bring to focus love affairs that are forbidden by social norms and law. The people involved in such affairs are made to feel ashamed of their behaviour. Often the criticism is so strong that the couple in the illicit relationship is forced to leave the village and settle elsewhere. Sometimes, they accept the punishments meted out to them by the village elders.

Social problems are also discussed through this medium. As most of the performers are farmers, an oft-repeated theme includes the presence of the *Halua* (farmer), *Haluani* (farmer's wife) and cows on stage. The language used is simple so that it is easily understood.



# Banobibir Pala

*Banobibi* is the protector goddess of the Sunderbans. *Banobibir Pala* or the enactment of the folk tale about *Banobibi* is very popular in the region. *Banobibir Pala* is also known by various names like *Banobibir Gaan*, *Dukher Yatra*, *Dukher Pala*, etc. *Banobibir Pala* is the dramatized version of *Munshi Moinuddin's* well-known folk tale, which too has many names, like *Banobibir Johuranama*, *Dhona Moule*, *Dukhe Sahar Kahini*, etc.

The clashes between the two historically contentious religions, Hinduism and Islam form the basis of the songs of this tale written in the *Panchali* style.

The siblings, *Dhona* and *Mona*, go to the forest to collect honey. Young *Dukhe* accompanies them. *Dhona* enters the forest without praying to *Dakshin Ray*, the king of the jungle. *Dakshin Ray* is angry and asks for human sacrifice. *Dukhe* is left behind in the forest to please *Dakshin Ray*. Hearing *Dukhe* crying, *Banobibi* is saddened and she sends *Shah Junglee* to save him. *Shah Junglee* wards off *Dakshin Ray*. *Dakshin Ray* requests *Baro Gaji* to help him. *Baro Gaji* helps *Dakshin Ray* and *Banobibi* to resolve their enmity. *Dukhe* is saved and sent home to his mother with a lot of riches. *Dukhe's* family live happily ever after.

The people of the Sunderbans believe that before entering the forests for fishing, collecting honey or wood, or for any other activity, it is important to appease the goddess.



# Bahurupi



The word *bahu* means many and *rupa* means forms and thus *Bahurupis* are a group of folk performers who assume several forms playfully and take on different identities. The *Bahurupi* borrows stories from the epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He is a performer par excellence and can switch roles at the drop of a hat. He wanders from one village to another to eke out a living by entertaining the people. The *Bahurupi* is always there at village fairs. The many guises he takes on include mythological gods or goddesses, a village housewife, a doctor, an old woman, a comical school teacher or even an animal like a lion or a tiger.

For his make-up, the *Bahurupi* uses ingredients like zinc oxide, vaseline, coconut oil, vermilion powder and *alaktaka* liquid. In West Bengal, *Bahurupis* have been around for the past hundred and fifty years and are seen in and around the districts of Birbhum, Bardhaman, Murshidabad, Hooghly, Medinipur and Nadia. The *Bahurupi* is thus an artiste-actor who performs in public areas to earn a living. He accepts money, clothes and food, anything that the audience gives him happily, but he does not beg.

In the nineteenth century Bengali novelist *Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's* well-known novel *Srikanta*, there is a reference to *Chinath Bahurupi*, who, dressed as a tiger created confusion and commotion in an ordinary household.



# Santhali Plays

The dramatic performances of the *Santhals* and similar tribes are also a part of Bengali folk theatre.

*Karam Binti* is a ritualistic performance of the *Santhals* that tells the story of the creation of the universe and man. The *Santhal* community believes that enactment of the story of evolution brings peace and harmony to the people and society. Every village of the Santhal Parganas of Murshidabad performs the rituals of *Karam Binti* at least once in three years. The rituals, which centre around the *Karam* tree, are held in the Bengali month of *Aghrayan*. The *Puja* begins with five important people of the village offering their prayers to the *Karam* tree. Then the entire village community offer prayers. Once the narration or the *Binti* starts everyone listens quietly as it is auspicious to hear it. The *Santhals* believe that man's life-cycle, thought process and behavioural pattern are governed by cosmic laws. At the very beginning the universe was invisible. There was darkness all around. The universe became visible only after the sun produced light out of anger. Creation started with just the sky and the ocean. The sky had the sun, the moon and the stars. The ocean had some aquatic animals. The Supreme Being created two celestial birds. The air lifted the water up into the sky, and the earthworm, with the help of the turtle, lifted the soil up from beneath the ocean, resulting in the formation of clouds and the earth. The first ancestral couple of the *Santhals* were born from the eggs of the two celestial birds. The earth is the perennial source of creation. The *Santhals* also believe that creation is always followed by destruction, which leads to the renewal of the world order. The enactments and dances are performed at the end of the narration.

# Jatra



*Jatra*, meaning procession or journey, is the most popular form of Bengali folk theatre, which has spread through most of the Bengali-speaking areas of the Indian sub-continent, including Bangladesh, and the Indian states of West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Odisha and Tripura. *Jatra* began as a musical theatre form, as a form of expression of *Sri Chaitanya's Bhakti Movement*. Though *Jatras* were born in a religious landscape, by the end of the nineteenth century, religion was replaced by morally didactic content and the form eventually became secular, and gained entry into urban proscenium theatres during the Bengal Renaissance. *Jatras* are usually performed in stages which are open on all sides, in open-air arenas. The

cast originally was predominantly male, but from the nineteenth century onwards, female actors started joining the dramatics personae. Actors join the troupe at a very young age and work their way up the hierarchy of roles. They are judged on their vocal prowess as well as intelligence and presence of mind, as this determines their ability to capture a large audience with thundering dialogue delivery and improvised speeches. Music being a key element in a *Jatra*, much attention is paid to its selection. Musicians sit on the two sides of the stage, carrying the *Dholak*, *Pakhawaj*, *Harmonium*, *Tabla*, flute, cymbals, trumpets, *Behala* and clarinet, all to heighten the dramatic effect of the performance. The *Jatra* season begins in autumn, around September, which is the time of Bengal's most important celebration, *Durga Puja*. It is also the beginning of the harvest season, when the travelling troupes head out to the interior rural regions. The season ends before the monsoon sets in and the planting season begins, in June.

## Bhar Jatra

*Bhar Jatra* is a rural play, created by rural artistes for a rural audience. In a *Bhar Jatra*, the audience is kept entertained by the extensive use of humour, which more often than not is of a reasonably intellectual level. Though the *Bhar* plays the role of a comic character, he conveys several important social messages through his dialogues. The *Bhar* also acts as a relief character in some serious plays, when he enters along with a lady companion, after every act to bring some comic relief into an otherwise serious presentation. In *Bhar Jatra* of course, the *Bhar* is the main character. Though there is no fixed time for the



presentation of *Bhar Jatra*, the main time is from the end of the Indian month of *Poush* to the beginning of the Indian calendar year in *Baisakh*. This is a time of celebration in rural Bengal as the new harvest has just been brought home. The nip in the air adds to the enjoyment of this outdoor presentation.

# Krishna Jatra



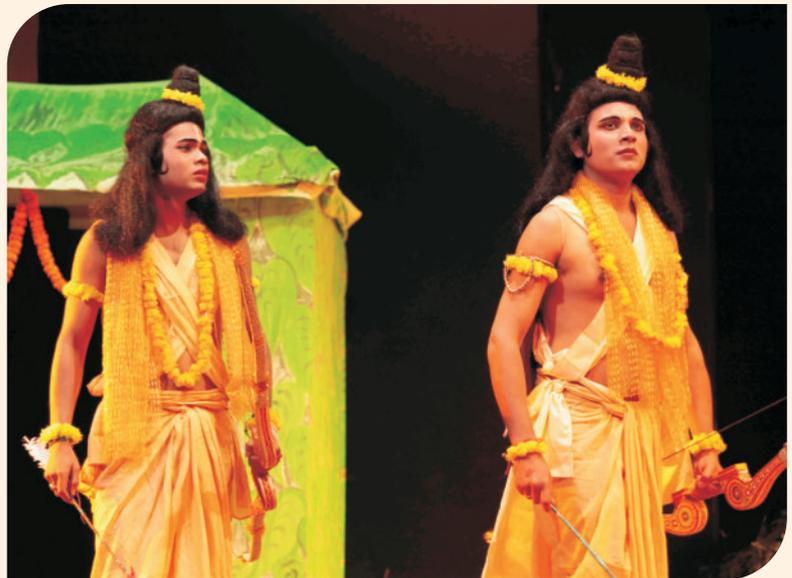
The advent of *Krishna Jatra* can be traced back to the rise of *Vaishnavism* and the *Bhakti Movement* in the sixteenth century, propelled by the advent of the mystic *Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu*. *Krishna Jatra* evolved through the devotional singing and dancing of the followers of the *Krishna Bhakti Movement*, inspired by *Raas Leela*, and dramatic poetry like *Geet Govindam*, written by *Jayadeva* in the twelfth century, and *Sri Krishna Kirtan* written by *Chandidas* in the fifteenth century. Historians also mention the existence of *Nata Geeta*, an operatic folk drama form in medieval Bengal, filled with singing, dancing and music but sans dialogue, which provided an early model for *Krishna Jatra*. After *Sri Chaitanya*, his followers like *Ramananda Rai* and *Rupa Goswami* wrote plays based on the life of *Sri Krishna*, which helped this form to evolve further. *Krishna Jatra* received royal patronage from *Prataparudra*, the King of *Utkal*. *Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu* popularized *Krishna*

*Jatra* by portraying the different incidents from *Lord Krishna's* life, through *Sankirtana*, *Padakirtana*, *Palakirtana*, *Lok Jatras* and *Jatra Palas*. Before taking up *sanyas*, *Sri Chaitanya* even played the role of *Rukmini* in the famous episode of *Rukmini Haran*, or “*The Abduction of Rukmini*”.

*Nauka Bilas*, *Maan Bhanjan*, *Mathur*, *Kansha Badh*, *Nimai Sanyas*, *Jagai Madhai Uddhar*, *Bhakt Haridas* and *Kazi Uddhar* continue to be popular presentations of *Krishna Jatra* both in Bengal and Tripura. This is a dialogue- and song-based production. Though initially men played the roles of women, nowadays, women are a part of the performances.

# Rama Jatra

*Rama Jatra* is essentially a variety of *uthan* or courtyard theatre, enacted in the courtyards of temples. The performance usually does not have a documented script, and the performers rely on the oral traditions handed down through the generations. The different episodes of the *Ramayana*, presents the teaching of ancient Hindu sages in narrative allegory, interspersing philosophical and devotional elements. Thematically, the *Ramayana* explores human values and the concept of *Dharma*. *Rama* the eldest son of King *Dasharath* of *Ayodhya* and his queen *Kausalya*, is portrayed as the seventh



*avatar* or incarnation of *Lord Vishnu*. He is the epitome of virtue. The *Ramayana* is divided into seven major *Kandas* or books that record chronologically the major events in *Rama's* life. Episodes from the different *Kandas*, namely *Bala Kanda*, *Ayodhya Kanda*, *Aranya Kanda*, *Kishkinda Kanda*, *Sundara Kanda*, *Yuddha Kanda* and *Uttara Kanda* are enacted in the *Rama Jatra*. The plays are presented either through *Pala Kirtan* or *Jatra*. In *Pala Kirtan*, there is a lead singer who is also the main actor. Besides the episodes from the *Ramayana*, Tagore's *Kalmrigaya*, which is based on an episode from the epic is also enacted. Sometimes certain important episodes like *Sita Haran* (“*Abduction of Sita*”) and *Sitar Banabas* (“*Exile of Sita*”) are made into full-length productions.

# Shiva Jatra, Chandi Jatra, Bhasan Jatra and Bisahara Jatra

*Krishna Jatra* and *Rama Jatra* which began as religious processions of devotees, that moved from one place to another, singing and dancing to the tunes of *Kirtans* or religious songs, later started performing in open arenas, surrounded by people on all sides. As the forms evolved, they absorbed all the prevalent folk traditions of music, dance and singing, to create a new template for folk theatre in the later centuries.

*Shiva Jatra*, a eulogy to *Lord Shiva*, is based on the *Puranas* and folklore.

Soon the form of religious *Jatras* was adopted by devotees of other *Bhakti* cults. *Chandi* devotees brought in *Chandi Mangal*, a narrative poem by Mukunda Chakrabarti, to start *Chandi Jatra*. *Kamale Kamini* was one of the popular presentations of *Chandi Jatra*. However, this form is gradually going into oblivion.

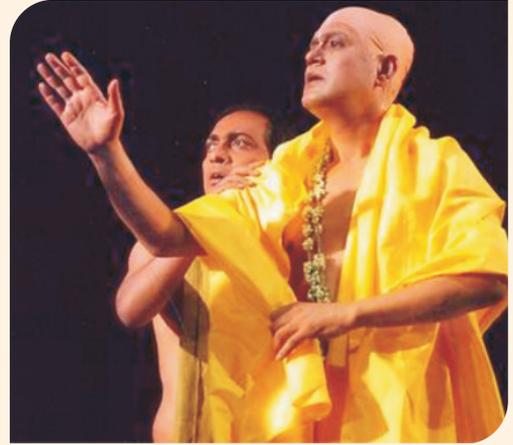
The *Behula* myth gave rise to the *Bhasan Jatra*. *Behula* is the heroine of the *Manasa Mangal* genre of Bengali medieval epics. Though the religious purpose of these works is to eulogise the goddess *Manasa*, these works are more well-known for depicting the love story of *Behula* and her husband *Lakhindar*. *Behula* sailed with the lifeless body of *Lakhindar*, who died of a snake-bite on their wedding night, on a raft, towards the heavens. She pleased the gods with her beautiful dance, and got back the life of her husband, on condition that she would convince her father-in-law, to offer prayers to *Manasa*, the snake goddess.

*Bisahara Jatra*, is also based on a *Manasa* serpent myth. *Manasa* the goddess of snakes is also known as *Bisahara*, or the “Destroyer of Poison”. Her myths empathise her unhappiness at the rejection by her father *Shiva*. In some scriptures, sage *Kashyap* is considered to be her father. *Manasa* is depicted as kind to her devotees, but harsh to people who refuse to worship her. Music and dance are integral to the presentation. The dancers, usually more than four, imitate the movements of snakes in this dance. The night-long performance has the lead singer along with the chorus performing alongside the dancers in the performing area.



# Nimai Sanyas

*Chaitanya Mahaprabhu* was called *Nimai* in his childhood. A number of stories exist about *Chaitanya's* attraction to the chanting and singing of *Krishna's* name from a very young age. *Nimai Sanyas* is a drama describing *Nimai* leaving his home and family, renouncing the material world for a greater goal in life.



# Natun Jatra

From the nineteenth century onwards, the format of the presentation of *Jatras* underwent a change. Dances, prose dialogues and free verse speech made inroads into this theatre form, which had hitherto been a pure musical. This gave rise to the *Natun Jatra* or New Theatre. Another new trend in *Jatra* during this period was the introduction of secular themes, in what was traditionally a religious theatre. *Nal Damayanti*, *Taranisen Badh*, *Haribasar*, *Raja Harish Chandra*, *Karnarjun*, *Parashuram Pala*, as well as *Bidyasundar Jatra* were many plays of this genre of *Jatra* that became popular during the nineteenth century.



# Swadeshi Jatra

In the early twentieth century, at the onset of the Indian Independence Movement, *Jatra* which had already reached its zenith in the previous century, now evolved yet again and became a vehicle of political protest. *Swadeshi Jatra*, as this form of *Jatra* was known, took on political themes and through satire tried to create a social and political awareness; Mahatma Gandhi's Movement against Untouchability, his Non-Violence Movement and Opposition to Colonial Ideologies were depicted through these *Jatras*. Several *Jatras* eulogising patriots were banned by the British rulers. The most famous among the playwrights of *Swadeshi Jatra* was poet *Mukunda Das*. When he would begin his songs requesting women to discard their fancy bangles, and devote themselves to the Freedom Struggle, the women in the audience would be so moved that they would take off their bangles and smash them. Plays based on the lives of the early Freedom Fighters like *Rana Pratap*, *Chatrapati Shivaji*, *Tipu Sultan*, *Sirajudullah*, and *Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi*, were popular themes. These plays are no longer presented.

# Chadar Badar



*Chadar Badar* or *Santhal* Puppetry is a very rare form of indigenous animation. Made with intricate workmanship, the puppets which are made of bamboo or wood are about nine inches in height. For the performance the puppets are placed on a small platform with a canopy. The string, lever and sticks used to move the puppets are covered with a *chadar* or wrap. When the puppeteer tugs the string, it turns the lever, which causes the sticks to move up and down, thereby making the puppets' limbs move. When the figures dance, the synchronization is so perfect, that the puppets appear to be automated. This form of puppet theatre is almost becoming obscure, with only a few members of the *Santhal* community continuing with the tradition of performing it during the *Dasain* festival, held around the time of *Durga Puja*. The making of the puppets is an important aspect of *Chadar Badar*, and the puppeteers make their own puppets. Accompanied by rhythmic drumbeats, soft strains of the flute and singing, the movements of the puppets create an illusion of a *Santhal* dance.



# Folk Music of Eastern India

Eastern India is a treasure trove of folk music. Every state has its own varied repertoire, distinct and identifiable. The rhythms of folk songs come naturally to the people as they are devoid of any kind of ornamentation. Folk songs are inherited and perpetuated through the oral tradition from one generation to the next. As the tunes are simple, every member of a community can take a more or less active part in its presentation. Several interesting indigenous musical instruments accompany the folk songs.

The folk songs of India represent the rich cultural and historical legacy of the ancient times. The melodious yet simple compositions of the songs cast a magical spell on the audience. The songs have acquired a global character because of their enchanting melody and simple philosophy and have helped to spread happiness around the world.



# ASSAM

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Assamese folk songs have originated from the tribal culture of the state and possess many kinds of melodic variations. The rural corners of Assam are rich in various forms of traditional music and folk songs, which have many kinds of melodic variations. Ethnic folk songs are one of the significant parts of the traditional music of Assam. Regional folk songs which include the *Goalparia Lokageet*, *Kamrupia Lokageet* and *Oja Pali* forms, is yet another enticing variation of Assamese music and is found in the different regions of the state. The vibrant festivals of the state are the prime occasion when these folk songs are sung by the rural people of Assam. Assamese folk songs collectively express the inherent tradition and cultural opulence of the state.



# Bihu Geet

Among the repertoire of festivals celebrated in Assam, the *Bihu* stands at the pinnacle bearing the most importance. The *Bihu* is a most anticipated festival, celebrated with a tremendous amount of zeal and enthusiasm. The festival brings together all the Assamese people, irrespective of their caste, creed and religious beliefs. *Bihu Geet* is regarded as the most important folk music form of Assam. While celebrating the *Bihu* festival, the people of Assam, mainly in the village areas, sing the *Bihu Geet* and visit each other to wish them for the new year. The *Mohor Singha Pepa*, made from buffalo horn, is an indispensable instrument in the performance of *Bihu* songs. The *Pepuwa* or *Pepa* player plays the buffalo horn to enhance the melody of the *Bihu* songs.



# Borgeet

*Borgeet* are classical-based spiritual songs which are rhythmic expressions of spiritual realization. The *Bhakti* or *Vaishnava* Movement in India gave birth to a new genre of religious poems and songs between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The same trend was brought to Assam by *Srimanta Sankaradeva*, and later his chief disciple *Srimanta Madhavadeva*, in the form of *Borgeet*. These songs are rich in both lyrics and music. These extraordinary creations of *Srimanta Sankaradeva* and *Madhavadeva* have never been mentioned as *Borgeet* by the two spiritual leaders themselves, but later, their disciples realizing the superiority of these songs, called them *Borgeet*. Through these songs the two saints spoke of the dual personality of *Lord Krishna* — like a child on one hand and on the other as the *Virata Purusha* as mentioned in the *Vedas*, the lord who has no beginning and no end. The two saints very beautifully spread the glories of *Bhakti Dharma* among the masses through the *Borgeet*. According to the *Charita*, the first *Borgeet*, *Mana Meri Raam Caranahi Lagu*, was composed by *Srimanta Sankaradeva* while he was on a pilgrimage at *Badarik Ashram*.



*Borgeet* is based on classical ragas like the *Shyama*, *Basanta*, *Asowari*, *Belowar* and *Bhatiali*, and were written in the simple *Brajabali* language created by *Sankaradeva*. They are purely devotional, a reflection of *Bhakti Rasa*, and were composed for the purpose of spreading *Vaishnavism*. In the *Vaisnavite* dramatic theatre tradition, *Ankiya Bhaona*, *Borgeet* is sung under the nomenclature of *Nator Geet*. The difference between *Nator Geet* and the *Borgeet* is that *Borgeet* can be sung in different *talas* but the *Nator Geet* can be sung only in one particular *tala*.

# Tokari Geet

*Tokari Geets* are the songs of the wandering minstrels of Assam. *Tokari* is a stringed musical instrument, indigenous to Assam. Songs sung to the accompaniment of the *Tokari* are called *Tokari Geet*. According to legend, the *Tokari* was created by *Lord Shiva* and the strings of the instrument were made by *Goddess Parvati* herself. In its original form the *Tokari* was a four stringed-instrument, which has been modified in its modern form. This style of singing is prevalent among different communities of Assam, the *Bodos*, *Mishings*, *Deoris* and also the *Hindus*. On different religious and social occasions, as well as in festivals like *Holi*, these songs are sung in temple courtyards and family homes.

The *Dehbichar Tokari Geet* preaches about the transitory nature of life and emphasizes that salvation can only be attained through complete submission to the Supreme Being. These songs represent human being's search for the spirituality within himself and an expression of man's innate desire to be united with the Almighty.



The *Tokari Geet* appeals to an older audience, who have, through their experiences, realized the true meaning of life and the need of spirituality in one's life. The songs describe the soul's progress beyond the limits of this perishable world, filled with sorrows, sufferings, hopes and desires, to receive enlightenment.

# Gayan Bayan

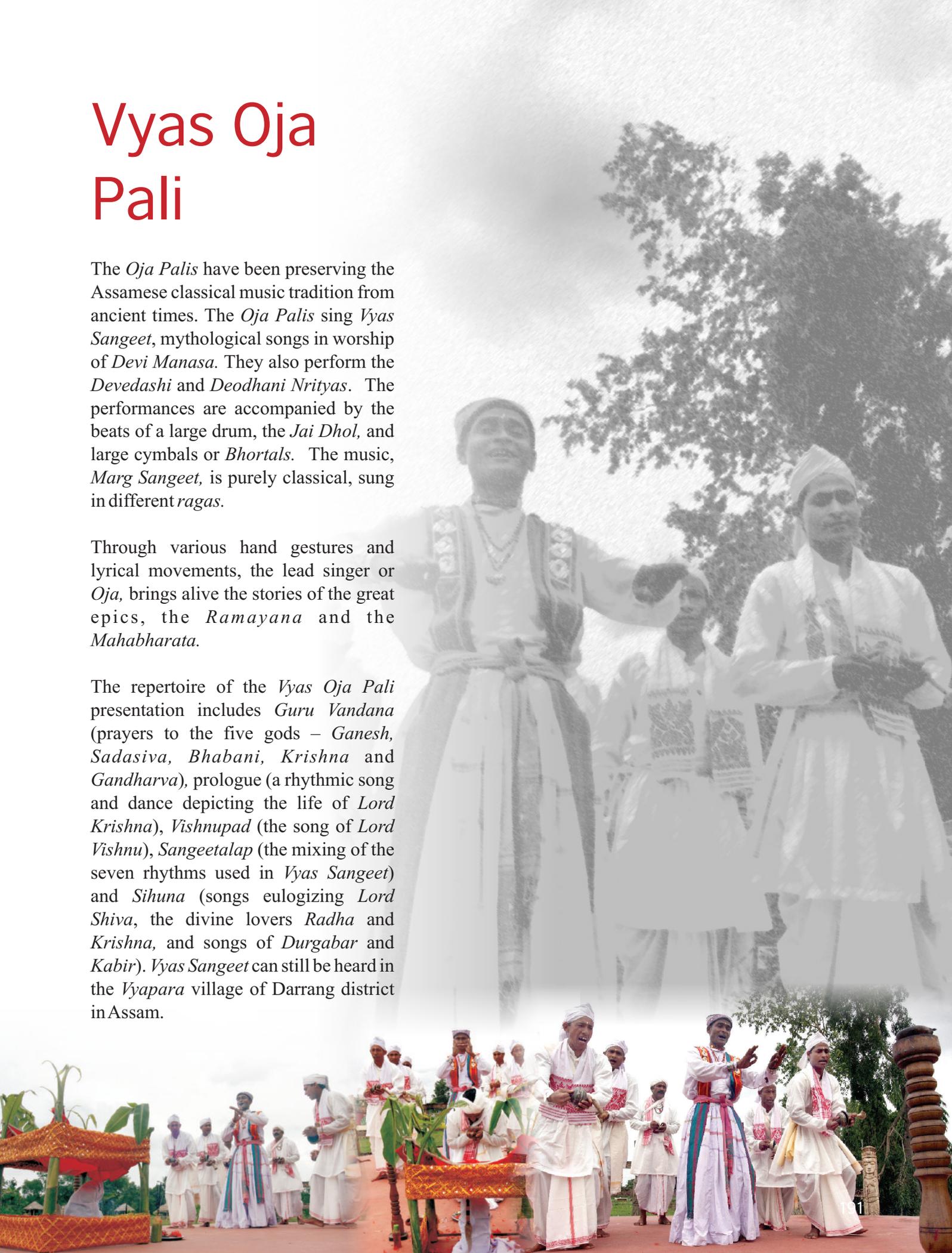
*Gayan Bayan*, or the singing and playing of musical instruments, is encoded in the performance culture of Assam as a prelude to the presentation of the *Bhaona* dramas by the repertory members of the performing units of the monastic *Sattras*. The content is light-weight, and the performance enjoyable, aiming to attract and engage spectators before the *Bhaona* unfolds its graver spiritual theme. *Gayan Bayan* occupies the place of *Purvaranga* of Sanskrit drama.

# Vyas Oja Pali

The *Oja Palis* have been preserving the Assamese classical music tradition from ancient times. The *Oja Palis* sing *Vyas Sangeet*, mythological songs in worship of *Devi Manasa*. They also perform the *Devedashi* and *Deodhani Nrityas*. The performances are accompanied by the beats of a large drum, the *Jai Dhol*, and large cymbals or *Bhortals*. The music, *Marg Sangeet*, is purely classical, sung in different *ragas*.

Through various hand gestures and lyrical movements, the lead singer or *Oja*, brings alive the stories of the great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

The repertoire of the *Vyas Oja Pali* presentation includes *Guru Vandana* (prayers to the five gods – *Ganesh*, *Sadasiva*, *Bhabani*, *Krishna* and *Gandharva*), prologue (a rhythmic song and dance depicting the life of *Lord Krishna*), *Vishnupad* (the song of *Lord Vishnu*), *Sangeetalap* (the mixing of the seven rhythms used in *Vyas Sangeet*) and *Sihuna* (songs eulogizing *Lord Shiva*, the divine lovers *Radha* and *Krishna*, and songs of *Durgabar* and *Kabir*). *Vyas Sangeet* can still be heard in the *Vyapara* village of Darrang district in Assam.



# Nangalee Geet

*Nangalee Geet* are the songs of the *Garakhiyaas* or cowherds of Darrang district in Assam. The *Garakhiyaas* take their cattle to the fields for grazing. For the young boys, the long wait can be tedious, and to get rid of boredom and bring some excitement into their otherwise monotonous jobs, they break into the *Nangalee* songs. The songs are sung in the local dialect of Darrang district. The lyricists and music composers of the songs are the young cowherds themselves. The songs have been handed down from one generation to the next through the oral tradition. No musical instruments accompany these songs when they are sung in the open fields, near a river or a pond. Two groups of *Garakhiyaas* who have brought their cattle to the same field, sit face to face and make silly and humiliating remarks about each other, in the form of the *Nangalee* songs. The conflict soon reaches the climax with the teams wanting to physically assault each other. At this point a senior *Garakhiyaa*, known as the *Bor Garakhiyaa*, intervenes and negotiates a peaceful settlement. Sometimes, the *Bor Garakhiyaas* of the two groups, act as arbitrators, and work out a compromise. All return home happy, ready to face a new day with new songs. The *Nangeeli Geet* is now coming to the stage from the vast open fields under the blue sky.



# Goalparia Folk Songs and Music

*Goalpraia* folk songs come from the districts of Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon of Assam.

The *Mahutor Geet*, for instance, is the song of the *Mahut*, or the elephant rider. The *Mahut* captivates young girls with his song, who ask him to call them when he is passing their way again.

The *Maishaler Geet* is sung by the cowherds when they take their herds of cows and buffaloes to the fields for grazing.



The *Naoriar Geet* is sung by the boatmen during boat races, a very popular sport of the area.

*Goalinir Geet* is the harvest song of the region. As the farmers and their wives carry the harvest from the fields to their homes, their hearts are filled with joy and they break into song.



The accompanying musical instruments are the *Dhol*, *Dotara* and *Sarinda*. The sweet melody of the songs has made them popular all over the country and abroad.

## Malita Geet

The *Malita Geet* are Assamese ballads — slow, sentimental or romantic songs, based on popular legends. The ballads, mythical or historical, have simple enjoyable storylines, and the repetition of lines gives the audience a chance to be a part of the performance. A few examples of the most popular songs show how the audience can identify with the characters in the songs.

*Monikonwaror Geet* is a mythical ballad about *Monikonwar*, son of King *Sankaldeva* and his wife *Kason Konwari*, daughter of *Barbaruah*. The ballad describes the different supernatural incidents that the couple encounter after marriage.

*Janagabharur Geet*, also a mythical ballad, is the story of *Janagabharu*, Queen of *Gorusar*, who captures and enslaves nine hundred *Konwars*. She is ultimately defeated by *Gopison Konwar*, who makes her subservient to him by marrying her.

*Moniram Dewan Geet* is a historical ballad about *Moniram Dewan* who fought with great courage to free Assam from British rule but ended up at the gallows.

*Joymati Konwarir Geet*, again a mythical ballad, is about *Joymati*, the daughter of *Laithepena Borgohain* of *Maduri*, who hid her husband *Gadapani* to save the kingdom and its subjects from the tyrannical rule of *Lora Raja*. For this act, she was punished and ultimately killed by *Sayduang*.



## Biya Naam

*Biya Naam* are the wedding songs of Assam. Songs are an integral part of an Assamese wedding ceremony, and are sung mainly by the women of the family. The songs are influenced by religious beliefs and reflect the traditions of Assamese society. In the different rituals connected with the ceremony, there are also specific songs which the bride and groom sing. The songs are based on Hindu mythological stories related to marriage and include happy as well as sad elements.

# Zikir and Zari



*Zikir* and *Zari* songs represent a musical genre of *Sufi* devotional songs of Assam. *Zikir* songs embody the teachings of Islam, whereas *Zari* songs narrate the tragic tale of *Karbala*. A *Zikir*, derived from the Arabic word, *Ziqr*, which means remembering Allah's name, is a religious or philosophical poem and, a *Zari* is elegiac in character and content, much like a *Marshiya*. The name *Zikir* not only applies to the musical genre but also to the occasion of its performance, devotional assemblies of Islamic mysticism, or *Sufism* in Assam. This genre of singing began in Assam in the seventeenth century, within the socio-cultural framework of the *Bhakti* Movement.

It was initiated by the Assamese saint *Srimanta Sankaradeva* and was patronized by the *Ahom* kings. During the time of *Sankaradeva*, Muslims joined in devotional prayers sung in Hindu temples, while Hindus joined in the chords of *Zikir* songs.

*Zikir* songs were composed and popularized by the *Sufi* saint and poet, *Hazrat Shah Miran*, popularly known as *Azan Fakir*, who came to Assam from Baghdad and settled in Suwaguri Sapori, near present-day Sibsagar town. According to legend, *Hazrat Shah Miran* was called *Azan Fakir* or *Azan Pir* because he taught the Assamese people to recite the *Azan*, an important Islamic ritual. Though the exact time when *Azan Fakir* came to Assam cannot be conclusively ascertained, most chronicles refer to his stay in India in the seventeenth century.

Muslim settlers came to India as *Mughal* and *Pathan* invaders. The *Badshahs* and *Sultans* of Delhi made many attempts to conquer Assam, as a result of which some Muslims stayed back as prisoners of war. The reigning *Ahom* kings also invited Muslim artisans with special skills from the different parts of the country. Many of them married local Assamese women and adopted Assamese culture.

*Azan Fakir*, though a preacher of Islam, was very influenced by *Vaishnavite* thoughts, teachings and the music of *Sankaradeva*. He was also influenced by the different genres of Assamese folk music, like *Ojapali* and *Dehabicharar Geet*. *Azan Fakir* was himself a good singer and poet and composed over a hundred and sixty *Zikirs* in Assamese. Though Islam does not promote music and dance for entertainment, there is no restriction on it for the propagation of religion. At that time, music was a very popular way of praying to God, among both the Hindu and Muslim communities of Assam.



# BIHAR

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Bihar is one of the few Indian states with a rich subaltern culture and has a very old tradition of folk songs. The songs are associated with the different significant events in the lives of ordinary people and this is why the forms have survived through the centuries. These songs are sung during important family occasions, such as marriage, birth of a child, festivals, etc. During *Chhath Parva*, Bihar's most important celebration, there is much singing both at home and on the river banks where the rituals are conducted. The songs are sung mainly in a group, using a *Dholak*. Sometimes, the *Tabla* and *Harmonium* are also used. The folk songs of Bihar were not created for artistic expression alone – all of them have a social relevance.





# Nirgun Songs

*Nirgun* songs are *Bhojpuri* songs which are woven around the theme of the soul's meeting with God. The *Nirgun* followers are believers of a formless God. The believers of this school of thought see and feel the presence of the Almighty in all the causes and effects of this world. *Sant Kabir* has been one of the main exponents of this thought process. The lyrics of the songs have dual meanings. Besides the apparent simple translation, there is also a spiritual message. For instance, in the line “*Sunore Ali Balma Ko Le Gaya Thanedar,*” the singer is apparently telling her friend that her husband has been taken away by the prosecutors of law. But the deeper spiritual interpretation would be that the soul has united with God.

*Nirgun* songs are a medium which the devotee uses to surrender himself to God. We have come into this world at His bidding and we will all return to Him. During our short time on earth, it is better that we do not get too attached to anything, material or otherwise. Like all devotional songs, *Nirgun* songs help people to maintain a balance, to develop a relationship with our Maker and totally surrender to His will.



# Alha Udal

*Alha Udal* is a famous folk tale of bravery and courage which originated in Madhya Pradesh and later become very popular in Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Bihar. The story about the two brave brothers, *Alha* and *Udal*, is divided into fifty-two chapters. Each section is complete and has a message to convey.

The story, set in the era of *Pirthviraj Chauhan*, is enacted through songs and dances. It begins with an introduction of the *Mahoba* family and ends in a war. *Alha* was five years old and *Udal* was not yet born when their father, also the *Senapati* or army commander, was insulted and killed by King *Kariga*. On learning about this from their mother, the brothers are determined to take revenge. *Maihar Mata* had blessed *Alha* with immortality and she had given *Udal* the strength of a hundred elephants and the magic sword, *Tega Sanichar*. In this folk tale, *Alha* has often been likened to *Yudhisthir* and *Udal* to *Bheem*, thereby evoking comparisons with the *Mahabharata*.

It is a tale which combines elements of mystery and romance, power and respect, revenge and bravery, happiness and sorrow, love and sacrifice, comedy and sarcasm. The story ends in a war, similar to the *Battle of Kurukshetra* of the *Mahabharata*. The story also incorporates many elements of popular lore and the rural folk of Bihar are very fond of these performances.



# Sohar

*Sohar* is one of the most popular folk song traditions of the state. Like all forms of folk music in the state, this genre of songs is also connected with a very significant event in a person's life – the birth of a child. *Sohar* songs are also popular in the neighbouring state of Jharkhand. The birth of a child is a very happy occasion and various rituals are observed to commemorate the event. The singing of *Sohar* songs is an integral part of the celebrations. The language of the *Sohar* songs is *Magadhi*. The songs are sung by a group of women, usually in the form of a chorus, with one of the women being the lead singer. The songs are soothing and are noted for their lilting melody. These typically rural songs, which resemble a lullaby, are accompanied by traditional musical instruments like the *Harmonium*, *Tabla* and other folk instruments of the region.

# Kajari Songs

Like all seasons of India, the monsoons too have their own songs and the *Kajari* songs belong to this genre. The word *Kajari* is possibly derived from the word *kajal* meaning kohl. The *Kajari* songs welcome the monsoon. It is believed that the singing invites the rains. This belief shows our traditional, cultural and social relationship with the rainy season. These songs of the rainy season are sung in the semi-classical style. The sky overcast with dark monsoon clouds creates an atmosphere in which the young maidens long to be united with their beloveds. Popular in the Bhojpur region, the songs are sung by the women on monsoon evenings when separation from their beloveds becomes unbearable.



# Holi Songs

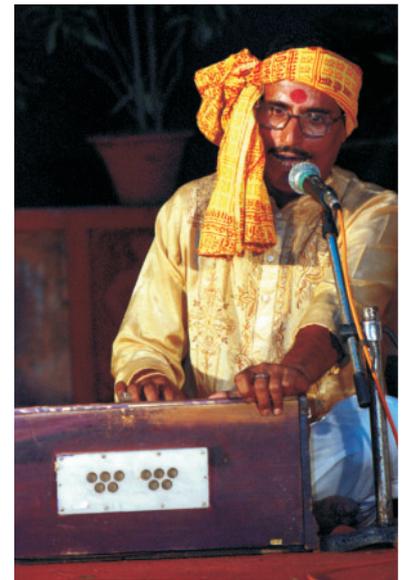
(Dhamar Jogira)

*Holi* is celebrated with as much enthusiasm in Bihar as it is in other parts of northern India. Bonfires are lit on the eve of *Falgun Purnima* (the full-moon night in the month of *Falgun*) and everyone assembles around it. *Holi* songs are sung at a high pitch to the rhythms of the *Dholak*.



# Chhath Puja

*Chhath Puja Ke Geet* are *Bhojpuri* devotional songs sung during *Chhath Puja*, the thanksgiving ceremony dedicated to the Sun God, the giver of energy and life on earth. Through a variety of hymns the devotees pray for the well-being and success of their family members and friends. According to legend, *Chhath Puja* was started by the great warrior and *Surya Putra* (son of the Sun God), *Karna*, who ruled over *Anga Desh* (present day Munger district of Bihar) during the *Mahabharata* period. The songs have a lilting melody and are accompanied by the beats of the *Dholak*.



# Ropnigeet and Katnigeet

Like in many other states of the country, agriculture is the most important occupation of the people of Bihar. The *Ropnigeet* are sung by the farmers during the paddy-sowing season. They express their happiness through the *Katnigeet*, which are sung during the harvesting season.



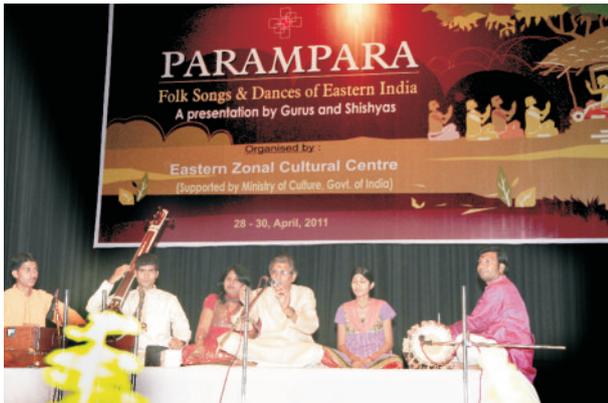
# Dhrupad and Dhamar

*Dhrupad* is the oldest existing form of north Indian classical music. A significant characteristic of *Dhrupad* is the emphasis on maintaining the purity of the *ragas* and *swaras*. *Dhrupad* music is primarily devotional in theme and content. The teaching of *Dhrupad* is closely linked to the *Guru-Shishya Parampara*. This is an oral tradition that dates back thousands of years. Due to its strict adherence to purity, learning *Dhrupad* is very difficult. It takes years of rigorous and painstaking training involving many hours of practice every day, before a *Dhrupad* student is ready to perform competently on his own. A *Dhrupad* set to the fourteen beat signature



*Dhamar Taal* is called a *Dhamar*. This is a light musical form and associated with the spring festival of *Holi*.

The *Darbhangha Dhrupad and Dhamar gharana* is a four hundred year-old *gharana* which originated from the *Senia gharana*. The founders of this *gharana*, *Pandit Ram Krishna Mallick* and *Pandit Kantaram Mullick* created a separate identity for the *gharana*. *Darbhangha Naresh Madhav Singh* was so moved when he heard the beautiful music created by the founders of the *gharana* that he appointed them as court musicians and honoured them with the gift of seven hundred and fifty acres of land and three villages.



## Parati and Sanjha

*Parati* and *Sanjha* are wedding songs of Bihar, practiced from ancient times. The songs are sung by the elderly women of the villages, to pay respect to the forefathers of the family and to invite them to attend the wedding ceremonies. The forefathers are also requested to ensure that there are no untoward incidents or obstacles in the ceremonies. The *Parati* songs are sung very early in the morning between 3 and 5 a.m., while the *Sanjha* songs are performed in the evenings. Nowadays, everyone joins in the singing. It is no longer the prerogative of only the elderly women of the family. The rhythms are faster and it is a time for the young and the old to express their happiness together and seek blessings through their singing.



# Godana Geet

After marriage, young wives wish to express their deep love and devotion to their husbands. They have the names of their husbands, and sometimes the names and pictures of gods and goddesses also, tattooed on their hand. The ceremony ends with paying the lady beautician, who does the tattooing, for her services, followed by community singing and dancing. These songs are a part of this ceremony.



# Veer Kunwar

The historical ballads dealing with the heroic deeds of the freedom fighter *Kunwar Singh* have been immortalized through this genre of folk songs. *Veer Kunwar Singh* belonged to the *Rajput* royal family of Jagdishpur, currently a part of Bhojpur district. He was the most outstanding military leader and strategist of the Revolt of 1857 in Bihar. He had adopted the unique method of attacking the weakest positions of the English, while keeping his men mobilized for any eventuality. *Kunwar Singh* freed his state and his people from the slavery of British rule before his death. The heroic deeds of the octogenarian king are remembered in these songs.

# JHARKHAND

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The folk music of Jharkhand is largely tribal in its content. There are many similarities between the tribal music of Jharkhand and that of the neighbouring state of Bihar. There are also points of commonality with the music of the districts of Purulia and Bankura in West Bengal. The song and music tradition of the state is not merely for entertainment but has a major ritualistic and social significance. Sometimes they commemorate some incident of tribal significance and sometimes they act as a social commentary. In fact, music has often acted as the voice of protest against oppression and has worked as an important political tool. However, more often than not, the themes are religious and draw from the mythological canon of tales and stories.



# Jhoomar

*Jhoomar* songs have been prevalent in Jharkhand from the eighteenth century, though not in its present form. In the bygone days, after a day's work, the people of Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal would sing *Jhoomar* songs to relieve themselves of the monotony of work. The *Dhol*, *Chad-Chadi*, *Mandar*, *Bansuri*, *Sarangi* and *Kartal* are the main accompanying musical instruments besides the flute, *Harmonium*, *Madal* and *Mahuri*. Today this genre of songs is mainly

practised by the members of the *Santhal* community. The *Mardana Jhoomar* songs celebrate the harvest season and are a major attraction at fairs and festivals. The dance that accompanies the singing has a martial flavour and the music creates the martial mood. The theme of the *Jenana Jhoomar* songs is mainly love and romance. Though normally performed on days of religious and social significance, they can also be performed on other days. For the tribal people, singing these songs is a great way of forgetting for a short while the hardships that they encounter every day.

# Lahasuya

The rains are invoked in the *Lahasuya* songs, sung by both men and women.

# Domkach

The music tradition of Jharkhand reflects a very colourful tribal tapestry and *Domkach* is a very popular form of music in the tribal belt of the state. More than the entertainment, the singing has a cultural significance too.



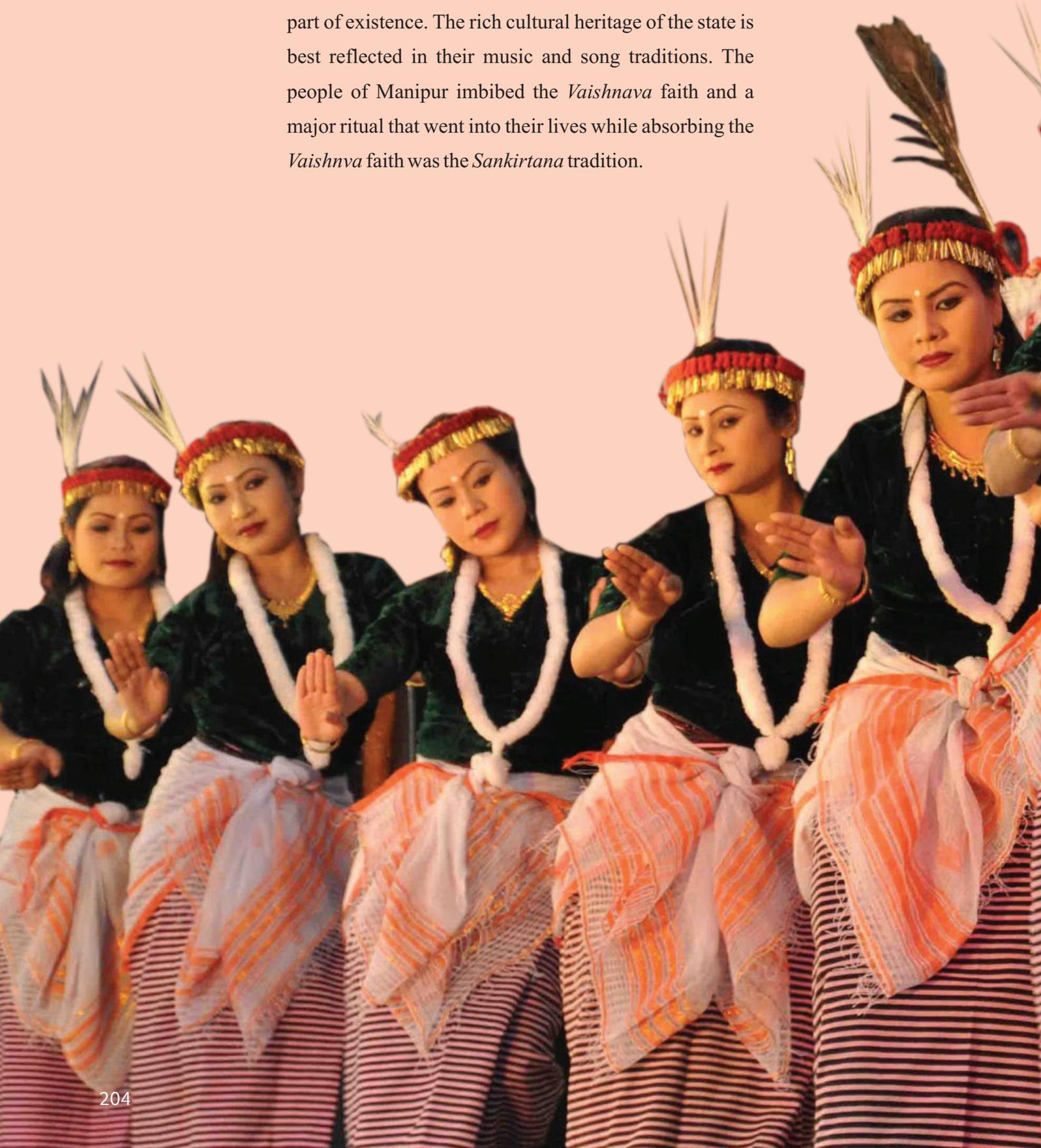
# Chaita

*Chaita* is a genre of popular seasonal folk songs of Jharkhand and Bihar, sung in the Indian month of *Chaitra*. Though known as *Chaita* songs, they are not really restricted to a particular time of the year. They encompass a wide range of themes and are performed all round the year, on all happy occasions.

# MANIPUR

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For the people of Manipur, art and culture are an integral part of existence. The rich cultural heritage of the state is best reflected in their music and song traditions. The people of Manipur imbibed the *Vaishnava* faith and a major ritual that went into their lives while absorbing the *Vaishnva* faith was the *Sankirtana* tradition.





## Khullong Ishei

*Khullong Ishei* means “community singing”. These are folk songs commonly sung by the *Meiti* villagers when they go to work in the fields or go fishing, two of their primary occupations. There are no set words or sentences for the songs. This ancient traditional style of singing has different themes and many variations in the way of presentation, but the main theme is love. They are the rural love songs of Manipur

## Lai Haraoba Ishei

*Lai Haraoba Ishei* are songs sung to please the gods. They are sung on the ceremonial occasion of *Lai Haraoba*. The lyrics of the songs make veiled references to erotic mysticism and have dual meanings. The real meaning is always camouflaged with innocent words. The tunes and rhythms of the songs make this genre of Manipuri music among its best.

## Pena Ishei

*Pena Ishei* is a style of singing which has only the *Pena* as the musical accompaniment. The *Pena* is an indigenous spike fiddle instrument in which a slender bamboo rod is attached to a round dry shell of gourd or coconut. A strand from a horse's tail is fastened from one end of the bamboo rod to the other. Another string is tied to the curved iron rod. The music is produced by rubbing the string of the bamboo with the curved iron rod. The *Pena* is an ancient instrument and an important cultural symbol for Manipuris.

*Moirang Sai* — which narrates the love story of *Khamba* and Princess *Thoibi*, and is dedicated to



the deity *Thangjing* of *Moirang*, an old principality of Manipur — is generally performed with the *Pena*. The presentation usually has four to eight female singers, who accentuate the appeal of the musical performance with their exotic costumes (made of handloom material embossed with the *Moirangphee* design, believed to have been developed by Princess *Thoibi*) and graceful rhythmic movements. Male musicians provide the musical accompaniment using indigenous folk instruments, which includes, besides the *Pena*, the *Langden* (drum).



A popular episode from the lore of *Khamba* and *Thoibi* which is often sung at social gatherings is *Loi Okpa*. Princess *Thoibi*, returning from exile in *Kabo* (Burma), meets her suitor *Nongban* on the way, who tries to abduct her. *Thoibi* intelligently avoids *Nongban*, but uses his horse to escape to her beloved *Khamba's* house.

## Khongjom Parva

*Khongjom Parva* narrates the story of the heroic struggle of Major *Pauna* and *Tikendrajit*, a famous warrior, in the battle of *Khongjom*, which was fought with the British.



## Manohar Sai

*Manohar Sai* is another important class of songs, devoted to a nineteenth century man of the same name.

## Thabal Chongba



*Thabal Chongba* songs have a religious theme and are performed during the festival of *Holi*. The literal meaning of *Thabal Chongba* is “jumping in the moonlight”. The songs accompany the *Thabal Chongba* dance, which is a merry social dance, in which everyone can join in irrespective of caste and social standing. *Thabal Chongba* is a great attraction at *Holi* because on this occasion young boys and girls can stay out as late as they like.

## Nata Sankirtana

*Nata Sankirtana* is a unique composite art form which combines the elements of dance, mime, chanting and the playing of the drums and cymbals. The *Nata Sankirtana* is performed at birth ceremonies, weddings and even on the occasion of death. This form of congregational devotional singing, which is performed with a large number of performers, is an indispensable part of the social life of Manipuri



*Vaishnavas*. The *Sankirtana* singers first stand in a basic pose with the *Kartals* or cymbals in their hands. While playing intricate rhythms on the cymbals and matching their singing to these complex rhythms, they also execute various graceful body movements.

## Gaur Pada

The *Gaur Pada* songs are a kind of devotional music of Manipur, which are sung in praise of *Chaitanya Mahaprabhu*.

## Dhap Kirtan

*Dhap Kirtan* songs do not follow the strict rules of singing as in *Padavali Kirtan*, but are sung and embellished in their own way. The songs are accompanied by the playing of the *Jhal*, a special pair of large cymbals.

## Nupi Pala

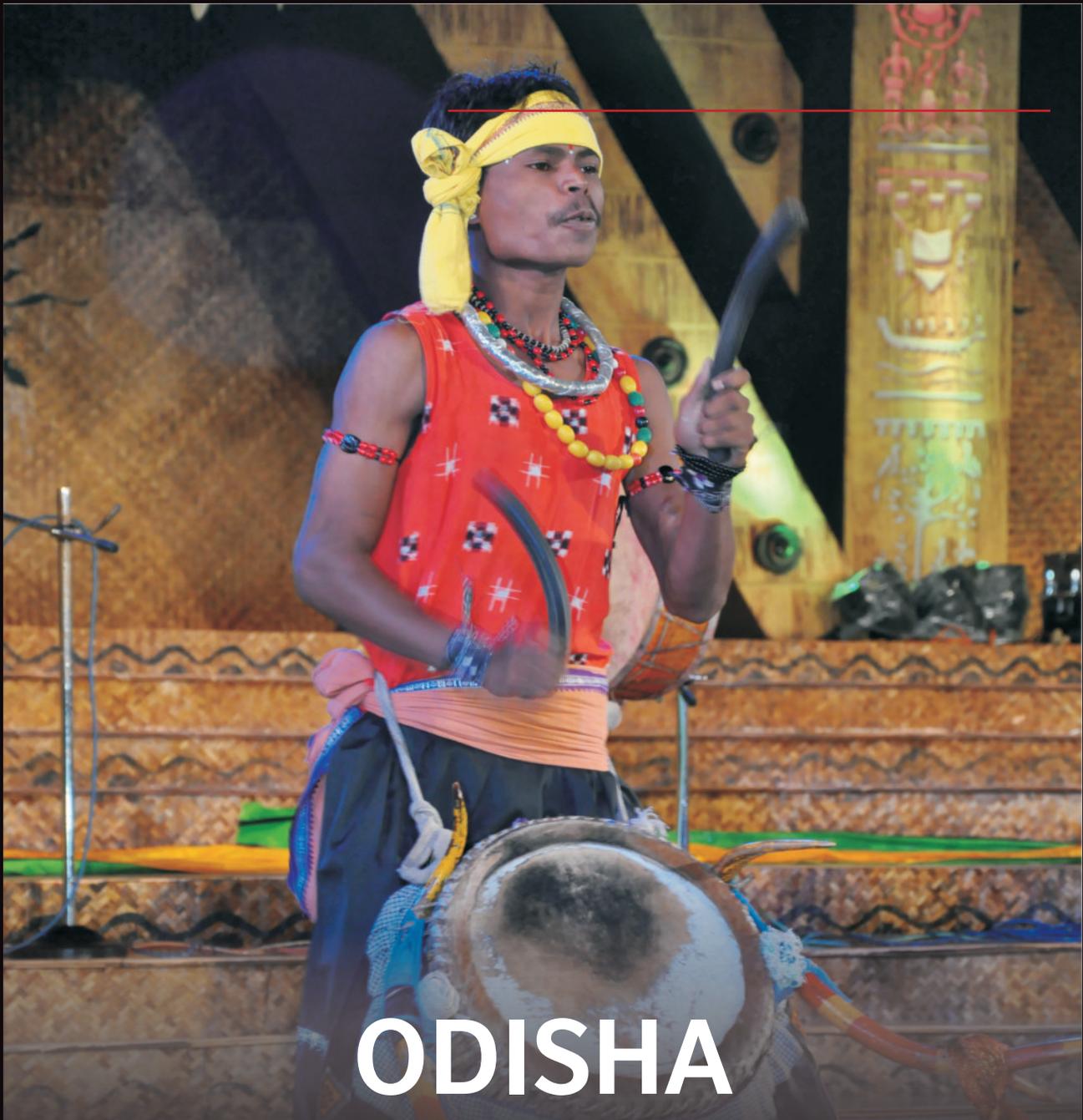
*Nupi Pala* is a traditional genre of devotional Manipuri songs sung in praise of *Lord Krishna*. On the full-moon day of the Indian month of *Shravan*, corresponding to the English months of July and August, the festival of *Jhulan Jatra* is celebrated, when the idols of *Radha* and *Krishna* are put on a swing and worshipped. Women perform the *Nupi Pala* for thirteen days. They sit around the swing and sing, keeping rhythm with the *Manjiras*.



## Khubak Ishei

*Khubak Ishei* is a kind of singing accompanied by clapping. The singing is a part of the *Rathayatra* festival, held in *Asad*, corresponding to the months of June and July of the English calendar. The celebrations start from the day of *Lord Jagannath's* journey in the *Rath*, or chariot, and end on the day of *Harisayana*. The *Pala* held on these days is called the *Khubak Ishei*. The speciality of the *Pala* is that clapping is done instead of the playing of cymbals, to keep the rhythm. The performers sing and dance with joy. Generally, the agony experienced by *Radha* and the other *Gopis* when *Krishna* leaves for *Mathura* is the content of the acting portion.





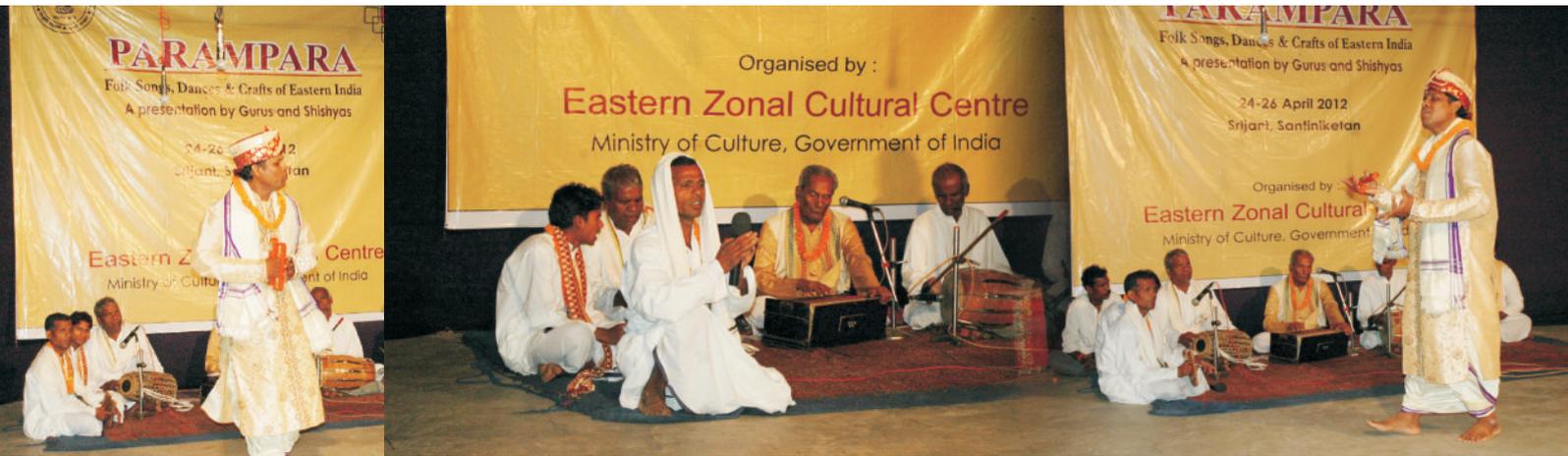
# ODISHA

Folk music occupies an important part of the cultural potpourri of Odisha. Wide arrays of local folk songs are sung during the festive celebrations and other auspicious ceremonies. The music not only represents the cultural legacy of the bucolic communities, but it is also an indicator of the society and lifestyle of the rural folk. Folk music of Odisha popularly known as *Loka Geeta* has many variations across the state, which are not always standardized and may vary in scale, interval, tonality, etc. in the different regions, even though the same tune may be identifiable. A folk song is inherited and perpetuated by the oral tradition from one generation to another. The striking feature of the folk song tradition is that every member of a community takes a more or less active part in its presentation. The rhythms of the folk music, like the tunes, come almost naturally to the people, and being devoid of any sophistication, they appeal directly to the heart.

The popular forms of folk music include *Kela Keluni Geeta*, *Bali Puja Geeta*, *Danda Nacha Geeta*, *Kendera Geeta*, *Dalkhai Geeta*, *Ghumura Geeta*, *Jaiphula Geeta*, *Osa-Parva Geeta*, *Ghoda Nacha* and *Gopal Ugala*.

# Hari Katha

*Hari Katha* is a genre of folk songs, popular in Andhra Pradesh. *Guru Tarini Charan Patra* first began singing *Hari Katha* in Odiya. *Hari Katha* is generally presented as a part of a theatre production. The stories presented in this style of singing include mythological tales and stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The songs are heard on all social and religious occasions in western Odisha.



# Sambalpuri Songs

The *Sambalpuri* folk songs are popular not only in Odisha but all over the country. They are accompanied by a wide range of musical instruments of which the *Dhol*, *Madal*, *Nishan* and *Tasha* are the four oldest unmodified percussion instruments. The lyrics of some of the songs have come down from ancient times through an oral tradition though several new songs with contemporary themes have also been added to the repertoire. Deeply rooted in tradition, the songs set in a rural background, are vibrant and eternal, and a delight for the listener.



# Kirtan



*Kirtan* is a form of congregational chanting of God's name. Practiced in most temples and villages along coastal Odisha, *Kirtans* are a mode of a spiritual practice that helps the devotee or the performer to reach the highest state of his being through his singing. It is basically an ecstatic meditation in which the singers celebrate the divine qualities of existence by chanting God's name. The leader leads the singing by presenting a phrase or a sentence which the others repeat in unison. The most traditional form of *Kirtan* is sung with just the *Mridanga*, *Kartal* and the

*Harmonium* as the accompaniment. *Kirtan* came to Odisha with *Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu* and has now become an important component in the life of most people in Odisha. *Kirtans* are now sung mainly for the worship of *Lord Shiva* and *Lord Vishnu*. The practice involves devotees congregating at the place of worship. The leader of the group, or *Gayak*, begins by singing a line of the song. The *Kirtan* group follows by repeating the same with uninterrupted precision accompanied by the beats of the *Mridanga* and cymbals. The songs are repetitive and lyrical.

# Tribal Songs or Adivasi Geeta



There is a bewildering variety of folk music in Odisha because of the many tribal communities inhabiting the state. The tribal communities live an eventful life interspersed with songs, activity and dance. No social activity of the tribal communities is complete without song and dance.

Accompanied by sharp drum beats, these songs are sung in chorus and are known for their beautiful tunes.

*Kendera Geeta* involves a particular group of people who sing devotional songs accompanied by a very simple-looking musical instrument, the *Kendera*, made from the shell of dried pumpkin, while the strings are made from the hair of a horse's tail. They move from door to door, singing their songs and seeking alms to sustain themselves. The *Nath* community have made *Kendera*-singing a profession and have been carrying it on as a family tradition. The *Naths* migrated from Angul at different points of time to Nathpada of Dadar Nuapali and Parmanpur villages.

The *Ghumura* is a typical folk musical instrument of the Kalahandi district of Odisha. It is an earthen pitcher with a narrow neck and a large belly. It is tied around the waist and played with the hands. The *Gond*, *Kond* and *Bhatra* tribes of Kalahandi play the instrument and perform corresponding dance movements during traditional and religious festivals like *Nuakhai* and *Dusserah*. There are several myths about the origin of the *Ghumura*. In the *Chandi Puran* the *Ghumura* has been mentioned as the war musical instrument given to *Goddess Durga* when all the gods and goddesses were lending her their weapons. In the *Mahabharata*, the *Ghumura* is mentioned as the musical instrument that was used by the gods and goddesses during war. Sarala Dasa has also described it as the *Rana Vadya* (war music) of *Mahisasura*. Many experts also believe that it was also used to create the war music for *Ravana*, the demon king of *Lanka*. During British rule, the *Paika* soldiers were often inactive, and they developed the *Ghumura* as a primary source of entertainment.

The *Kela* plays an indigenous string instrument called the *Ghuduki*, on which he works out different rhythms. The songs the *Kela* and *Keluni* sing are called the *Kela-Keluni Geeta*. This genre of songs has been included in the repertoire of *Yatra* troupes and other professional performing troupes and hence saved from going into oblivion.

# Pala

*Pala* is a long musical narrative, punctuated with explanations, rendered by the *Gayak* or lead singer and accompanied by a band of four to five persons. One person plays on the *Mridanga*, a drum, and the others play musical instruments like cymbals. *Pala* is essentially a singing of mythological and religious stories. The themes are drawn from the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Puranas*. The *Gayak*, describes a particular episode from a religious text while the accompanying musicians provide the chorus. Loud music of drums and cymbals accompany the *Pala* singing. The singer and his accompanists dance with very simple rhythmic stepping as they sing.



This music tradition is generally associated with the cult of *Satya Pir* which evolved as a result of the amalgamation of the *Satya Narayan* cult of Hinduism with that of the *Pir* cult of Muslims. Significantly, there are two types of *Pala* in Odisha, depending on the posture of the performers. *The Baithaki Pala* is practiced in a sitting posture, while the *Thia Pala*, which is the most prevalent form of *Pala* of Odisha, is performed standing upright. The *Thia Pala* is a derivative of, and has developed from, the *Danda Nata* tradition of the state.

A *Pala* starts with the invocation of the god *Satyanarayan*, and then extracts from the *Puranas* and compositions of famous poets are sung with accompanying dances. As the *Gayak* continues his performance, another singer of the group asks him questions or requests him to elucidate a point. Generally, the *Pala* songs are taken from the rich repertoire of Odiya poetry and literature with references to relevant Sanskrit poetry. The *Pala* singer is highly innovative in establishing rapport with his audience. He is dressed in glittering robes and ornate headgear. The *Gayak* holds a *chamara* (whisk) in his hand which he waves in the air according to the needs of the songs and also as a sign of divine blessing. Thus, he combines drama, song and dance and, as a narrator, remains detached from the main events of his dramatic song. The singer also uses prose and verse in order to make the narrative simpler.

# Daskathia



*Daskathia* is an art form exclusive to Odisha, which originated in the Ganjam district. It is simpler than a *Pala* and is usually performed by two men, the singer or the *Gayak*, and his assistant, the *Palia*. The *Gayak* and *Palia* narrate a mythological or religious poem. As the name implies, the performance is a form of worship and offering of the *Das* or the devotee. A unique and indigenous musical instrument called *Kathi* is used in this form of performance, and hence the name *Daskathia*. The singers hold these instruments in their left hand and as they strike the sticks against each other, rhythmic sounds are produced.

Like in the *Pala* singing, the singer begins with an invocatory item, in which he seeks the blessings of a deity. The entire narrative is interspersed with lines dedicated to the deity. The *Daskathia* performance is of a shorter duration than the *Pala*. The costume of the dancers, consisting of a long silken coat and a turban, creates an impact on the audience. Themes are usually drawn from the *Puranas*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and through the singing and dancing, different episodes are described.

# SIKKIM

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Folk songs occupy a significant position in the socio-cultural set-up of Sikkimese society and are an expression of the cultural heritage of the state. Many of the songs deal with folklore and folk tales, with a special emphasis on mythology and the divine occurrences in the state. Many of the lyrical poems also sing the praise of the cultural heritage of the land. Most of the Sikkimese folk songs follow an oral tradition and have been passed down from one generation to another.

Three communities: the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese, make up the population of the state, each with their distinct traditions and ways of life. In Sikkim the locals are happy to speak Nepalese, practice Buddhism and worship Nature, adopting the essence of each other's life. This effortless amalgamation is also reflected in the music and song traditions of the state.



# Lepcha Songs

The *Lepchas* are the original inhabitants of Sikkim and are primarily worshippers of Nature. The early settlers worshipped rivers, forests and mountains since these were key to their existence. Even today, many of their festivals and customs revolve around the celebration of Nature. Most of the *Lepcha* songs describe the sublime beauty of their state – it is the land of peace and tranquility. They thank the Almighty for creating such a paradise for them.



# Bhutia Songs



The *Bhutias* are people of Tibetan origin and are responsible for introducing Buddhism in the state. Folk songs and dances form a vital part of their culture. The songs reverberate with the rhythm of life. The *Bhutias* are happy people and for them life itself is a celebration. Some of these songs describe the beauty of the natural surroundings, some depict the harvest season, some are songs of joy and happiness, love and longing, and others are performed for good luck and prosperity. Earlier, these songs and dances were performed in the courtyards of family homes or in a cleared area on the slopes of the mountains. The singing and dancing have been modified to a certain extent to

make it suitable for stage presentations. The musical instrument *Nang* is an integral part of the music and dance traditions of the *Bhutia* community.

# Nepalese Folk Songs

There are many varieties of Nepali folk songs that are popular in Sikkim, like *Asade* (sung in the month of *Asad*, while sowing the corn), *Jaate* (a song sung at home while grinding the corn), *Dampke* (sung while processing the corn), *Mela Geet* (sung at fairs and festivals), *Sohri*, *Damphu*, *Sangini*, *Doheri*,



*Vivah Geet* (sung at weddings), *Bhaulini* and *Dausi* (sung during *Deepavali*), *Tamang Shelo* (sung during the *Dusserah* festival) etc.

Nepalese folk songs were patronized by the royalty. The era of the Msal Kings is considered to be the golden era of music and fine arts in Sikkim. During this time, there was extensive documentation of the different styles of singing.

## Yak Song



The Yak songs are sung by the yak drivers as they come down the slopes of the mountains crossing the rhododendron belt which is above the pine zone. The clapper bells and tinklers of the yaks provide the musical accompaniment.





# TRIPURA

Tripura resounds with folk music. Known to have music interwoven into their socio-cultural life, the *Tripuri* people always stay upbeat by making use of the drum in their dances. The musical instruments and music of the tribes are endowed with richness and abound in myths associated with the birth of the first note. In all social and religious practices, the *Tripuris* have a deep respect towards nature and seek to pacify the spirits and local gods to protect them from the evil eye.

# Jadu Kalija

*Tripuris* constitute the largest tribal population of Tripura. The *Jadu Kalija* songs are an integral part of their culture. *Jadu* is “a loved one” and *Kalija* is “heart”, so these songs are meant to touch the hearts of loved ones. The *Tripuris* depend on *Jhum* or shift agriculture, for their livelihood. At the crack of dawn, the men and women of the tribe set out for the day's work holding the *takkal*, a sharp weapon, in their hand, and tying the *Langa*, a bamboo basket, on their backs. They carry their staple diet of rice, carefully wrapped in banana leaves, in their *langas*. They work very hard all through the day. During their short breaks they bring some excitement into their lives through the singing of the *Jadu Kalija* songs. On the *Jhum* fields and even while carrying the harvest home, the *Tripuris* express their joy and happiness through these songs. Sometimes love ballads are also sung. At one time, social occasions in the *Tripuri* community would be incomplete without the presentation of the *Jadu Kalija* songs.

Over the years, the *Tripuri* community has gradually moved away from *Jhum* cultivation and the *Jadu Kalija* songs are no longer heard as much as they used to be heard earlier.



# Rasekhagra

*Rasekhagra* songs are sung in memory of a person after his death, especially for someone who has died in the battlefield while fighting for his country. The songs are sung in a plaintive tune which touches the heart.

# Chamaritunmani

The groom's family sing the *Chamaritunmani* songs to the groom, when he departs from his home for service, or *Chamari*, with his would-be in-laws for a short duration.

# Hamjuk Rohomani

After a marriage has been solemnized and the bride, known as the *Hamjuk*, gets ready for her departure to her husband's home, the *Hamjuk Rohomani* songs are sung by her family members. It is a moment of sadness for the family as the daughter is leaving home, but at the same time they wish her all the best and bless her for her new life ahead. The tune in which these songs are sung is melancholic.

# Hachwg Kamani

Tripura is a hilly state, and often the people have to pass through hilly regions carrying a heavy load. This causes fatigue and they find it difficult to carry on walking. To divert their minds, they sing the *Hachwg Kamani* songs. As they sing these songs together, an atmosphere of gaiety is created and their work load appears much lighter.

# Kuchung ha-Sikam

*Kuchung ha-Sikam* is an ancient form of folk music of Tripura. During the reign of King *Dhanya Manikya*, he issued an order that one male member of every family in Tripura would have to join the royal forces and be ready to fight the *Sikams*. The melodious *Kuchung ha-Sikam* songs were composed in this background. Today, the songs are an integral part of fairs and festivals and can also be heard during wedding ceremonies. Often a dance accompanies the singing.

# Garia Ruinani

The life of the rural folk of Tripura revolve around *Jhum*. By mid-April, when the process of sowing the seeds is completed, the farmers pray to *Garia*, the god of good harvests. The *Garia* music and dance is an important part of the *Garia Puja*. The songs are known as *Garia Ruinani*.

Ministry of Culture, Government of India



# Longoi Chokmani

*Longoi Chokmani* is a children's game in the state. Little children make a cradle shaped swing to play, using bamboos and ropes. One child sits on it and the other pushes it. The *Longoi Chokmani* song is sung by the child who is pushing the swing. The songs are not only an expression of the joy of the children as they enjoy their play, but it is also an expression of the culture and tradition of the state. The children play the game in pairs. The *Longoi Chokmani* game is played at a specific place and several thousands of people gather to watch the children.

# Waying Khilimani

*Waying Khilimani* are lullaby songs sung by a mother to put her child to sleep. The melodious and rhythmic songs are an expression of motherly love and convey her feelings to her child. When a child is crying, this lullaby soothes the child and he falls asleep peacefully in his mother's lap. These songs are nowadays also sung during festivals and other social occasions.

# Mamita

After keeping the new crops in the granary, the people of Tripura express their happiness through the *Mamita* songs which are sung during the thanksgiving festival of *Mamita*.



# Kabigaan

*Kabigaan* is a very popular form of dramatized singing among the Bengali community of Tripura. Most of the *Kabials* (folk poets) migrated to Tripura from the erstwhile East Bengal. *Kabigaans* are popular because of their simplicity of content and theatrical delivery. *Kabigaans* were originally characterized by *Vaishnava* devotion. With the passage of time, there were marked social, political and economic changes. The patronage of the sophisticated *zamindars* gave way to that of commercial merchants and the themes of the songs changed from mythological and devotional themes to ones of fun and alliteration.

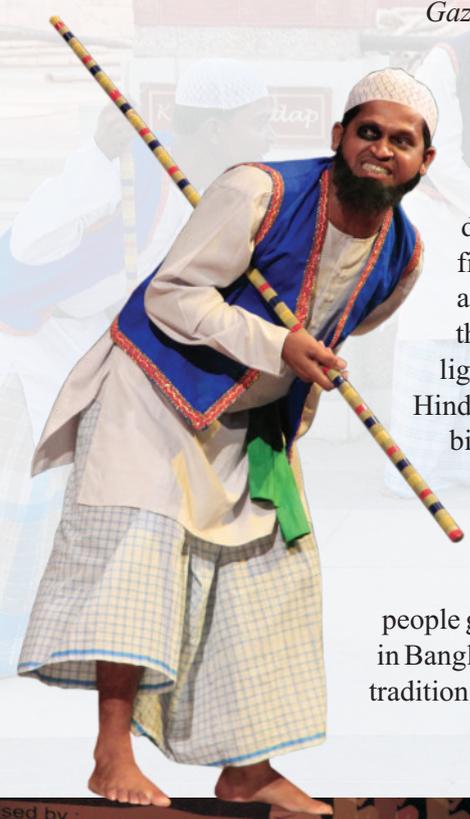
*Kabi Larais* are duels involving two troupes of contesting poet-singers and their accompanists. The talented folk poets, who can compose verses instantly, sing or recite their compositions in front of an audience. They attack their opponents with questions and riddles. The opponents solve the riddles with mastery and leave behind a counter question. This process continues till one side concedes to the other for that session. The unique feature of the *Kabigaans* is that the poets not only compose the lyrics on the spot but also compose the scores for them instantly as they are reciting their verses. The songs are full of emotions, romanticism and wisdom. Traditionally, *Kabials* were mostly Hindus and derived their subject-matter from Hindu mythology and way of life. Characters



from the great Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were very often referred to in the songs. In recent times, contemporary topics, like traditionalism versus modernity and capitalism versus communism, are also popular themes for *Kabigaan* sessions.

# Gazir Pat

*Gazir Pat* and *Gazir Gaan*, a genre of songs dedicated to the legendary saint popularly known as *Gazi Pir*, originated in the Faridpur, Noakhali, Chittagong and Sylhet districts of Bangladesh. They were performed in thanksgiving for blessings received, like the birth of a child, the curing of an illness or as prayer songs, asking for divine favours like fertility of the soil, well-being of the cattle, success in business, etc. The songs are presented with the simultaneous unfurling of scrolls depicting different events in the life of *Gazi Pir*. The scrolls have the depictions of the field of *Karbala*, the *Kaaba*, as well as Hindu temples. Sometimes, these paintings are also made on earthen pots. The performances begin with a *Vandana* or hymn, sung by the main singer – “I turn to the east in reverence to the Sun God *Bhanushvar*, who lights up the world. I offer my salutation to the kind-hearted *Gazi*, who is adored by Hindus and *Mussalmans* alike.” This is followed by narrations of stories about *Gazi Pir's* birth, his wars with demons and evil spirits, as well as scattered episodes like him rescuing merchants at sea, saving the peasants from an oppressive *zamindar*, helping a devotee win a case in court, etc. In *Gazi* songs, spiritual and material interests get intermingled. Though *Gazi Pir* was a Muslim, his followers belonged to different faiths and communities. After a performance in the village, people give money in charity in the name of *Gazi Pir*. Though this genre of songs originated in Bangladesh, today it is almost extinct there. A few troupes in Tripura are trying to keep this tradition alive.





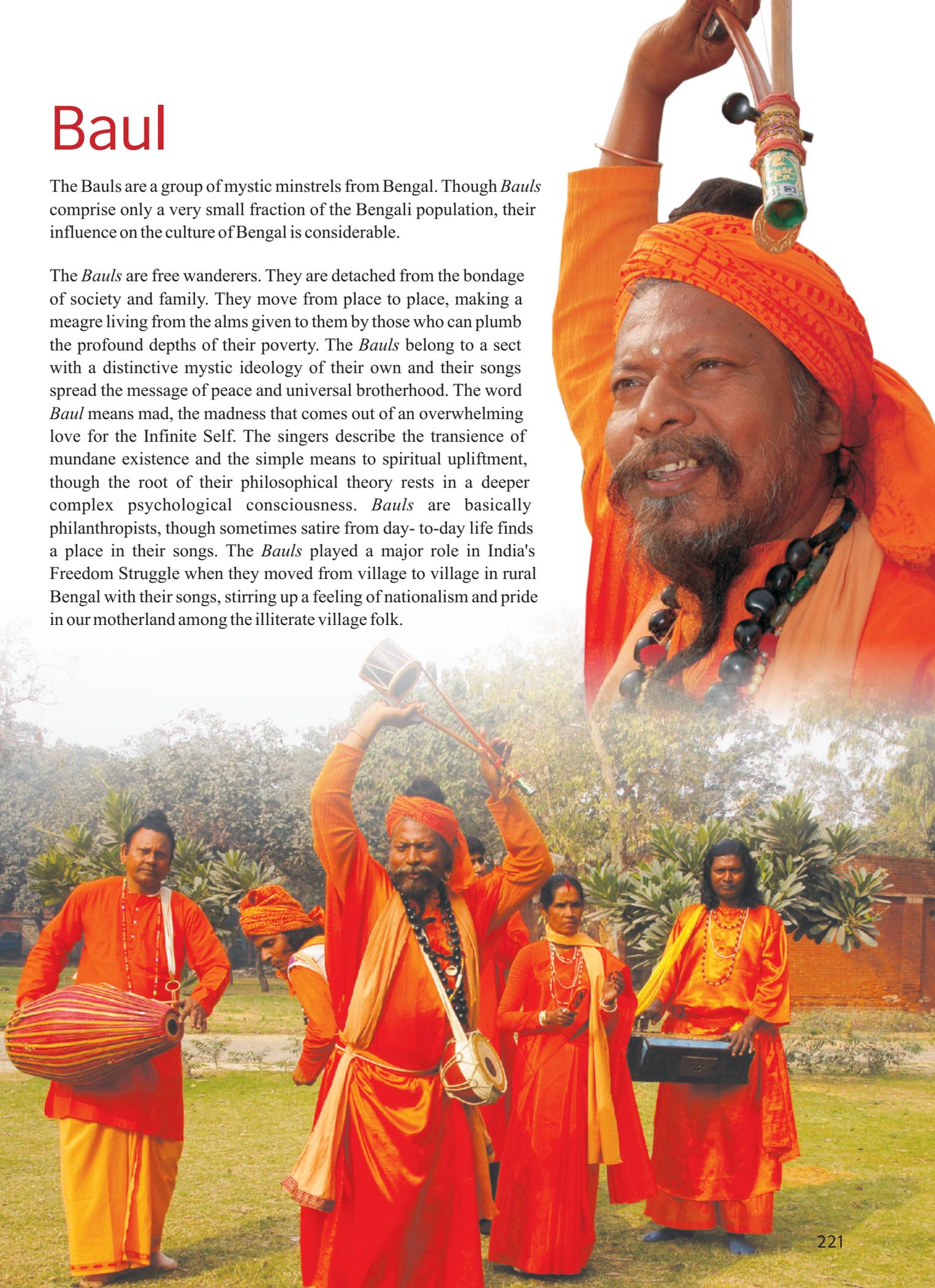
# WEST BENGAL

Steeped in tradition and folklore, the rural heartland of Bengal is enchanting and resplendent in art and culture. Bengal's repertoire of folk songs, with its lyrical appeal and richness, and its thematic diversity and range, is a reflection of rural Bengal's creativity and imagination. Folk songs of rural Bengal are a reflection of the rich cultural heritage of the state. The melodious, yet simple, compositions cast a magical spell on the audience and mirror the natural talents of the rural artistes. They display the sentiments and emotions of the common people, their hopes, dreams and desires. The musical instruments used include the *Dhak*, *Dhol*, *Kanshi*, *Khol*, *Madal*, *Kartal*, *Khanjani*, *Ektara*, *Goopijantra*, etc.

# Baul

The Bauls are a group of mystic minstrels from Bengal. Though *Bauls* comprise only a very small fraction of the Bengali population, their influence on the culture of Bengal is considerable.

The *Bauls* are free wanderers. They are detached from the bondage of society and family. They move from place to place, making a meagre living from the alms given to them by those who can plumb the profound depths of their poverty. The *Bauls* belong to a sect with a distinctive mystic ideology of their own and their songs spread the message of peace and universal brotherhood. The word *Baul* means mad, the madness that comes out of an overwhelming love for the Infinite Self. The singers describe the transience of mundane existence and the simple means to spiritual upliftment, though the root of their philosophical theory rests in a deeper complex psychological consciousness. *Bauls* are basically philanthropists, though sometimes satire from day-to-day life finds a place in their songs. The *Bauls* played a major role in India's Freedom Struggle when they moved from village to village in rural Bengal with their songs, stirring up a feeling of nationalism and pride in our motherland among the illiterate village folk.



Both men and women (*Bauls* and *Baulanis*) are a part of this great musical tradition. For a long time, the *Baulanis* performed with the *Bauls* and they did not have any separate identity. But in recent years *Baulanis* have carved out their own foothold. The music of the *Bauls* had a significant influence on Rabindranath Tagore. Today the *Bauls'* songs can be heard in many districts of West Bengal as their footsteps dot the muddy village lanes of Bankura, Birbhum, Bardhaman, Nadia, Dinajpur and Murshidabad.



## Fakiri



Though the Spartan tendencies and mysticism of the *Bauls* stem from a Hindu tradition, a very similar people – the *Fakirs* — are rooted in Islam, providing a unique parallel between these two historically contentious religions. *Fakiri* artistes are mainly concentrated in Nadia district. In a society stifled with superstitions, caste divisions, religious intolerance and malpractices, the *Fakirs*, like the *Bauls*, sang about humanism and brotherhood, celebration of life and nature. Centuries later, in today's conflict-ridden society, their songs and philosophy remain relevant and inspiring. Spirituality is above race and religion, the human body embodies the soul, and the soul is the essence of humanity: this is the message of these wandering minstrels.

## Sufi Songs

*Sufism* is a serious quest for union with God. *Sufi* music is about love for humanity. It is about a world with no boundaries, no violence and no hunger. The core of *Sufism* is to strive to be closer to God and the ultimate union with the divine.

# Darbeshi Gaan

*Darbeshi* is a style of Bengali folk music that has descended from the Sufi devotees. Bengal's *Darbeshis* are

unique because of the influence of *Vajrayana* Buddhist principles and *Sahajiya* ideals. The *Darbeshi* ideology encourages followers to talk about both Allah and idols. These are songs of character-building, songs of awakening, and songs

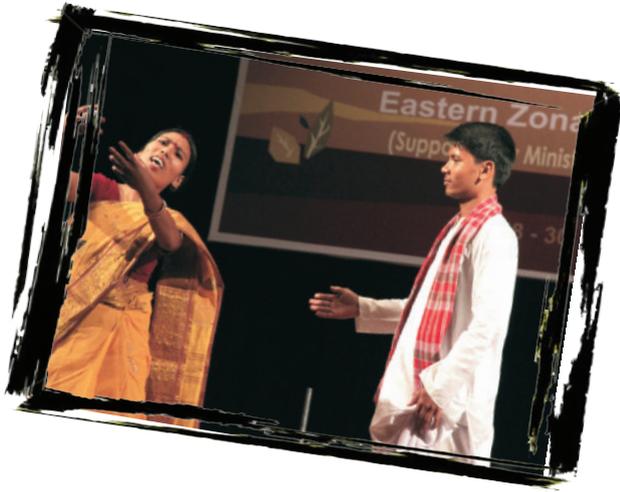
of man's relationship with Nature. Many Islamic terms are often used in the songs. The accompanying traditional *Darbeshi* musical instrument is the *Swaraj*, which is also fading into oblivion. *Darbeshi* is not just a mere musical genre; it is a way of life.



# Lahankari

*Lahankari* songs are one of the varieties of folk songs of the *Rajbanshi* (literally meaning royal community) tribe of north Bengal. The *Rajbanshis* call themselves the descendants of *Suryabanshi*. They have a rich cultural heritage in their own language. This genre of folk music has its origins in the Terrai regions of Darjeeling, north Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri districts, and is sung in simple *Rajbanshi* language. The word *Lahankari* comes from the words *Loi* meaning “tear” and *hanker* meaning “calling” or “beckoning”. Through these melancholic songs the pangs of separation in illegitimate love is expressed. Through the shedding of tears the illegitimate lover is beckoned. The *Dotara*, *Khol*, *Tashi*, *Kartal*, *Mukhobanshi* and *Behala* are the accompanying indigenous musical instruments.





The repertoire of *Lahankari* songs include the following:

*Bhasani* songs, in which the melody and rhythms of the vocals move up and down like the waves.

*Dhipani* songs, which are songs of separation and heartbreak. *Dhip* is “a heap of husks” and *pani* is “water”. *Dhipani* is thus the “water of the husks”. When a fire burns inside the heap of husks, the extreme heat causes the husks on the surface of the heap to lose water. In these songs the *dhip* is the heart of the lover that is burning and the *pani* is the tears resulting from the heartbreak.

*Haki* songs are songs of calling and are a prelude in *Lahankari* performances. These songs are based on the *Ramayana* and the *Puranas*.

*Dhadi* songs are those in which a rebuked or separated lover tries to conceal his or her pain and sorrow. In the *Teora* songs there are sudden jerks in the *talas*.

## Jhumur

*Jhumur* songs are a popular genre of folk songs in Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha. In West Bengal they are popular in the districts of Bankura, Purulia, Birbhum and West Medinipur. The themes of the *Jhumur* songs are varied. Some songs describe the divine love of the celestial lovers *Radha* and *Krishna*, some are based on stories from our epics and mythology, while some others pay tribute to Mother Nature. Other *Jhumur* songs describe the rustic charm of quaint rivulets or even depict the lifestyle of simple village folk. *Darbari Jhumur* songs bear reminiscence of the courts of *rajas* and *zamindars*. This form of *Jhumur*, which was patronized by the local king, is based on the *ragas* of classical music. *Bhaduria Jhumur* are the *Jhumur* songs of the monsoons. *Naachni Jhumur* evolved as the *Naachnis* or dancers sang *Jhumur* songs as they danced. *Jhumur* songs are lively, fast-paced and secular in nature. After a wearisome day's work, the people sing these songs to lighten their burdens.



# Kirtan

*Kirtan* are devotional songs sung in praise of the Supreme Being. The compositions are melodious and *Kirtans* are generally sung in chorus. Popularized by the mystic saint *Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu*, *Kirtans* provide one with an intense sense of devotion. The musical accompaniments are the *Dhol* and the *Mridanga*.



# Sarigaan

*Sarigaan* is another popular genre of Bengali folk songs. There are different kinds of *Sarigaan*, such as those sung while casting the roofs of houses, or while digging a tube-well to get water, or even during the harvesting season. *Sari* songs are also composed by the boatmen, who sing the songs during their long voyages, to dispel their boredom and fill the air with music. *Sari* songs are also sung by the village women while carrying water home from the rivers. The *Sari* folk songs have gained tremendous popularity in recent years because of their enchanting yet simple musical compositions.



# Bhawaiya

The original inhabitants of the expanded regions of Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri and West Dinajpur in North Bengal belong to the *Rajbanshi* community and their language is the *Rajbanshi* dialect. The folk songs of the *Rajbanshi* community are known as the *Bhawaiyas*. These are simple songs of love, passion, sorrow, togetherness and separation. The main musical accompaniment is the *Dotara*. It's strings are made of *Muga Resham*, a variety of silk. The other musical instruments include the *Khol*, flute and *Sarinda*.

*Dariya Bhawaiya* are the songs of the boatmen of North Bengal. The boatmen sing about their dreams, hopes and aspirations.

# Dhamail

*Dhamail* songs are sung by married women of rural Bengal. The women arrange themselves in a circle, around a certain object of prayer, clapping to the beats of the song. The clapping brings a rhythmic element into the otherwise slow-paced song.



## Chatka

*Chatkas* are light-hearted, humorous songs from the Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri districts of north Bengal.

## Bhatiali

*Bhatialis* are songs of the boatmen. It is a life of hardship and struggle for these people, who give expression to the joys and sorrows of their everyday lives through the *Bhatiali* songs. The soft and simple musical compositions of the *Bhatiali* songs reflect the rich cultural traditions of rural Bengal.

## Gajan

Singing and dancing is an integral part of the *Gajan* festival. *Gajan* songs are sung in praise of *Lord Shiva* and goddess *Parvati* in the Bengali month of *Chaitra*. The performers sometimes dress up as *Hara Parvati*, that is, *Shiva* and *Parvati*, and move around the village, singing and dancing to the accompaniment of the *Dhol*, *Kanshi* and flute. In Malda and Murshidabad, the celebration is known as *Bolan*.



# Gambhira

The district of Malda has its characteristic style of singing and dancing and the songs sung are mainly *Gambhira* songs. The themes used are varied, and range from religious and mythological subjects to events of everyday life in the village. Current social or political problems also occasionally supply the inspiration for *Gambhira* songs and the accompanying dancing. The *Dhak* and *Kanshi* are the main musical instruments accompanying this dance.



# Alkaap

Song and dance are an integral part of the *Alkaap* performance. The accompanying musical instruments include the *Harmonium*, *Tabla* and *Khanjani*. *Alkaap* always begins with a distinctive, composite music and ends on a note of moral victory – which is actually the victory of common people.



# Bhadu

*Bhadu* is an important social festival of south Bengal. *Bhadu Gaan* is an integral part of the festival. This style of singing which mainly focuses on marriage is popular in the Burdwan, Bankura and Medinipur districts. *Bhadu* songs are sung extempore and describe the legend of Princess Bhadreswari. Since *Bhadu* is unmarried, her songs are also primarily sung by unmarried girls. Dancing and playing of the drums accompanies the singing.



# Tushu

*Tushu Parab* is held in Birbhum district on the occasion of *Makar Sankranti*. All through the month of *Poush*, young girls get together in the evenings and sing *Tushu* songs. On the day of *Makar Sankranti* all villagers gather around a pond in the village or on the river bank, if there is a river close by, and offer prayers to *Goddess Tushu*. After the completion of the rituals, singing and dancing takes place.





# Folk Musical Instruments of Eastern India

The folk musical instruments of eastern India reflect the rich cultural heritage and musical traditions of the region. Folk songs, accompanied by the rhythms and melodies of indigenous musical instruments, fill the lives of the people of rural India with joy and happiness. The musical instruments can be divided into four different categories, depending on the material used for making them: the wind, string, metal and hide instruments. Though many of these instruments have acquired a global character, they remain an integral part of the folk traditions of the region.



# ASSAM

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The musical instruments of Assam are varied and good use has been made of the bamboo, particularly in the exquisite varieties of flutes indigenous to the state.

# Shankha

The *Shankha* or conch is a *Gandharva* instrument. According to an old myth, *Lord Krishna* killed the demon *Shankhasura* and made a conch, *Panchajanya*, with his skull. *Lord Vishnu* also used the conch as a weapon. In ancient times, conches were used as bugles in wars. The blowing of the conch marks the beginning of any auspicious occasion. It is believed that the resonating sound produced while blowing the conch drives away evil spirits.



# Dhol



The *Dhol*, an *Anaddhya Vadya*, is the principal rhythmic accompaniment to the *Bihu* dance, an integral part of the *Bihu* Festival, the most important festival of the state. As in many varieties of Indian drums, the body of the Assamese *Dhol* is made of a wooden barrel, with the two open ends covered with animal skin. The pitch of the sound produced depends on how tightly the skin is attached to the barrel. Ropes, and sometimes nuts and bolts are used to tighten and loosen the skin. Every beat of the Assamese *Dhol* celebrates the life, culture and tradition of the state.

A variation of the *Dhol*, the *Jaidhol*, is used in wedding ceremonies.

# Nagada

The *Nagada* are kettle drums of the old *Naubat* (the traditional ensemble of nine musical instruments), which are about one to two feet in diameter and played with sticks. Now-a-days, this traditional instrument usually accompanies the *Shehnai* in providing the rhythm.

# Khanjari

*Khanjaris* are small and light, a combination of the drum and cymbals.



# Toka

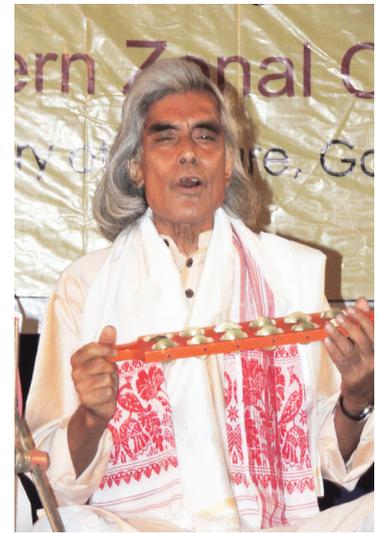
The *Toka* is a simple instrument, made from a simple piece of bamboo, split at one side, which is beaten to keep time measurement in a *Bihu* song and dance.

# Pepa

The *Mohor Singha Pepa*, the most well-known *Susir Vadya* (wind instrument) of Assam, is an intrinsic part of the traditional folk music of the state. The sound of the *Pepa* mingles with the beats of the *Dhol* to create the revelry of the *Bihu* Festival, when the banks of the Brahmaputra come alive with music and dance. It is also an integral part of evening entertainment in the villages of Assam, and reflects the rhythm of rural life in the state. The *Pepa* is a reed pipe made of bamboo and cane. The diameter of the horn is large at one end, and gradually tapers down, making the diameter at the other end where it is blown, quite small. The upper end of the instrument is covered with the horn (*singha*) of the buffaloes, and hence it is also known as the *Singha*. Holding one's breath for long periods and modulating the tunes on the *Pepa* is an important part



of playing the instrument. Nowadays many *Pepuwas* play the instrument in unusual ways, to increase the visual presentation of the art form.



# Chiphung

The *Chiphung* is a musical instrument belonging to the *Bodo* community of the state. It is a long wind instrument made of bamboo, resembling a flute. The *Chiphung Bahi* is an integral part of all *Bodo* festivities.

# Kali

The *Kali* is also a *Susir Vadya*, a more developed version of the *Shehnai*. Assamese wedding processions are led by an instrumentalist playing the *Kali*.



# Gagana

The *Gagana* is a small, very finely cut and delicate split bamboo instrument, played by holding it between the teeth, and striking it with the right forefinger to allow air to pass, when necessary. The sound of the *Gagana* is short and high pitched. The *Gagana* along with the *Pepa* is an accompaniment to the *Dhol* during *Bihu* dance performances. Together, they create music that is lively, energetic and joyful.



# Tokari

*Tokari* is a *Tata Vadya* (stringed instrument), which is played like the *Ektara* of Bengal. It is used by the folk singers and wandering minstrels of Assam, who sing mystic songs like *Deh Bisarar Geet*.



# Serenda

The *Serenda* is a stringed instrument, used by the *Bodo* community of Assam. It resembles a *Sarod* and is played with a bow.

# Been

The *Been* can be heard in the evenings in the villages of Assam. Young boys roam around the village, playing lilting melodies on the *Been* with the help of a bow.

# Tal

*Tal* or cymbals is a *Ghana Vadya* (solid instrument), which has several variations like the *Bhortal*, *Khutital*, *Karatal*, *Mandira*, etc. The *Bhortal* is the largest pair of cymbals used in the Vaishnava tradition of singing. The tiniest cymbal, the *Khutital*, is used by the *Oja Pali* performers.

# Kah

The *Kah* is a flat bell, a *Ghanta*, which is rung periodically, during worship.

# Bhortal

The *Bhortal* is an important accompaniment in the Vaishnava tradition of singing.





# BIHAR

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The folk songs of Bihar are known for their rhythm and melody. Folk musical instruments like the *Dholak*, drums, *Jhaal*, *Manjeera* and *Tabla* accompany the folk songs of Bihar.

# Dholak



The *Dholak* is the most important folk musical instrument of Bihar. It is a two-sided percussion instrument, which can be played with the hands or sticks. Anyone with a sense of rhythm can play the *Dholak*, no special expertise is required. The rhythms of the *Dholak* accompany all folk song traditions of the state giving them an element of vigour, energy and joy.



# Manjeera



*Manjeera* is a simple pair of cymbals, joined with a string. It has always been used as an accompaniment to devotional songs, sung in religious congregations, but now it is also used as an accompaniment to folk songs and dances. The *Manjeera* can also be made with wood with metal sides.





# JHARKHAND

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The music of Jharkhand has several popular folk songs, which are always accompanied by the musical instruments of the region. The music enlivens all social and religious ceremonies and festivals of the state.

# Sarangi

The Jharkhand *Sarangi* is a popular instrument used to create the background music for a variety of folk songs of the state, that include the *Domkach*, *Dotari*, *Daidhara*, *Mardana Jhumur*, *Jenana Jhumur*, *Pawa*, *Faguwa*, *Adhratiya*, *Jhumta* and *Pratkali*, among others. The word *Sarangi* means a hundred different colours, signifying the wide variety of melodies that can be generated with this instrument. It also signifies the different genres of music that this instrument can accompany. The *Sarangi* has three main cords and at least twenty to thirty supplementary cords, with the main cords being heavier in weight than the supplementary ones. The main cords are used to play the melodies, while the supplementary cords are used to generate the hum, typical of such instruments.



# Singha

The *Singha* is a wind instrument of Jharkhand, an integral part of the music tradition of the state, which is played on different occasions, particularly wedding ceremonies. It is made of brass, shaped like the letter 'S', and played by blowing at one end with the mouth, so as to form the sound at the conic opening at the other end. Wedding processions are incomplete without the resonating music of the *Singha*.



# MANIPUR

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Manipur is a land of music and dance and the state has some indigenous musical instruments that are its very own. The different kinds of folk songs of Manipur are all accompanied by some kind of musical instrument. Besides the special musical instruments of Manipur, the common musical instruments of India, like the *Kartal*, *Harmonium*, flute and *Esraj*, are also used.

# Pena

The *Pena* is an ancient musical instrument of the Manipuris, which is like a symbol of their rich music tradition. The *Pena* is made from a slender bamboo rod, and a dry round shell of a gourd or a coconut. A circular opening is made on the shell of the gourd, which is covered with hide. A string from the horse's tail is fastened from the bamboo rod to the opening. A curved iron rod is attached to another string to form a bow. The string on the bow is rubbed against the string on the *Pena* to play the instrument.



# Pung

The devotional Manipuri *Sankirtana* is based on the holy cult of *Hari Sankirtana*, propounded by *Chaitanya Mahaprabhu*, who is believed to be the incarnation of *Sri Krishna* and *Radhika*, combined as one, who appeared in the *Kali Yuga* to preach the *Mahima* or greatness of *Hari Nama*, the chanting and hearing of which can bring peace to disturbed and turbulent minds.

The playing of the *Pung* is a *Vaishnavite* tradition, and part of the music of the *Sankirtana*. According to the *Sankirtana Vichar* or Code, widely accepted in Manipur, the body of the *Pung* is most sacredly regarded as being that of the divine and holy body of *Sri Krishna*. The two faces of the *Pung* are believed to be *Parvati (Durga)*, on the smaller right side face (*Manao*), and *Shiva Mahadeva* on the bigger left-side face (*Maru*).



# Dhol



The *Dhol* is a large drum that accompanies the singing and dancing of the *Sankirtana* tradition. It is a *Badya Jantra* belonging to the *Mridanga* group and enjoys a special privilege in Manipur. There are several kinds of drums for different occasions. The *Dhol* is an important part of the *Yaoshang* festival. The interplay of drums is specially seen during the *Yaoshang* Festival, as the Festival of Colours is known in Manipur. During this festival people play the *Dhol* with gay abandon. *Dhol Cholom* or the playing of the *Dhol* is characterized by modulation of sound from a soft whisper to a thunderous climax.

# Dholak

The *Dholak* is another variety of drum played during *Yaoshang*. The *Dholak* is also a *Badya Jantra* belonging to the *Anadha* group. The *Dholak* infuses life into the singing and dancing in the *Sankirtana* tradition. The *Dholak* is also an important accompaniment for the *Yaoshang* festivities.



# Mandila

The *Mandila* or small cymbals provide the musical accompaniment to the singing and dancing performed during the *Jhulan Yatra* in Manipur. *Radha* and *Krishna* are seated on the *Jhula* (swing) and are surrounded by the *Sakhis* who sing and dance around them, keeping beat with the *Mandila*.



# Moibung Conch

The *Moibung* or conch shell, is a beautiful instrument used in *Vaishnava* rituals in the temples of Manipur. Wearing white turbans, the *Moibung* players play two conch shells simultaneously. The blowing of the *Moibung* marks the beginning of any auspicious occasion.





# ODISHA

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Amidst the hills and jungles of Odisha live the tribal people of the state. Over sixty tribal communities live in harmony with each other and they have all retained their musical traditions. They have nurtured a rich variety of quaint and interesting musical instruments. Some of these are rapidly going into oblivion.

# Kendera

A large section of the *Kond* population lives in the Khandamal district of Odisha. They use a simple musical instrument called the *Kendera*, a percussion instrument made from bamboo and snake skin, as an accompaniment to their songs. The *Kendera* is simple to make and is made by the musicians themselves. Playing the *Kendera* too is not a specialized art. Most of the *Kendera* musicians are self-taught, having learnt to play the instrument by watching the elders of the community.



# The Ganilauri

The *Ganilauri* is a rare and uncommon musical instrument, indigenous to the *Kutia Kond* community. As very few pieces of this instrument are left in the community, they make an improvised version of the same by striking a bamboo piece with a stick. In ancient times it was a custom among the *Kutia Konds* to give a *Ganilauri* as a wedding gift, supposedly to fight a curse of the community. The *Ganilauri* is made of a very special kind of light wood found in the hills. The light wood not only improves the tonal quality of the instrument but also makes it easier for the musician to keep it on his shoulders for a long period of time. The instrument is similar to another more popular rhythm instrument of the state, the *Daskathia*. The music beckons the listeners, and the womenfolk leave their household chores and come out to dance to its rhythm. Many of the instruments are decorated with drawings and etchings to increase their aesthetic value. The *Ganilauri* is an integral part of the traditions of the *Kutia Konds* and all the members of the community can play it.



# Tapka

The *Tapka* is a percussion instrument, made of wood and leather, found in the Dupi area of Kandhamal district. The wood is cut to size and the interiors are scooped out. It is then covered with leather. The *Tapka* is played on all festive occasions. Most of the *Tapka* players make the instrument themselves and have learnt to play it in an informal manner and not with proper training.

# Changu

The *Changu*, also known as the *Dadam*, is a percussion instrument made from the wood of the *Daman* or *Pipul* trees. First the wood is cut into a round shape, and then the leather is fixed on the rim, using a special kind of gum known as *Jirika* gum. Most of the *Changu* players have not had any formal training in the playing of the instrument, but have learnt the art by watching their elders.



# Dhulki

The *Dhulki* is another percussion instrument of Odisha, made from the wood of the *Gamar* tree, with the leather covering made from goatskin.



# Tamak

The *Tamak* is a percussion instrument made from a piece of iron covered with leather. It is played with wooden sticks or even short pieces of hard rubber. The rhythms of the *Tamak* can be heard during all festive occasions, in the chorus of *Jatra* presentations, and during wedding ceremonies. The *Tamak* played by the *Saoras* is called the *Lichri*. The style of playing of the different varieties of the *Tamak* is the same, but the way in which the different instruments are made is different. The leather has a kind of gum applied on it with oil. This improves the tonal quality of the instrument.



# Dhol

The *Dhol*, the most common of Indian percussion instruments, is also extensively used in Odisha. It is made from bamboo, wood and cowhide. It is one of the most popular percussion instruments in the state and is played with two wooden sticks.

# Muhuri

The *Muhuri*, akin to the *Shehnai*, is an important wind instrument in the musical tradition of Odisha. Made from clay, copper and bamboo, *Muhuris* of different shapes are seen in the different villages of Odisha. There is no appreciable difference in the tonal quality of the sound produced by the different varieties of *Muhuri*.



# Dekka

The *Dekka* is a stringed instrument made using the tailbone of a monkey. A piece of bamboo and the tailbone are fixed to the shell of a gourd and a hollow piece of wood with the help of a special kind of gum obtained from the *Mahua* tree. The most difficult part of making the *Dekka* is collecting the tailbone of the monkey. The villagers go to the forest to look for a monkey that has been killed by wild dogs. The tail bone is collected and buried under the ground for the skin to wear away. Then the tailbone is taken out, dried, and used for making the *Dekka*.



# Raggoidang

The *Raggoidang* is a musical instrument belonging to the *Saora* tribe of Odisha. Striking a stick on a piece of bamboo that has grooves engraved on it makes a *raggoi raggoi* sound and hence the name of the instrument. The *Raggoidang* takes a long time to make as the making of the etchings is quite laborious.



# Copper Flutes

The *Saoras* use copper flutes in addition to flutes made from cow and buffalo horns. The flutes are made by the artistes themselves and they have all learnt to play them in an informal manner.



# Tudum

The *Tudum*, another interesting folk instrument in the musical tradition of the state, is an earthen pot covered with cowhide. They are made by the artistes themselves as a family tradition. The *Tudum* can be mainly heard when there is a death in the village and when the prayer services for the dead are held. The *Tudum* is also played on other occasions.

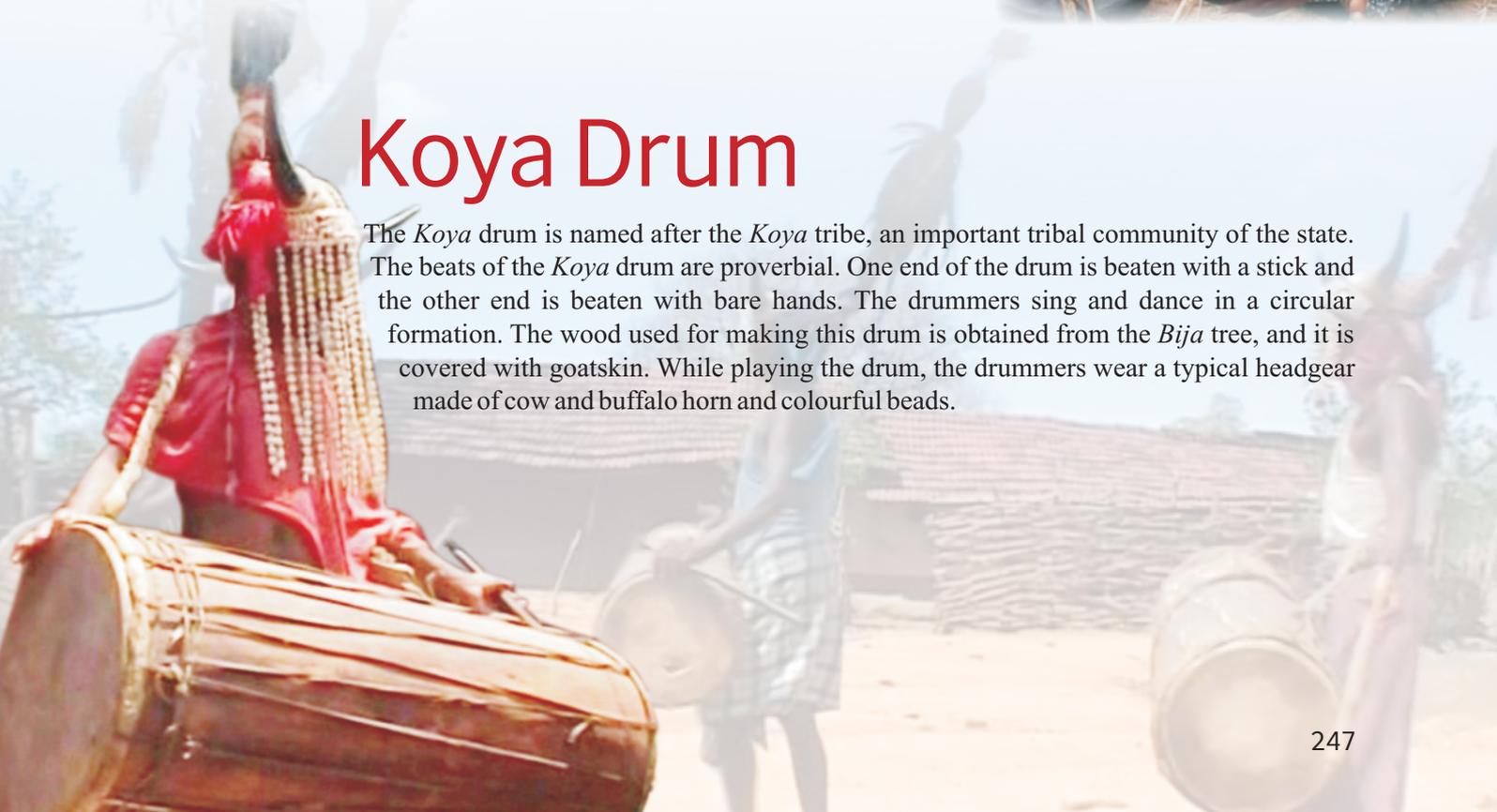
# Dudunga

The *Dudunga*, also known as the *Dunduni*, is a rare musical instrument used by the *Parajas* of Koraput district. This instrument is very similar to the *Kendera* used by the *Konds* of Kandhamal district. The bamboo sticks are cut to a definite size. The shell of a gourd, covered with kid skin, is attached to the two ends of the bamboo stick and strings are attached across the length of the bamboo stick.



# Koya Drum

The *Koya* drum is named after the *Koya* tribe, an important tribal community of the state. The beats of the *Koya* drum are proverbial. One end of the drum is beaten with a stick and the other end is beaten with bare hands. The drummers sing and dance in a circular formation. The wood used for making this drum is obtained from the *Bija* tree, and it is covered with goatskin. While playing the drum, the drummers wear a typical headgear made of cow and buffalo horn and colourful beads.



# Gurki

The *Gurki* is a special instrument found in Nabarangpur. It is played with style and vivacity. This instrument is not made anymore and the few pieces that can be seen have been with the families for several years. It consists of an earthen pot covered with leather.



# Nishan



The *Nishan* is an important folk musical instrument, made from a pot which has twelve iron strips fixed on it. The drum is covered with buffalo hide and decorated with the horn of a deer. The *Nishan* is used all over the state, particularly in Sambalpur. It is also used as an accompaniment to the famous *Ghumura* dance of Kalahandi district. The playing of the *Nishan* is learnt by watching the elders of the community.

# Ghumura

The *Ghumura* is a special earthen pot made by the potters of Kalahandi district. It is played by tying it to the waist. The *Ghumura* players dance while playing the instrument. The skin of a dead donkey is collected from the tribals, dried in the sun, and then fixed with gum to the pot. The pots can be of different sizes. Most of the artistes make the *Ghumura* themselves. The mouth of the *Ghumura* should only be four fingers wide, but it can also be bigger or smaller. There are two styles of playing the *Ghumura* – the *Kari* and the *Chatil*. The *Ghumura* is also played when the epics are read out in villages.





# SIKKIM

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Musical instruments are the sole form of entertainment and recreation in Sikkim and a source of great delight. According to popular belief in Sikkim, no musical instrument should be played in the Indian month of *Shravan*, when the gods descend from the heavens for a much-needed rest. They should not be disturbed with the sound of the musical instruments.

# Panchai Baja and Naumati Baja

The *Panchai Baja* and the *Naumati Baja* are auspicious bands played by the Nepali community of the state during religious ceremonies. The *Panchai Baja*, which has five musical instruments, is the symbol of *Pancha Tatwa*, or the five basic elements of life (earth, water, fire, air and ether), and the *Pancha Dhatu* (gold, silver, copper, lead and tin). The five instruments, *Teep Sahanai*, *Dholaki*, *Jhurumma*, *Domaha* and *Tiamko*, also represent the five gods, *Ganesh*, *Vishnu*, *Devi*, *Surya* and *Shiva*. The *Naumati Baja*, which is the more elaborate form of the *Panchai Baja*, has four additional musical instruments, which are the *Narsingha*, *Karnal*, *Dhodre Sahanai*, and *Bikul*. Other indigenous musical instruments like the *Tyakko*, *Turahi*, *Dahinu Damau*, *Bheyri*, *Rasa*, etc., may also be a part of the orchestra.

## Flute

The *Lepcha*, *Bhutia* and *Nepali* communities of Sikkim have retained their own dress codes, language and culture. Each community also has its own musical instruments. But all the communities have one common instrument – the *Bansuri* or flute. The flute is one of the oldest musical instruments of the state. Normally, a Sikkimese flute has seven holes on its body. The songs and music of each community are different in rhythm and tune, just as they stand apart from the folk rhythms and tunes heard in other regions of the country. Though the flute is an important musical accompaniment all over the country, the sweetness of the Sikkimese flute tugs at the heart strings of all music lovers.

In Sikkim, many varieties of bamboo are grown, like *Chongya*, *Dhali*, *Salu*, *Gal*, *Beth*, *Singane*, *Pareng*, *Gope*, etc. *Bansuris* can be made from all these, but the flute made from *Gope* bamboo is considered the best and most sacred. People coming down from the mountains use bamboo sticks to negotiate the difficult mountain terrain. When they reach the foothills, they throw away these sticks. These are then picked by the villagers living in the foothill areas and made into flutes.

*Pentong Palit*, a flute with four holes, is a very ancient musical instrument of the *Lepcha* community. The hopes, joys and aspirations of the *Lepcha* community are beautifully expressed through the music of this flute.



# Tungna

Many of the musical instruments that accompany the dances of Sikkim are unique to the state, and the *Tungna* is one of them. A primary occupation of the *Gurungs* is rearing of herds of sheep in the Himalayan region. According to ancient *Gurung* legend, a young shepherd was sitting by the side of a peaceful blue lagoon, while his sheep were grazing. Away from home and family, he was in a melancholic mood. To add to his sadness, a group of swans flew by singing a sad note. Just then, a gust of wind broke off a dry branch from an old tree and it fell into the lagoon. The young shepherd jumped into the water, brought the branch out, and used it along with sheepskin and sheep intestines to make a *Tungna*. As he began to play on his creation, the air was filled with melodious music. The *Tungna* became the boy's constant companion, and he shared with it his joys and sorrows.



This stringed instrument is made from any kind of wood found in the Himalayan region, but the music that comes from a *Tungna* made from the wood of a rhododendron tree is especially sweet. While the main *Tungna* player sings soulful songs to the accompaniment of soothing music from the *Tungna*, the others make gentle rhythmic movements in different formations with the *Tungna* in hand. The instrument is played by scratching the strings.

# Madal

The *Madal*, a variety of the *Mridanga*, is a hand drum, cylindrical in shape, with a slight bulge in the middle. The main frame is made of wood or clay and the leather on the head is what vibrates and produces sound. Both heads are played with hands, holding the *Madal* drum horizontally. Though the *Madal* has evolved from the *Mridanga*, there are distinct differences between the two instruments. This typical Nepalese percussion instrument is the backbone of most Nepali folk music. The left face of the *Madal* is called the *Nat* and the right face the *Madina*. The popular *Taals* played on the *Madal* to accompany the Nepali folk songs include, *Samla*, *Virani*, *Kheyali*, *Tappa*,



*Garsha* and *Chakra*. There are two kinds of *Madals* used – the *Purvali* and the *Paschimi*. The *Paschimi* is smaller in size and has a sharper sound. The *Madal* is an important accompaniment for all Nepalese folk songs and dances.



## Chabrung

The *Chabrung* is an indigenous drum of the *Limboo* community of Sikkim, and part of their traditional and cultural identification. Legend has it that the Almighty God, *Tagera Ningwaphnis*, created the earth and man. The creation of man came about through a woman, *Tigenjungoa*, who gave birth to twins, one a human baby and the other a tiger cub. The man-brother, *Namasami*, made the *Chabrung*, using the skin of his bestial sibling. Whenever the sound of the *Chabrung* drum resounds in the air, these brothers are remembered. As the male members of the tribe perform this dance, they remind all around them that good always triumphs over evil.



## Bells

Bells are used in the temples of Sikkim during *Aarti* and the singing of *Kirtans*. Priests also ring the bells to initiate or end a *Puja*.

# Damphu

*Damphu* is a percussion instrument similar to a big tambourine. It is a double-sided disc-shaped drum, covered with leather and with a long wooden handle. This is a very rare musical instrument belonging to the indigenous *Tamang* community of the state. This instrument is very easy to play and easy to learn.



In the *Tamang* community there are many stories about the invention of the *Damphu*. According to a popular legend, a hunter, Peng Dorje, once killed a beautiful deer and brought it home. Seeing the dead animal saddened his wife who started crying. Though Peng tried very hard to lift her mood, he was unable to do so. One day he brought a piece of wood, four feet in length, and shaped it into a circle of four inches' width. He also made thirty-two small sticks and tightened the dry skin of the deer to one side of the circle with the help of these sticks. He started singing songs remembering the gods and his ancestors, keeping beat with his newly created instrument. All the creatures of the jungle stated dancing to the music. Even his wife forgot her sorrow and joined in the dance. A bird, '*Danpha*', danced so beautifully that Dorje decided to name his instrument after her. The *Damphu* soon became an integral

part of the lifestyle the *Tamangs*. The *Damphu* also symbolizes the *Buddha* and the *Bodhisattwa*, with the thirty-two bamboo sticks representing the *Buddha's* thirty-two symbols.

# Narasingha

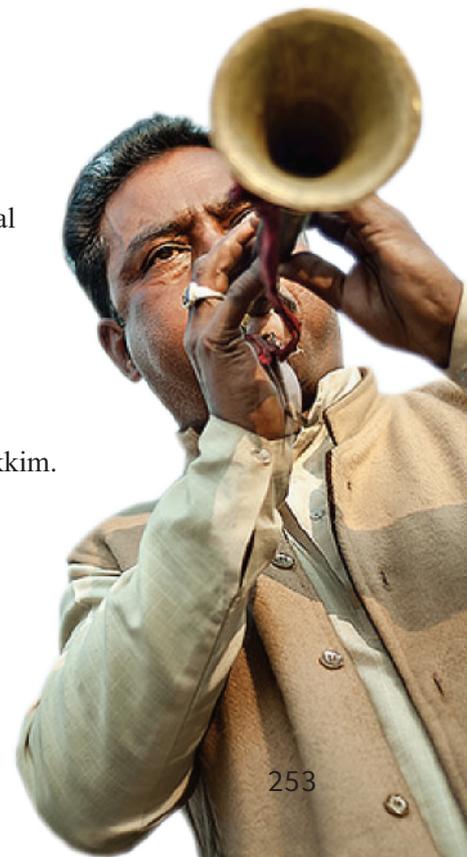
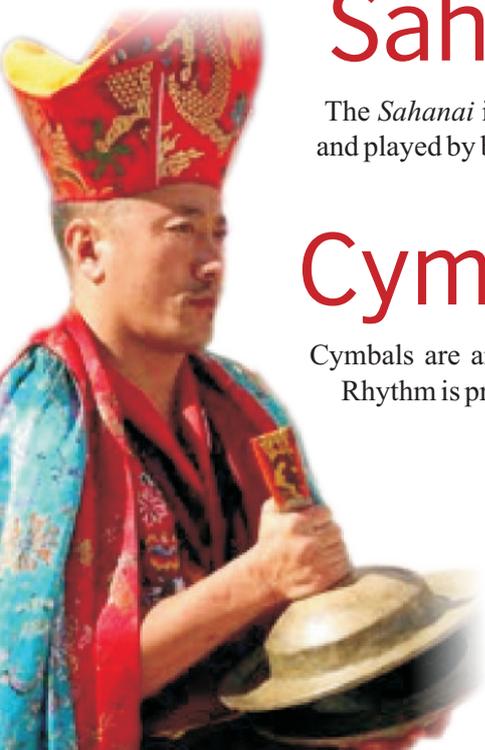
The *Narasingha* is one of the musical instruments of *Panchai Baja* and is made of copper. It is a *Susira* or a wind instrument that is played by blowing air and tuning the nodes with fingers. The instrument is long and carved like a half circle.

## Sahanai

The *Sahanai* is also a part of *Panchai Baja*. *Sahanai* is made of metal and played by blowing air with the mouth.

## Cymbals

Cymbals are an important accompaniment of the folk dances of Sikkim. Rhythm is provided with the drums and cymbals.





# TRIPURA

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Original Tripuri musical instruments consist of the drum, the rattle and the wooden or bamboo coarse file with rows of sharp points on its surface made of notched sticks. The Tripuris treat every musical instrument with reverence as they believe that every instrument has the power to bestow certain material benefits on the user. The *Sumui*, *Sarinda*, *Chongpreng* and *Dangdu* are among the most popular musical instruments of the state.

# Sumui

The *Sumui*, an ancient variety of the flute, is the most perfect and least mechanical instrument in the musical tradition of Tripura. There are two types of *Sumui* in Tripura – one having seven holes and the other having eight holes. The *Sumui* is made from the hollow stem of a bamboo, which is cut to a suitable length, and then the distances of the flute stops are determined by the instrumentalist himself after deciding on the playing position. There are two ways of playing the *Sumui*, either by holding it along the mouth or across the mouth.

# Rosem



*Rosem*, is an indigenous flute, made from the *Um*, a traditional water pot used by the *Darlong* tribe, one of the nineteen major tribes of Tripura. The members of the community, living in different villages, hold inter-village cultural competitions, in which the *Rosem* is used as an musical accompaniment. It is believed that the *Rosem* was first used at the *Jhum* Festival, an agriculture-based celebration, where the king also joins his people in their merry-making.

Now-a-days, the *Rosem* is an important accompaniment in many of the dances of the *Darlongs*, like the Bamboo dance, Bird dance, etc. The *Rosem* can accompany the different rhythms of

*Darlong* music like *Dar-Teng*, *Dar-Resbu* and others.



# Uakhrap

The Tripuri *Uakhrap* is an ancient traditional musical instrument of the state. *Uakhrap* is a combination of two musical bases: strings and skin membranes. The semi-circular shaped base of the instrument is made from the wood of the *Gamai*, *Koroi* or *Garjam* trees. Four or five hollow bamboo pieces, each four to five centimeters in length, are fitted on the outer hemisphere of the semi-circular wooden base. The bamboo pieces, each with nine holes, are connected to each other and to the metal disc by metal strings. The inner hemisphere has a leather covering. A rhythmic sound is produced when the bamboo sticks are beaten on the stretched skin covering.

# Lebang Boomani and Lebangti

*Lebang Boomani* is a very specialized instrument found in Tripura, which is a combination of bamboo clappers and miniature *tuntunes*, which is played with claps and twangs. It is a variation of the *Lebangti*, which is a normal bamboo clapper.

# Chongphreng

The *Chongphreng* is a particular type of chordophonic lute, made of bamboo, popular among the tribal communities of Tripura. The *Chongphreng* is made of a hollowed block of wood, with the resonator covered with a parchment. A resonator bridge is placed on the lower one-third portion of the membrane. The strings passing over it are hooked to lute pins. The instrument is played by pressing the strings against the board.

# Dangdoo

The *Dangdoo* is a small rod idiophone, a combination of a wind and percussion instrument, used extensively as an accompaniment in Tripura. In its construction it is similar to a Jew's harp. It is shaped like a pair of tongs, nine to ten centimetres in length, with a single wire running between the arms. One end of the *Dangdoo* is held between the teeth, with the lips parted. As the wire is plucked, the player inhales and exhales which controls the twang and the pitch.

# Kham

The *Kham* used in Tripura is barrel-shaped and double membraned, with both the membranes of almost equal size. The hollow barrel is made from the wood of the *Gamai* tree, a variety of teak. The membranes are made from goat-skin, fixed to the barrel with twisted leather rims. Criss-crossed leather straps are fastened around the drum chamber. The *Kham* can be played in different ways – by suspending it from the neck, tying it to the waist or keeping it on the lap or the ground.



# WEST BENGAL

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West Bengal has a rich cultural tradition and a wide variety of musical instruments. Folk songs and music is an integral part of the culture of rural Bengal. The beautiful songs and music bring joy and happiness into the otherwise monotonous lives of the village folk.



## Ektara

The *Ektara* is an important symbol of the folk traditions of rural Bengal, which has been made popular by the *Baul* and *Fakiri* singers, who use it as their main musical accompaniment, to spread their message of love and universal brotherhood. The word *Ektara* is derived from two words, *Ek* meaning “one” and *tara* meaning “string”. It is thus a one-stringed musical instrument that can produce a wide variety of tunes and melodies.

The body of the *Ektara* is made from the shell of bottle gourd, wood apple, coconut, etc. *Ektaras* made from wood apple shell or coconut shell are comparatively smaller in size compared to those made from bottle gourd shell. The bowl of the instrument is covered with skin and fixed to a prepared bamboo, approximately three feet long. The string, usually made of steel, is attached to the bottom of the bowl, and to a wooden knob at the other end, called the *Kaan* (ear). The *Ektara* is usually held in the right hand, and played with the right forefinger.

## Dotara

The *Dotara*, literally meaning “two-stringed”, is a folk musical instrument that resembles a guitar or a mandolin, or the long necked two-stringed lute found in Central Asia. The *Dotara* dates back to the fifteenth or sixteenth century, and despite its name, may have more than two strings, often four, five or six. There are two varieties of *Dotara* – the *Bangla* form that originated in the *Rahr* Bengal region, which has metal strings, and the *Bhawaiya*, made of thick cotton strings, which gives it a bass timbre. The *Dotara* can produce drones, rhythmic adjuncts and also melodies, and was possibly devised in the course of the development of a



sense of melody. Like the *Ektara*, the *Dotara* is also made by stretching leather on a hollowed wooden frame. Strings made of brass, or twisted silk strands, are attached to the base of the frame at one end, and to the pegs at the top. The pegs are used to tighten or loosen the strings, which are known as the *jil*, *sur*, *vam* and *gam*. The wooden top of the *Dotara* is decorated with engravings, usually of birds. The *Kati* or plectrum is made up of horn, bone or wood.



## Anandalahari

The *Anandalahari*, also known as the *Khamak*, has traditionally been an accompaniment to *Baul* and devotional songs. Though the instrument is ancient and has been mentioned in the *Mangal Kavyas*, it gained eminence only with the emergence of the *Baul* tradition. It is made of a cylindrical earthen or wooden body, covered with leather. The strings are brought out through the middle of the leather covering and tied to a small piece



of wood or clay. The bowl of the *Anandalahari* is held under the left arm, and the enchanting tunes are played with the strings. When struck with a pin or a stick it produces a *gub-gub* sound and hence the instrument is locally known as the *Gubgubi*. Variations in the sound in the *Khamak* depend upon the plucking intensity of the strings. With a slow song the strings of the *Khamak* are plucked with mellow strokes. With a fast number, as with many *Baul* songs, the strings are plucked more frequently.

## Sarinda



*Sarinda* is also a stringed musical instrument, made of a wooden frame, hide, strings and bow. This approximately seventy-centimetres-long instrument has an oval-shaped hollow resonating chamber. The resonator is covered by a light skin and its wider top portion is open. The bridge is set on the lower half of the resonator. The middle of the instrument is so narrow, that it appears that the upper and lower halves of the instrument are separated from each other. Usually, three pegs are fitted to the top portion of the instrument to fasten the strings (normally three to four strings). The tuning of the *Sarinda* is done by tightening or loosening the strings with the pegs. The strings are bridged by a block of wood at

one end and tied to pegs at the other. The *Sarinda* is played with the bow, made from the hair of the tails of animals or silk strings.

# Khol

The *Khol* is an important percussion instrument that enriches the age-old folk culture of the state. It is a two-sided terracotta drum, heavily laced with leather straps, with circular faces covered with parchment. The right face is smaller in size than the left. The right end of the instrument has a black motif, prepared from rice, wheat, water and iron. Though the *Khol* originated in Bengal, it is also used as an accompaniment to devotional music in other states of eastern, northern and north-eastern India, where it is known as the *Mridanga*. A cotton strap is attached to both ends of the *Khol*, to enable the player to carry it in a horizontal way, by wearing it around his neck. The *Khol* continues to be an important part of all social and religious ceremonies in Bengal as well as the other states where it is popular. During village fairs and festivals, the *Khol* players entertain the visitors to the fair with the rhythmic beats of the instrument.



# Dhak



The *Dhak* is the most important accompaniment for all the music and dance traditions of the state. It is made of a big wooden shell, covered by parchment at both the ends, tightened with leather straps and

hung on the shoulder while playing. The sound produced by the *Dhak* when beaten with two wooden sticks is loud and rhythmic. It is widely used in all *Shakta* (related to the female power, *Shakti*) and *Shaiva* (related to the male power, *Shiva*) rituals and festivals.

*Utsav* in Bengal is synonymous with *Durga Puja*. The Bengali waits all year round for the arrival of *Devi Ma*. It is a time for celebration and festivity, and it is the sound of the *Dhak* that joyously announces her eagerly-awaited arrival. It is the sound of the *Dhak* that captures the many moods of the *Devi*, frenzied, calm, plaintive and nostalgic, and it is the plaintive notes of the *Dhak* that also tells us it is time for her to return to her heavenly abode. Every beat of the *Dhak* is different and each of them holds a special place in the heart of every Bengali.





## Dhol

The *Dhol* (a variation of the *Dhak*) is another indispensable musical instrument of the different festivals of Bengal. The musicians dance and play the *Dhol* simultaneously.

The *Dhol* is a comparatively smaller version of the *Dhak*, constructed with the same components and using the same technique as the *Dhak*. The shape of the *Dhol* is slightly different from that of the *Dhak*, and the sound effect is also moderate in comparison to the *Dhak*. The *Dhol* is an accompaniment to several music and dance traditions of the state.

## Kangshya or Kansar

The *Kangshya* or *Kansar* is a metal plate that accompanies the rhythms of the *Dhak* and the *Dhol* to reinforce their beats.

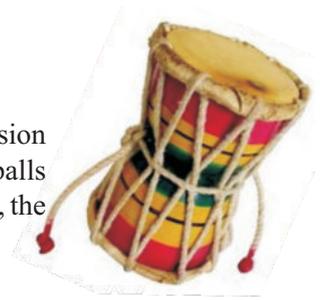
## Mandira, Khanjani and Ramchaki

The *Mandira* is an integral part of the folk traditions of Bengal. A *Mandira* is a pair of small bell-shaped cymbals, used by the *Bauls*, as well as an accompaniment for *Kirtan* singing. *Bauls*, the pioneers of the cultural renaissance of Bengal, would sing their songs as they walked down the muddy lanes of the villages of the state. They brought in the *Mandira* to add a rhythmic element to their songs. Singers of other genres of folk music in Bengal have also made the *Mandira* an essential part of their performances.

The *Khanjani*, a tambourine without jangles, can be heard in every festival of rural Bengal. *Ramchaki* is a pair of wooden clappers with jangles.

# Dugdugi

The *Dugdugi*, or *Damaru*, associated with *Lord Shiva*, is an hour-glass shaped percussion instrument, covered at both ends with goatskin. A string with two small lead or iron balls is fastened to the narrow waist of the *Dugdugi*. When the instrument is moved rapidly, the balls hit the stretched skin, and make the rhythmic sound.



# Ghungur

*Ghungur* is a garland of small bells tied around the ankle and played with the rhythmic movements of the feet.

# Santhali Banam

Celebrations in the *Santhal* community are always accompanied by singing and dancing. There are special songs and dances for different occasions like the sowing of seeds, harvesting, weddings, birth of children and, even, the death of a member of the community. The *Santhals* live in communion with nature and this attitude towards their ecology forms an integral part of their peaceful and meaningful existence. The *Santhals*, as a community, are therefore seen in the context of their environment and ecology and their strong belief in the powers of the supernatural world. The music is always created by using a range of indigenous musical instruments like the *Tirio* (a bamboo flute with seven holes), *Tumdak*, *Tamak*, *Junko* and *Singha*. One of the most interesting musical instruments is the *Banam*, a popular accompaniment during all festivities, particularly those associated with the fertility of the soil and harvesting. It is a kind of a folk fiddle and is seen in eastern and north eastern India and in Bangladesh. Though the instrument has been classified as *Tendor Banam*, *Dhodro Banam*, *Huka Banam* and several other names, the classification is based more on the ornamentation of the instrument rather than its structure. Each instrument bears the artistic vision of its maker and hence a wide variety of *Banams* can be seen.





# Handicrafts of Eastern India

The handicrafts made by the craftsmen and artisans of eastern India reflect the colourful and rich culture and heritage of the people of the region. The range includes unique artefacts and utility items and an exquisite collection of handlooms. The traditional patterns and designs on the fabrics make them suitable not only for use in making fashionable apparel wear, but also for making assorted textile accessories.

# ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands was the land of exile for the Indian Freedom Fighters. The people of the Islands have developed small-scale handicraft units which specialize in the making of shell and wooden craft items.

## Shell Crafts



The craftsmen of the Islands make good use of the resources of the sea. Ornaments and decorative items are the speciality of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. A variety of shells are found and each of them is used to make different items. The shells found on the shores are used for making decorative items and jewellery. The conch shells are used mainly for religious purposes. Tortoise shells which come in beautiful colours are much in demand in the western countries for making home lifestyle items.



# Woodcraft

Eighty-six percent of the total land area of the Islands is covered with deciduous and rain forests and the people of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands have made good use of this wealth inherited by them. The ornamental woods of the Islands include the *Paduak*, *Chui* and marble wood, which are used to make show-pieces and other decorative items. Some of the most popular crafts of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands include the table-top made from the wood of the *Paduak* tree and the miniature model of a wooden canoe. Shaped by the currents of the sea, the driftwood of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is

also widely used to make various artefacts.



# Palm Mats



Durable palm mats which serve a variety of purposes are made from materials extracted from the palm tree. The palm trees grow well in the tropical climate of the Islands and provide a source of livelihood to many people.

# ASSAM

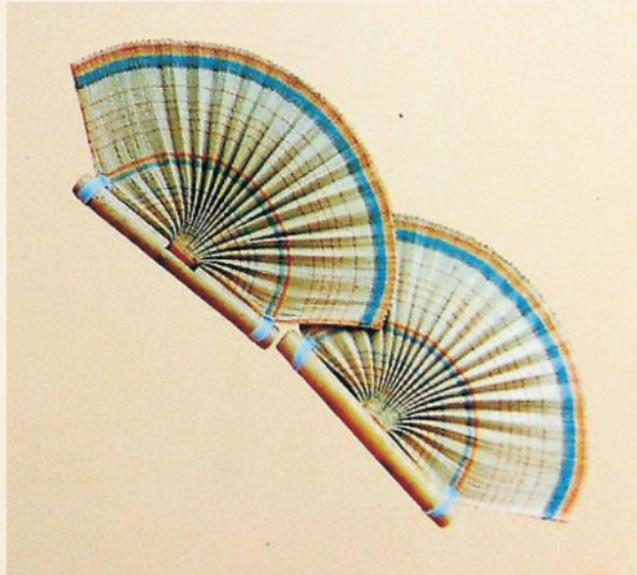
From time immemorial the people of Assam have traditionally been craftsmen. Though Assam is mainly known for its cane and bamboo products, several other crafts are also made in the state. Different regions of Assam are known for their different handicrafts.

## Cane and Bamboo Crafts



Cane and bamboo are an inseparable part of Assamese life. Most of the articles in Assamese households are made of cane or bamboo. These raw materials not only go into the production of handicraft items, such as a variety of baskets, mats and musical instruments, but are also used to make household items and furniture. The *Jappi*, which is the traditional sunshade, continues to be the most important bamboo item of the





state. The Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang has mentioned in his travel memoirs that visitors to the state were welcomed with the *Jappi*.



## Metalcrafts

Bell-metal products and brassware form a part of the Assamese people's daily life. The craftsmen involved in the making of the metalcraft are known for their unique artistic skills. The *Xorai* and *Bota* – receptacles for betel nut and *paan* leaves -- have been traditionally used for centuries. Two whole townships near Guwahati, namely, Hajo and Sarthebari, are entirely devoted to the production of traditional metalware.



## Toys

Toys speak about the culture and tradition of a place and depict the lifestyle of the people living there and the customs prevalent in the region. The traditional toys made in Assam are broadly classified under four heads: toys made from clay, toys made from pith, wood and bamboo, those made from cloth, or a combination of cloth and mud.

Human figures, particularly models of bride and groom, and a variety of animal forms,

dominate the clay toys scene. Images of gods and goddesses, as well as mythological figures, are also popular. The *Kumar* and *Hira* communities of the state have been involved with this art form for several generations. The Goalpara region of Assam is famous for its toys made from pith or Indian cork. As with the clay toys, figures of gods and goddesses, and animals and birds, are very popular. Wood and bamboo which are also available in plenty in the state, are used for making toys. Toys made of cloth and a combination of cloth and mud also constitute an important part of the rich toy-making tradition of the state. The art of making cloth toys has been handed down from mothers to daughters over several generations. These household toys are made from scrap materials and given to the children to play. Here too, the figure of the bride and groom is most common.

## Pottery

The pottery of Assam can be traced back several centuries. The most common traditional products include the earthen pots and pitchers, plates, incense-stick holders and earthen lamps. The *Kumars* and *Hiras* are the two traditional potter communities of the state. While the *Kumars* use the potter's wheel to create their pots, the *Hiras* are possibly the only potters in the world who do not use the wheel at all! Among the *Hiras*, only the womenfolk are engaged in the making of pottery. The men help in procuring the raw materials and marketing the products.



## Woodcraft

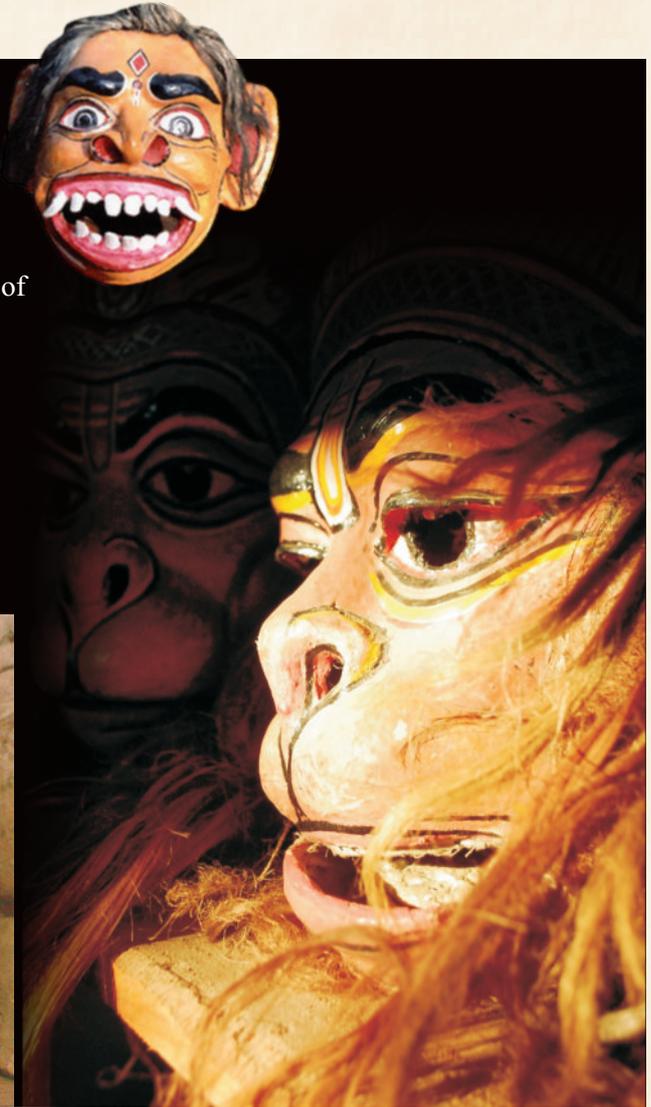


Assam being a state with a large forest cover, wood is available in plenty. The different varieties of wood and timber available are used to make a wide variety of objects. The intricately-carved decorative panels seen in the royal *Ahom* palaces of the past, and the ancient *Sattras* or *Vaishnavite* monasteries, speak volumes about the skill of the craftsmen, known for centuries as the *Khanikars*. The two most popular items today are the one-horned rhinoceros, found only in Assam, and the replica of the world-famous *Kamakhya* temple, situated near Guwahati.



# Masks

Assam has a tradition of making masks, known as *Mukhas*, which are widely used in the performances of the *Bhaonas*, or the folk theatre of the state. The materials used for making these masks include terracotta, pith, metal, bamboo and wood. Masks are also used by the tribal communities of the state for their colourful dances which revolve around their typical tribal myths and folklore. The masks are popular as decorative items in modern homes.



# Terracotta



Terracotta has been a popular handicraft of Assam from ancient times. The tradition has been handed down through the generations in the families engaged in this art. While at one time, the images of gods and goddesses and mythological figures were most common, today several decorative items and toys are more in demand.

# BIHAR

Bihar is one of the states of India with a culturally mixed population, which is reflected in their varied crafts. The handicrafts feature an extremely rich tradition of artistry and innovation and are known for their aesthetic value and their adherence to tradition. The beautiful stories of the ancient times are depicted in the exquisite handicrafts of the state.

## Stonework



Stonework in Bihar dates back to the pre-Christian era and the state is well-known for its stone images of the Buddha, which are carved with supreme mastery. Stonework had reached its peak in the Mauryan period, when stonework and architecture had become a symbol of the dynasty. Stone craftsmen are seen in the Pathakatti region of Gaya district, in the areas adjoining important Buddhist pilgrimage sites. Most of the stonework depicts just the head of the Buddha, but sometimes the full body of the sage is made out of the luminescent grey-green stone found in the neighbouring hills of Gaya. Images of Ganesha and other deities of the Hindu pantheon are also made following the demands of the buyers. Utensils and tableware made from blackstone are used for ritualistic and religious purposes, like placing offerings before gods and goddesses. The art has been handed down from one generation to the next, through the age-old tradition in the families.

# Bangle-Making

Bangles made in Muzaffarpur are known for their brightness and colour. The raw materials required for making the bangles, mainly lac and natural colours, can be obtained from the forests nearby. The bangles are made in bright colours like vermilion, red, purple and gold. The artisans of Muzaffarpur specialize in the making of a variety of bangles called *lahathi*. These lac bangles are usually yellow or orange in colour with exquisite stripes and adorned with small glass pieces.



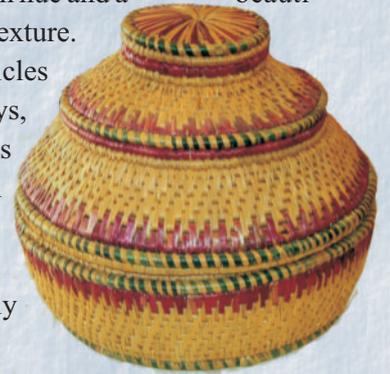
# Sikki Kala



*Sikki* craft is intrinsically connected to the cultural life of Bihar. *Sikki* is a kind of grass-like weed that grows on the banks of the Ganges. *Sikki* craft is the art of converting grass into the most wonderful objects, by the extremely efficient artistry of *Sikki* women of the Mithila region of northern Bihar.

The *Sikki* weeds are collected and then dried, by virtue of which they get a lustrous golden hue and a beautiful coarse texture.

They are then twisted into ropes and then imaginatively wrought into a variety of articles such as baskets and boxes, human figures, replicas of gods and goddesses, toys, animals, birds and models of chariots and temples. Before being woven, the grass is dyed in bright translucent colours and the shimmering golden grass, glowing through the paint, gives the articles their characteristic luminosity. The coiling technique used in *Sikki* craft is one of the oldest of its kind. The common long grass is coiled and stitched together with *Sikki*, using a thick needle called *Takua*. The form is completely folk in nature and has a style of its own, is environment friendly and exclusive.



In olden days, when girls got married, a lot of *Sikki* articles like trays, bread boxes, dolls, etc., were sent as gifts to the bride's new family. Now the craft is more organized and artisans have updated themselves to create different kinds of utilitarian objects suitable for sale in urban areas as well as for export.



# JHARKHAND

The handicrafts of Jharkhand are made by its different tribes and portray the rich tradition of art and culture of the state. The various crafts of the state include bamboo-craft, woodcraft, tribal ornaments and stone-carving. The tribal ornaments are unique and special and portray the traditional heritage of the tribal people. Toy-making is another interesting craft of the state.



## Wooden Crafts



Jharkhand is surrounded by dense forests and wood is plentiful. The artisans of Jharkhand make a variety of wooden articles that include intricately-carved windows and door panels, which are in high demand. Smaller items like wooden boxes, spoons and decorative items also have a good market. The articles are known not only for their durability, elegance and design, but also for having a cultural flavour of the region.

# Bamboo Work

The variety of bamboo found in the forests of Jharkhand is of a very good quality – thin but strong and flexible. The tribal communities of the state use this to make a variety of utility goods like fishing baskets and other equipment. These eco-friendly products are light in weight, have a long shelf life and require minimum maintenance. The craft also provides part-time employment to cultivators during the lean season.



# Metalcraft

Some tribal communities of the state, particularly the *Malhar* community, have developed expertise in metalcraft. The crafts are created by the deft hands of the tribal artisans who have learnt it as a family tradition.



# Jewellery

The tribal community of Jharkhand is fond of wearing ornaments. Using gold, silver and other metals, and alloys like bronze and brass, and combining it with colourful beads, the artisans make simple jewellery that reflect the traditional culture of the region.



# Toy-Making

Toy-making is a speciality of Jharkhand. The small village of Tonpadane in Jharkhand is famous for its stunning wooden toys. Bright and lustrous colours are used for painting the toys which are durable and attractive.

# MANIPUR

Manipur is a storehouse of a wide variety of crafts. Manipuris put a lot of passion and style into the making of their crafts and handloom products. They are natural craftspersons and their skilled hands create some of the most exquisite handicrafts, which include a range of products unique to the state.

## Cane and Bamboo Work

Since cane and bamboo are abundantly available, weaving of baskets has been one of the primary occupations in Manipur. Baskets of different shapes and sizes, in a variety of designs, are made for domestic and ritualistic purposes. The



The *Heijing Kharai*, *Phiruk* and *Lukmai* are meant exclusively for use at weddings, celebrations of childbirth, or rituals connected with death. The *Likhai*, *Sangbai*, *Chengbon*, *Meruk* and *Morah* are baskets used for domestic purposes. The *Longup* and *Tungbol* are fishing equipment made from bamboo. The *Maring* tribe inhabiting the Chandel district are the main makers of these type of baskets. Many of the other tribes, particularly the *Meitis*, are also involved in the production of baskets.

## Pottery

The art of making pottery is very old in Manipur, particularly in Andro, Nongpok, Sekmai, Oinam, Chairen, Thongjao, Nungbi, and parts of Senapati district. The *Chapka* women are known for their skill as potters and





make a variety of pots in different colours like red, dark red and black. There are several varieties of pots which are used for ritualistic and ceremonial purposes and each has a different socio-cultural significance. Many items for use in modern homes are also being made now.

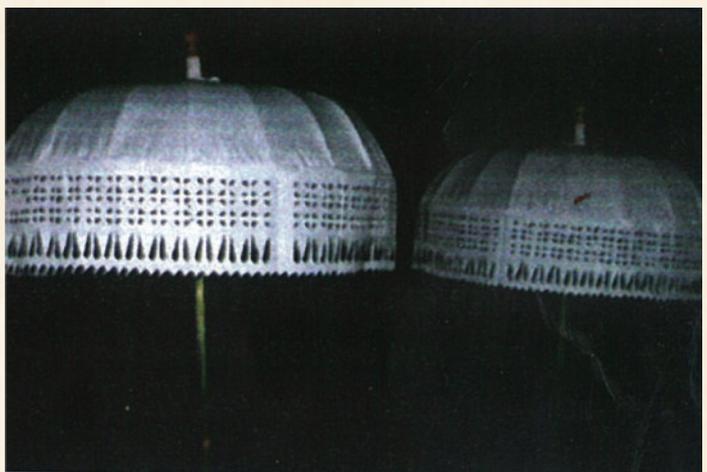
## Wood-Carving

Wood-carving developed in Manipur out of necessity. Due to the lack of a good communication system, the people of Manipur could neither export their produce to the outside nor bring in necessary items. So they used the wood available to create the different items required in their daily lives.



## Chong and Pe Craft

The *Chong* and *Pe* are unique umbrella-like structures made from bamboo and cloth. First believed to have been made in the seventeenth century during the reign of King Bhagyachandra, these are used in ritualistic ceremonies of gods and goddesses, being held over the idols during the prayers. They are also held over kings and other dignitaries, as well as people being felicitated for heroic deeds. Manipuris believe that anything falling on the king's head is a bad omen, and to prevent this from happening, the *Chong* and *Pe* are used. Usually white, the *Chongs* and *Pes* can also be coloured — a popular colour is marigold yellow, Lord *Krishna's* chosen colour. Being highly decorative, they are also being used for decoration in recent times.



# Kaunaphak



*Kaunaphak* is a traditional craft of Manipur, associated with the *Meitei* community of the state. *Kauna* is a type of water reed that grows in the wetlands and marshy areas of Manipur. *Phak*, which is the *Meitei* term for the succulent stem of the plant, is yellow in colour and used for making the unique traditional Manipuri double-weave reed mats. There are two different varieties of *Kauna* in Manipur and about a thousand craftspersons of Imphal valley are engaged in this craft. The reeds used for making the mats are chosen and cut only from the mature plant. The stems are then dried. The drying has to be done very carefully as the *Kauna* is a seasonal plant and if the drying is not done properly, most of it is lost to fungus. A bunch of stems is then woven into mats, using bamboo at regular intervals. The borders of the mats which are usually about an inch wide has interesting patterns. *Kauna* reed mats cannot be washed as the reed spoils with moisture. The mats can be used outdoor as picnic mats, as well as indoors as floor and *yoga* mats.

In recent times, the *Kauna* is being used by the imaginative *Meitis* to make a wide range of innovative products besides the traditional mat. The reeds are shaped by the deft and magical fingers of *Meitis* into cushions, handbags, baskets, lamp shades, wall hangings, fruit trays, mobile phone covers, file covers and jewellery boxes.



# Chini Chafu



The craft of *Chini Chafu* is derived from two words – *Chini*, meaning sugar, and *Chafu*, meaning a bucket where the sugar can be kept, and from which the children can have their share at the end of their games.

*Chini Chafu* is the art of making dolls and other decorative items using wheat flour dough. This craft was originally used to make the *Chafu* in which the sugar is kept and hence the name. Later the scope of the craft was extended, and now the dough is used to make dolls and other objects, including toys. Wheat flour is made into dough and then crafted into the desired shape, which is

then dropped into boiling water and kept for about ten minutes, taken out and dried in the sun. Though the process is simple, the objects made are sturdy and attractive. These indigenous dolls are very popular in Manipur.



# ODISHA

Many of the handicrafts found in Odisha are in some way linked to the rituals and traditions of Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of the Puri temple. All the handicrafts of the state exhibit the artistic excellence of the artisans.

## Silver Filigree Work



The most unique handicraft of Odisha is the silver filigree work, in which extremely delicate silver wires are shaped into intricate designs. The process involves drawing silver through a series of small holes to produce strands of fine

wires of varying thickness. The craftsmen then bend the wires into different designs and solder them. Cuttack, the former capital of the state, is famous for this craft. Scenes from the *Mahabharata* are depicted through filigree work, the most famous being the chariot of *Arjuna* driven by *Lord Krishna*. The beauty of the chariot, the proud stance of the





horses, minute details of the chariot wheels and true to life figures all contribute to making it a majestic piece of art. Other popular objects include the palanquin, the *Mayurpankhi* ship, the *Konark* wheel and the hand-pulled *Rikshaw*, among others.

Jewellery items made of filigree work are very popular as are vermilion boxes used by married women.



# Stone-Carving



Stone-carving is an ancient craft of Odisha, as is evident from the numerous archaeological monuments, rock-cut sculptures, temples decorated with intricately-carved statues, etc., for the past several centuries. The tradition of stone carvings has been kept alive in Odisha as a hereditary craft. The most popular carved items includes replicas of the temples of Odisha, images of gods and goddesses, the *Konark* wheel and figurines like *Alasa Kanya* (the indolent damsel), *Salabhanjika* (lady leaning against the branch of a *Sal* tree), *Surasundari* (celestial beauty) and *Patra Lekhika* (lady writing a letter). The surfaces of the statues are smooth and shining. The stone carvings of Odisha have reached a level of perfection, through the efforts of generations of artisans.



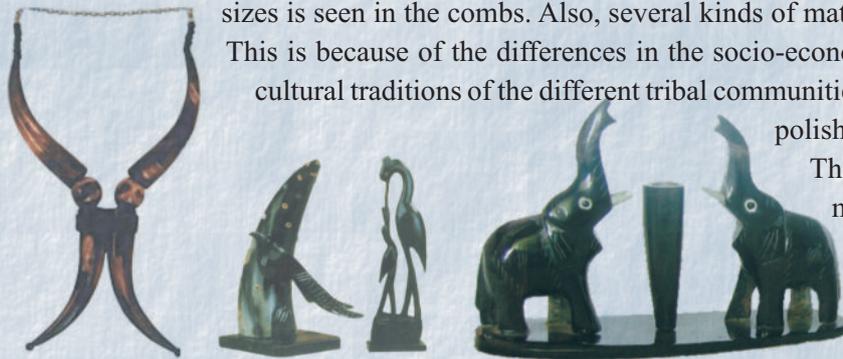
# Brass and Metalware

Odisha also has artefacts made of brass, bell metal and bronze. Lamps made of metal and decorated with engravings are used during the worship of the deities. Rice measuring bowls are a typical brass item of Odisha. Intricately decorated elephants and horses, containers for betel leaves and other household utility items are both decorative and useful.



# Horn Handicraft

An interesting tribal handicraft of the state is the art of making combs. Only twelve to fifteen of the sixty-two tribes inhabiting the state know this craft. An interesting feature of tribal life in Odisha is that no one buys combs. Those who do not make them, either receive them as gifts from the communities that make them, or receive them in a barter system, in exchange of agricultural surplus. A variety of designs, colours, shapes and sizes is seen in the combs. Also, several kinds of materials are used for making the combs. This is because of the differences in the socio-economic conditions, religious beliefs and cultural traditions of the different tribal communities. The horn used to make the combs is



polished smooth and has a lustrous sheen. Though traditionally horns were used to make just combs, nowadays, several other items like flower vases, pen-stands, and figurines of birds and animals are also made.

# Wood Carvings



Wood carvings of Odisha can be painted or just plain wood. In the first category are the painted wooden toys of Puri, and Bargarh masks, idols and chariot decorations. The wooden artefacts of the second category are different from similar items of other states as they are plain and



shining, with a smooth polish without even a coating of lacquer on them. All the items are made and polished on hand-operated machines.

## Terracotta and Pottery



Earthen pots are made by the potters of Odisha, for use in religious and social functions. The pots are decorated with different motifs to make them visually appealing. Fish and flower motifs and geometrical designs are popular for decorating the pottery. Terracotta figures of horses and elephants are made specifically for certain religious ceremonies. These are offered to the village deity to ward off evil and danger. Clay toys, simple in design, are also popular.



# Applique Work



Appliqué is a technique by which a decorative effect is obtained by sewing on patches of coloured fabrics on a basic fabric. Appliqué work is very popular in Pipli, near Puri. Giant-sized umbrellas of appliqué work are used on festive occasions. The rich splashes of yellow, white, green, blue, red and black lend a festive air to the social or religious occasion. The large-sized umbrellas are also popular as garden umbrellas. Appliqué wall hangings and other decorative items are used for interior decoration in homes and commercial establishments. Large canopies decorated with appliqué work are hung over deities to protect them from dust. Canopies are also an integral part of wedding celebrations. The appliqué tailors cut out figures of animals, birds, flowers, as well as geometrical shapes, which are sewn symmetrically onto the other piece of cloth, creating eye-catching designs.



# SIKKIM

The people of Sikkim have exceptional skill in the making of handicrafts. Woollen carpets and blankets with typical Sikkimese motifs, and the foldable *Choktse* table, are highly in demand. Every community in Sikkim has the expertise to make at least one handicraft product. The products are special as traditional methods of production are still used.

## Carpets

Sikkim is known for its hand-knotted carpets, with traditional Tibetan and modern designs, which are made by one of the oldest techniques of carpet weaving in the world, using a frame loom. The women of the Bhutia community are expert carpet weavers.



## Wood Carving



Wood carvings of Sikkim are unique and very different from the carvings seen in the other parts of the country. Several Sikkimese symbols and icons of good luck and fortune are carved in wood. The famous Mask dance of Sikkim is also portrayed through the wood carvings. In many of the monasteries of Sikkim, exquisite wood carvings and wooden sculptures are seen. Masks made from wood and papier mache are also quite common.

## Choktse Table

The *Choktse* tables are traditional collapsible wooden tables with Tibetan carved designs. These are made in different designs and dimensions and are a special product of Sikkim.



# TRIPURA

Tripura has carved out a niche for itself in the field of handicrafts, with the artisans producing the most beautiful products from simple materials like cane, bamboo and wood. Three distinct religious influences are seen in Tripura – Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam – which have converged to create a unique tradition of art and craft. To the original tribal motifs of Tripura were added the skills of the Bengali and Manipuri artisans who settled in Tripura, to create crafts which are not only beautiful but also functional.

## Cane and Bamboo Craft

Like in many of the other north-eastern states, in Tripura too, cane and bamboo-





craft constitutes the traditional handicraft of the state. Bamboo screens, lamp stands, table-mats and the traditional *Sital Pati* are popular items. Interior decoration items like false ceilings, panellings, furniture, plaques, etc., combine utility with artistic beauty. Baskets woven from cane and bamboo strips in different patterns and designs are made in the traditional way but given a contemporary look. The speciality of the cane and bamboo items of Tripura are the intricate and exquisite designs of the products.

## Brass and Metalcraft

As in many of the north-eastern states, brass and metal articles are also made in Tripura. Simplicity is the hallmark of these articles. The deft hands of the tribal artisans create a wide range of interesting products.

# WEST BENGAL

West Bengal has a rich heritage of exquisite handicrafts and handlooms. Jute products, wood and cane products, conch shell products, brassware and *Dokra* work from the state are sold all over the world.

## Masks

Masks depicting mainly mythological characters are made of paper mache and painted in bright colours. The art of making the masks has been handed down through the generations in the families of the artisans. These masks are used for different dances, particularly the *Purulia Chhau* and *Gambhira* dances. The masks are also used during different rituals and folk festivals as well as for decoration purposes.



# Terracotta

Terracotta is one of the most ancient and renowned craft forms of Bishnupur. The raw material used is the rich alluvial clay found on the river banks. The skills of the terracotta artisans is evident in the ancient temples of Bishnupur, which are richly decorated with carvings depicting different aspects of *Lord Krishna's* life. Many items are made drawing the themes from epics and old legends. Besides the traditional burnt clay models, there are many modern items, like tiles, panels and decorative items. The most famous item of terracotta craft is the *Bankura Horse*.



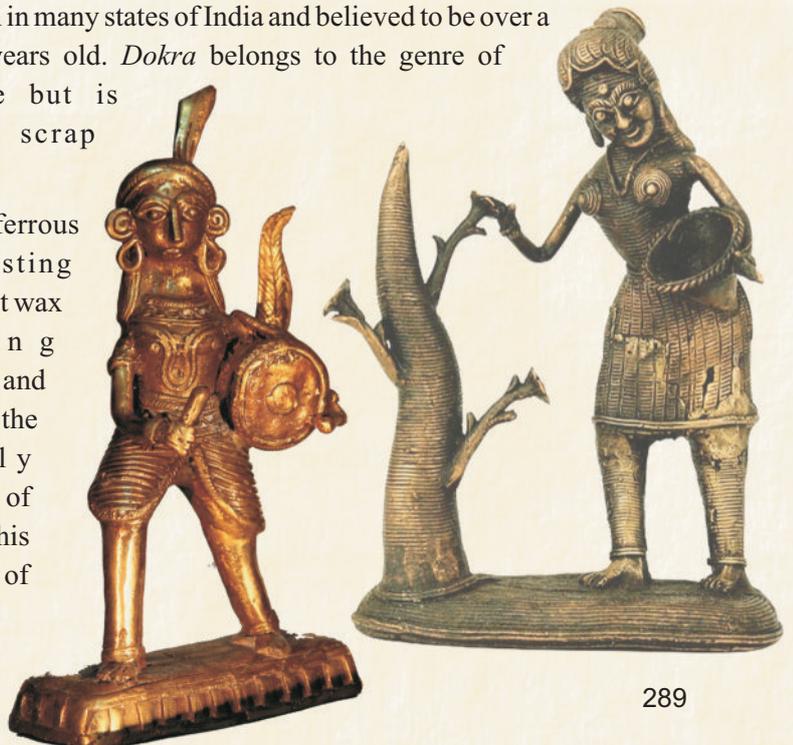
# Dokra

*Dokra* craft is an ancient tribal Indian handicraft seen in many states of India and believed to be over a thousand years old. *Dokra* belongs to the genre of brassware but is made of scrap metal.



The non-ferrous metal casting uses the lost wax casting technique and is made by the socially

backward tribes known as the *Dokra Kamars*. One of the earliest known artefacts made by using this technique is the 'Dancing Girl' found in the ruins of





Mohenjodaro. The *Dokra* items have a primitive simplicity and are decorated with traditional folk motifs. Horses, elephants, peacocks, owls and images of popular gods and goddesses are among the *Dokra* items made in West Bengal.



## Conch Shell Craft



Conch shell craft developed in the regions of West Bengal which have a close proximity to the sea. Conch shell workers, known as *Sakharis*, make the famous *Sankha*, worn by Bengali women as a marriage symbol. Besides, several items of fashion jewellery are also crafted out of the conch shells. Along with the shell articles, mother of pearl is also used to make cutlery items, small plates, decorative items and shell jewellery.

# Woodcraft



West Bengal is famous for wood craft made from the wood of the coconut tree. The traditional wood carvers of West Bengal continue to use the simplest of tools and follow the styles that have been handed down through the generations. This has helped the craft to maintain a high standard of perfection. Popular woodcraft items of West Bengal are toys and decorative panels. Folk motifs are used to give the products an earthy appeal.



# Sholapith



The craftsmen of West Bengal use the pith of *shola*, a herbaceous plant growing in the wild, to make decorative items. The light and lustrous inner portions of the plant are used to make minute and intricate decorations for the deities, particularly *Goddess Durga*. Images of gods and goddesses made of *shola* are a popular craft item of the state. The head-dress worn by Bengali brides and grooms on their wedding day is also made from *shola*. Garlands and floral bouquets made of *shola* are also very popular items.

# Clay Craft

Krishnanagar in Nadia district is widely acclaimed for its exquisitely crafted clay dolls. Families engaged in the making of clay models have been practising this art form for generations. The models include historical,



mythological and religious figures and toys and abstract art objects. The perfect detailing of the features and expressions of the dolls and the realism of the clothes to the last fold and tuck make each one of the dolls a collector's item. The intensely detailed models of the *Bhishti* or water-carrier, the colonial English gentleman complete with his hat and stick, and the *Khansamah* or cook, are some of the figures that reflect a lifestyle that is now a part of history.



# Rag Dolls



Rag dolls are made from pieces of small cloth, cotton and wood, and are popular as gifts for children and also for decorative purposes. Dolls depicting the *Santhals* and the *Bauls* or brides and bridegrooms are always in demand. This ancient art form is constantly evolving as new methodology is being used for structuring and stuffing as well as for

detailing in costumes and jewellery. The craft of making rag dolls is not traditional to West Bengal and has been influenced by Japanese rag dolls.



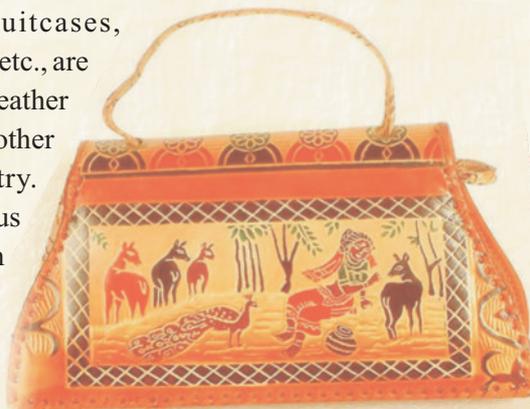
# Jute Products



Jute, which is also known as the golden fibre, is woven and knotted and used to make utility as well as decorative items. Carpets, decorative tapestries, wall hangings, handbags and bedspreads, are among the many jute products which are in demand.

# Leather Products

Kolkata is known for its many leather products. The leather products produced in Kolkata, which include bags, handbags, suitcases, wallets, jackets, shoes, etc., are different from the leather products made in the other states of the country. Santiniketan is famous for batik work on leather.



# Textiles

## Assam



Handloom-weaving is integral to life in Assam. The state can boast of several special kinds of hand-woven cloth. Using silk and cotton fibres, the Assamese people have been weaving their own cloth since ancient times.

The handloom of Assam is famous for its various types of silk. The most prized is the exclusive golden *Muga* silk. The other forms are the white *Pat* silk and the warm *Eri* silk. Most of the silk is grown in Sualkuchi, a small village near Guwahati, where the entire population engages in weaving silk fabrics.

The traditional garments include the two-piece *Mekhala Chaddar* worn by the women. The different tribes inhabiting the state weave a variety of patterns and designs, amongst which the traditional patterns and designs woven by the Bodo tribes, who use the shuttle looms, is typical of Assam.

## Bihar



Bihar is the largest producer of *Tussar* silk in the country. Three varieties of silk are produced in the state: *Tussar*, mulberry and *eri* silk. The *Tussar* silk of Bhagalpur has a texture that cannot be duplicated. Bhagalpur and Katoria have a vast forest cover where the silk worms are cultivated. The hamlet of weavers living in this area have developed immense skill in *Tussar*-spinning to produce extraordinary low-twist *Tussar* silk yarns. The shades produced in *Tussar* silk are cream, light brown, beige, grey, camel, coffee and gold tones. Handspun yarn is woven into high-quality fabric.

*Madhubani* weavers have taken advantage of the humid conditions prevailing in the region due to its proximity to the Kosi river to produce the hand woven hand spun fine cottons or *Mulmuls*, which are as famous as the paintings of the region.

# Jharkhand



Jharkhand is also a large producer of *Tussar* silk. The weavers use primitive looms which they make themselves using the wood from the forests. The combs (raddles) are made out of hundreds of slivers of bamboo, which they cut and form themselves. Finally, all the teeth are tied between two long narrow pieces of wood, into each of which a channel has been carved, with a string, to make the comb. The *tussar* silk produced in Jharkhand is of the same quality as the *tussar* produced in Bihar.

# Manipur



The handloom industry is the largest cottage industry of Manipur. An interesting feature of the weaving industry of Manipur is that only women are weavers. There are many stories about the origin of handlooms in Manipur. It is believed that *Goddess Chitnu Tamitnu* discovered cotton and also produced the first yarn. When the threads were ready for weaving, she

arranged for the required equipment and also constructed the *Sinnaishang* or work-shed. According to another legend, *Goddess Panthoibi* once saw a spider making its web with the fine threads that it had produced. Thus, the idea of weaving came to her mind and she began the handloom industry in the state.

Most of the weavers are from Wangkhei, Bamon Kampu, Kongba, Khongman and Utlon districts. A variety of tribal shawls with exotic designs and motifs are also made in Manipur.

# Odisha



The textile heritage of Odisha is a reflection of the artistic capabilities and superior craftsmanship of the weavers of the state. The weavers incorporate tribal motifs and the temple architectural style of Odisha. The handlooms are available both in cotton and silk. The colour patterns and weaving methodology is different for the two kinds of fabrics. The tie-and-dye technique of Odisha, known as *Ikat*, comes in earthy patterns and has a wide range of flowers, fish, animals, gods and goddesses. The *Ikat* of Odisha differs from the *Ikat* of the other states of the country, which have primarily geometrical and bold patterns as motifs. The origin of the *Ikat* handloom can be traced back to the state's rich maritime past, when seafaring traders made several journeys to the Islands of Indonesia, particularly Bali. The *Bomkai* threadwork features ornate borders and motifs drawn from the *Shakti* cult predominant in tribal and rural culture.

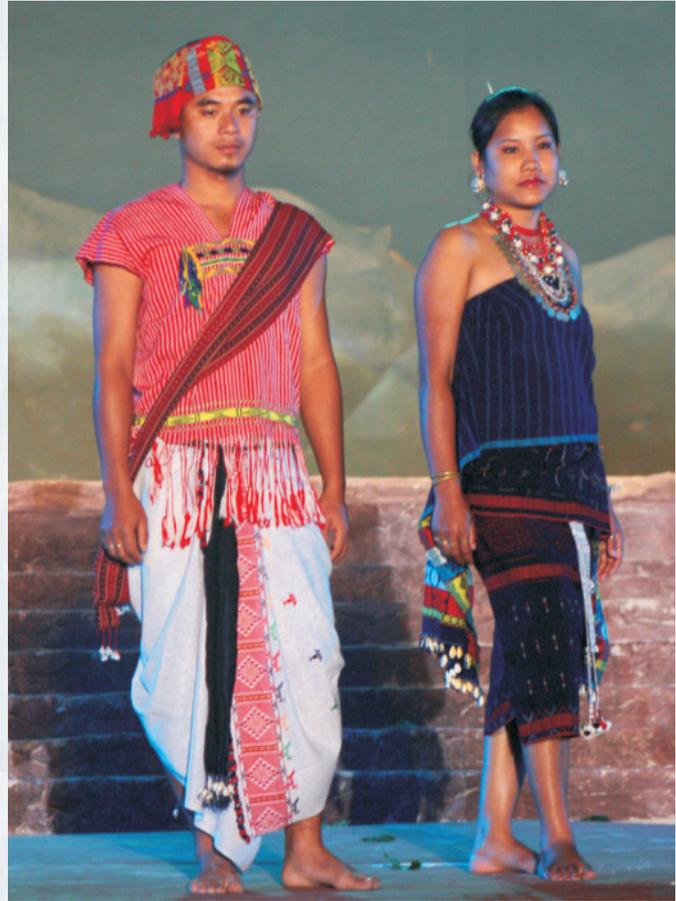
The handspun silks of Odisha have a metallic lustre and are used to make both the *Ikat* and *Bomkai sarees*. *Tussar* silk, made from non-mulberry silk, is also a part of the famed textile heritage of the state. Most of the fabrics are used to make a variety of fashion wear.

# Sikkim



The handlooms of Sikkim are known for their fine texture, unusual combination of themes and quality. *Lepcha*-weave bags, purses and Sikkimese dresses are known for their creative excellence. Hand-woven fabrics from Sikkim are used by designers to make jackets, sweaters, shawls and fashion wear.

# Tripura



Handloom industry is the craft of Tripura. The main feature of Tripura handloom is vertical and horizontal stripes with scattered embroidery in different colours. The textiles have a unique colour combination and lasting texture. The Bengali weavers who migrated to Tripura from the erstwhile East Bengal, and the Manipuri weavers, played an important role in the development of the handloom industry in Tripura. Thus, the handlooms of Tripura are a harmonious blend of the artistic sensibilities of the tribal, Bengali and Manipuri weavers. The colour combinations are rich and bold.

The art of weaving is considered sacred in Tripura. The hand-woven *Riha*, the chest cover of the elders of the family, is worshipped before beginning the weaving.

# West Bengal



The Bengal cotton or *Tant saree* of West Bengal is one of the finest handloom products of the state. Produced in traditional looms, the *Jamdani*, *Dhaniakhali*, *Santipuri*, *Tangail*, *Begumpuri* and *Fulia* cotton *sarees* are made by skilled weavers. The most well-known of the designs is the red bordered white *saree*, worn by Bengali women during religious festivities.

Many varieties of silk *sarees* are available in Bengal, which have exquisite textures – these include the *Murshidabad* silk, *Garad*, *Matka*, *Korial* and *Fulia* silk. The *Baluchari sarees* with their exquisite woven work or the *Kantha* and *Zari* work *sarees* with hand embroidery are also very attractive. The *Kantha* stitch originated with Bengali housewives mending and reinforcing old clothes with strands of thread drawn from the colourful borders of old *sarees* and creating at the same time simple designs with them. The *Kantha* stitch of Bengal has now been fine-tuned into designer wear.



# Visual Arts of Eastern India

The term “folk paintings” encompasses:

- paintings made in Indian villages, by both men and women, for decoration of their homes
- portrayals of their gods and goddesses, and for their various rituals
- paintings made by local professional artists for the use of the local people
- pictures made by hereditary professional painter families which are sold to the urban population
- paintings made and sold at centres of pilgrimage by traditional painter families

The folk paintings of eastern India are made in a variety of styles and themes, each retaining the distinct flavour of the region of its origin. The most popular themes are characters and incidents from the two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as well as from the Hindu *Puranas*. Everyday life in the villages, birds and animals of importance and religious significance, and Nature, particularly the sun, moon, plants and trees, are also popular themes. The range of colours used also varies widely, from vivid, bright and vibrant hues to sober, subdued tones. The colours are traditionally made from natural materials, and hand-made paper, cloth and leaves, earthen pots, stone and mud walls are used as the canvas. The style and quality of the paintings depend on the materials available in the place in which they are executed, thereby making them very different from each other. Yet, underlying this diversity, is a common thread of unity — it is the expression joys, sorrows, hopes and aspirations of our vast rural population. Folk paintings did not emerge in chronological order but evolved in the different regions of the country, sometimes simultaneously but more often at different times, depending mainly on the local culture and rituals and the popular mythological stories of the area.

# ASSAM ASSAMESE FOLK PAINTINGS



The tradition of painting in Assam can be traced back several centuries. Tracing their origin to seventh century AD, Assamese paintings and manuscripts are said to have been derived from mythological tales, the most prominent among which are *Chitra Bhagavata* and *Hastividyaranya*. Historical documents reveal that Kumar Bhaskara, the King of Kamrupa, gifted the well-known Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang and Emperor Harshavardhana, a number of paintings and painted objects, some done on exclusive Assam silk, when they visited him. Assamese literature of the medieval period has several references to *Chitrakars* and *Patuas* who were expert painters. Locally available organic colours, such as *hebgool* and *haital*, were used for paintings. *Ahom* palaces, *Sattras* and *Naamghars*, have collections of brightly-coloured paintings depicting mythological stories, folk tales and events from history. Known for their unmatched quality and outstanding strokes of mastery, they have become an integral part of the rich Assamese culture and heritage. In medieval Assam, different classes of painters evolved with time. The *Patuas* created the *Pats*, which were independent of votive structure. Another group of painters known as *Nats*, who were also professional singers and dancers, have also contributed to the evolution of art in the state. However, the most versatile among all the Assamese painters were the *Khanikars*, whose work mainly centred on the *Sattras* or monasteries, and the *Naamghars*. Known for their excellent artistic creations, some *Khanikars* can still be found in certain villages of Upper Assam.

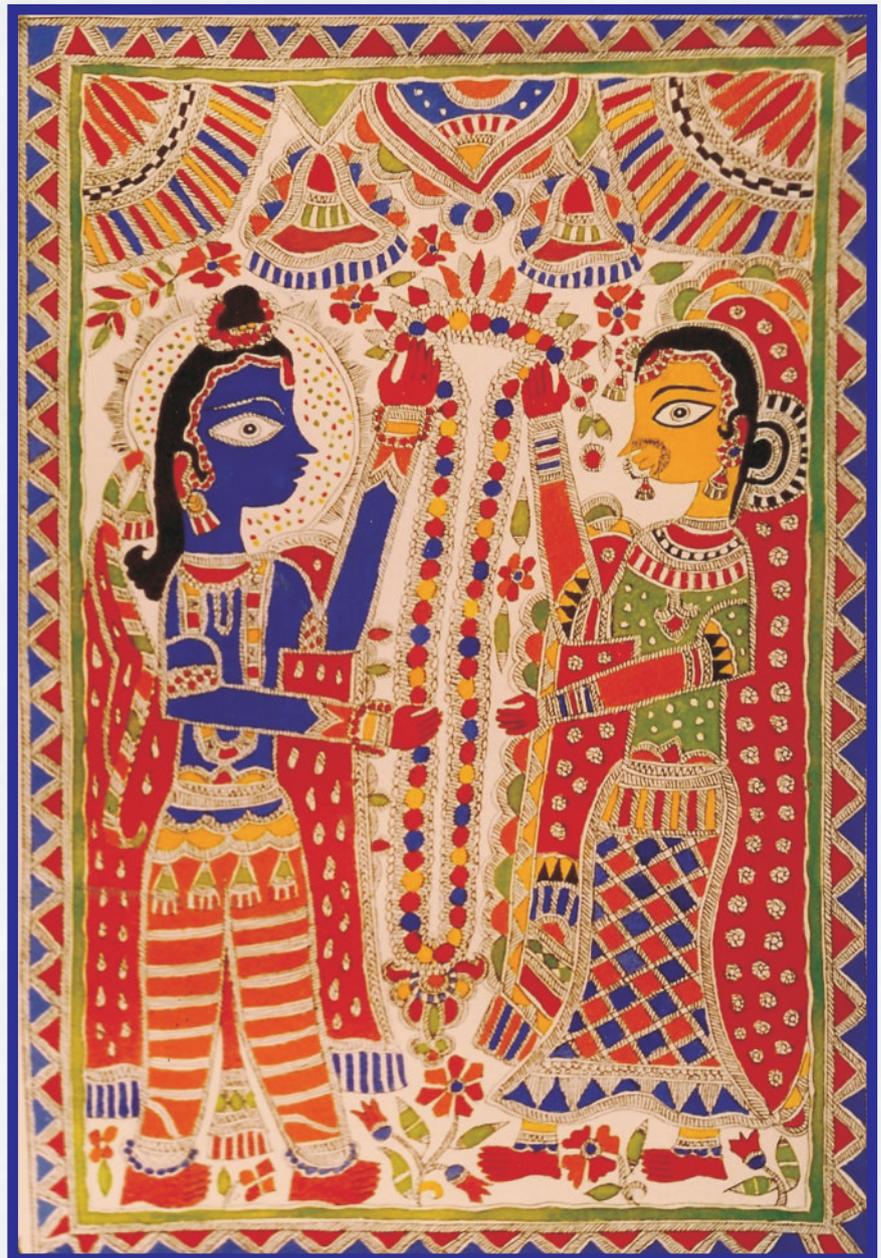
Broadly, the paintings of Assam can be categorized under two headings or schools - Assam School and *Tai-Ahom* School. Assam School can be further subdivided into the *Sattriya* and Royal styles. The *Sattriya* style was mainly propagated by the *Vaishnava* saint, *Sri Sankaradeva*. In addition to the local Assamese traditions, Mughal, Rajput and *Pahari* influence can also be seen in these paintings. There is also a fine portrayal of local animal life, the favourites being the lion and the bison, as well as pictures of trees with flowers and birds.

# BIHAR

## MADHUBANI PAINTINGS

*Madhubani* painting is a style of folk painting, practised in the Mithila region of Bihar and the adjoining parts of the Terai in Nepal. Mithila covers the districts of Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur, parts of Munger, Bhagalpur and Saharsa. The origins of *Madhubani* paintings or *Mithala* paintings are shrouded in antiquity and mythology. The paintings are characterized by line drawings filled in with bright colours and contrasts or patterns. They are done with fingers, twigs, brushes, nib-pens, and matchsticks, using natural dyes and pigments, and are characterized by eye-catching geometrical patterns. These paintings are popular because of their tribal motifs and the use of bright earthy colours.

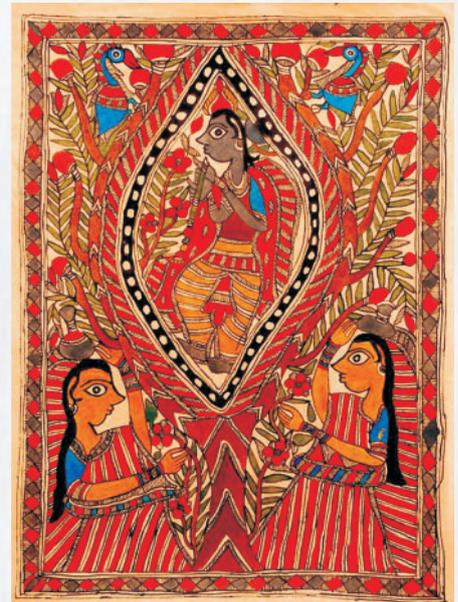
*Madhubani* paintings have traditionally been done by the women of the villages around the present town of Madhubani (literally meaning forests of honey), though today men are also involved to meet the demand. These paintings are





done with mineral pigments prepared by the artists themselves. Black is obtained by mixing soot or lampblack with cow dung; yellow from turmeric, pollen or lime, and the milk of banyan leaves; blue from *indigo*; red from the *kusam* flower juice or red sandalwood; green from the leaves of the wood apple tree; white from rice powder; and, orange from *palasha* flowers. The colours are applied flat with no shading and no empty space left. *Madhubani* painting has remained confined to a small geographical area and the skills have been handed down from one generation to the next. As the artists have remained shielded from outside influence, there has not been much change in the content and style of the paintings.

Figures from mythology are adapted and drawn in the style of *Madhubani* paintings. Hindu deities such as *Krishna*, *Rama*, *Shiva*, *Durga*, *Lakshmi* and *Saraswati* are popular themes, as with all folk paintings. Court scenes, wedding scenes and social happenings, also figure prominently in the paintings. Floral, animal and bird motifs are used to fill up all the gaps.





# JHARKHAND

## PAITKAR

Jharkhand is famous for a special type of folk painting called the *Paitkar* paintings. One of the oldest forms of tribal painting in India, the *Paitkar* paintings are also called scroll paintings due to their appearance. This style of painting has many themes, among which the depiction of life after death is quite popular. This form of painting is in the process of getting extinct due to the lack of funds for promoting it.

# SOHRAI AND KOHBAR



*Sohrai* and *Kohbar* are indigenous art forms of Jharkhand that have evolved from the rock art tradition of Hazaribagh. The upper valley of the Damodar river is the last remaining stronghold of this tradition. These village paintings are considered auspicious symbols, related to fertility and fecundity. *Sohrai* is the art form used during the winter harvest season and *Kohbar* is practised during marriage ceremonies. Artists use red, black and white sand along with cow dung, coal and powdered leaves as colours. *Sohrai* paintings which are done on walls, are made using combs and brooms – a brush is never used. In *Kohbar* paintings first a ground coat, traditionally

black, is applied and allowed to dry. Then a second coating is applied in a contrasting colour, again traditionally white, done with *Dudhiya Mitti*. After this, the second coating is scraped off in various designs or motifs using a bamboo or even a plastic comb or with the fingers, revealing the under layer which is in stark contrast with the upper layer. The *Sohrai* and *Kohbar* paintings which would adorn walls of village homes and bring colour inside a cave, are now made on high quality art paper and are very much in demand.





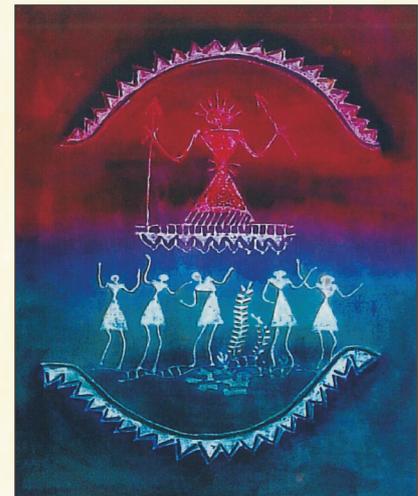
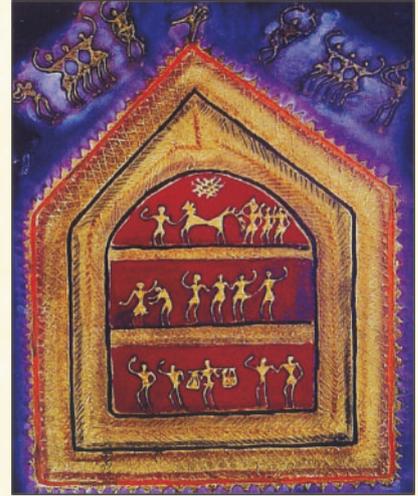
# MANIPUR

The diverse tribal culture of Manipur throws up simple yet intricate art forms, which add to the cultural richness of our country.

The *Mao* and *Thangkhul* tribes do a lot of carvings on the front and the inside facades of the walls of their houses, the *Kabuis* have paintings on the '*ahongyum*' (a typical house) front walls and the walls on all sides of the verandah. The subject of the paintings are usually animals, fish, birds, insects, men, and all the objects related to the existence of the tribes. The sun, the moon and the stars are also drawn on the walls. Normally, these solar symbols are done on the upper corners of the front walls. Other things represented on the walls of tribal houses include scabbards, spears, wooden seats, etc.

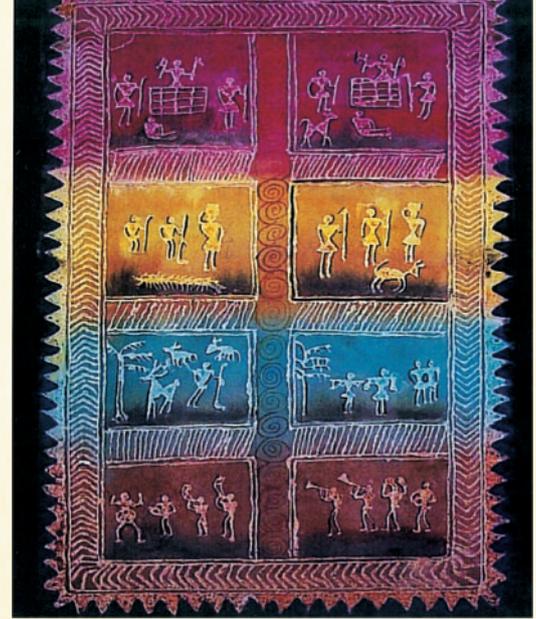
The carvings and paintings of the tribal people, though we see them as inexplicable, timeless decorative pieces, reflect the social conditions, customs, religions, economy and the changing way of life of the tribal people.





# ODISHA SAORA PAINTINGS

The *Saoras* of Odisha have a rich tradition in art, deeply connected to their religious and social life. They are famous for the wide variety of their paintings based on religious and ceremonial themes. The paintings are known for their elegance and ritualistic association. They remember the dead and their gods and goddesses through these traditional wall paintings drawn inside their houses. Each painting has a story behind it and an occasion to draw it.



Various types of pictograms are drawn to appease the gods and ancestral spirits. The religious icons of the *Saoras* are called *Iditals*. The interaction between the *Saoras* and their supernatural entities is very intimate and is reflected in their paintings. The *Iditals* are drawn primarily to propitiate the gods and ancestors. The *Saora* society is inseparably connected with their ancestors. They believe that the dead sometimes nurture their living descendants and at other times inflict upon them diseases from which they may die. On the whole, *Iditals* play the most important role in the life and religion of the *Saoras*. Each *Idital* contains different symbols and scenes depending on the purpose for which it is meant. *Saora* rites and religious practices feature prominently in all their paintings. The minute details of the pictograms reflect the everyday life of the *Saoras*, their social customs and their culture.

The day before the pictogram is drawn the wall is washed by the womenfolk of the family with a solution made from locally available red earth. Brushes used for painting are made from date palm or bamboo twigs which are slightly splayed at the end. For paint, the artists use rice flour and water mixed in a small bowl. In the centre of every *Saora* house, one finds a grinding or pounding hole, where the rice flour is made with the help of a long pole. Lamp black and red ochre are the other preferred colours.



# PATTACHITRA

*Pattachitra* is one of Odisha's earliest art forms, a folk tradition that goes back several centuries. The art form is characterized by vibrant colours and superb craftsmanship. The term *Pattachitra* comes from the words *Patta* meaning *Vastra* or “cloth” and *Chitra* meaning “paintings”. So, *Pattachitra* means “paintings on cloth”.

The preparation of the *Patta* is very interesting. A clean piece of cloth is spread on the floor. Powdered tamarind seeds are mixed with water to prepare a special gum. The gum is applied over the piece of cloth. Before the gum dries up, another piece of cloth is placed on top of it and a fresh coating of the gum is pasted on it. The *Patta* is then dried in the sun. A paste of soft white stone powder and the tamarind seed gum mixed in proper proportions is then applied to both sides of the dried *Patta*. The *Patta* is then cut to size and polished, first with a rough stone, and then a smooth pebble, to make the surface suitable for painting. The polishing requires several hours and is done by the womenfolk of the *Chitrakar* (artist) families. The *Chitrakars* are traditionally men. While working on a painting which takes several months at times, the *Chitrakars* follow austere rituals such as eating only vegetarian food and sleeping on the floor.





The colours used for the paintings are bright and made from naturally-available raw materials. A brilliant and permanent white is obtained by powdering, boiling and filtering conch shells. *Haritala*, a kind of stone, is processed to get yellow. *Ramaraja*, a kind of indigo, provides the blue. Black is made from either lampblack or burnt coconut shells. Red comes from *Hingula*, a mineral stone. A variety of shades are obtained from the primary colours through expert mixing.

The unique aspect of these colours is that they retain their brilliance for a long period and the gum used for treating the *Pattas* keeps it free from insects. The canvasses are profusely adorned with colourful flowers, creepers and prominent borders. While traditional *Chittrakars* continue to use several bright colours, modern artists tend to tone down the shades to



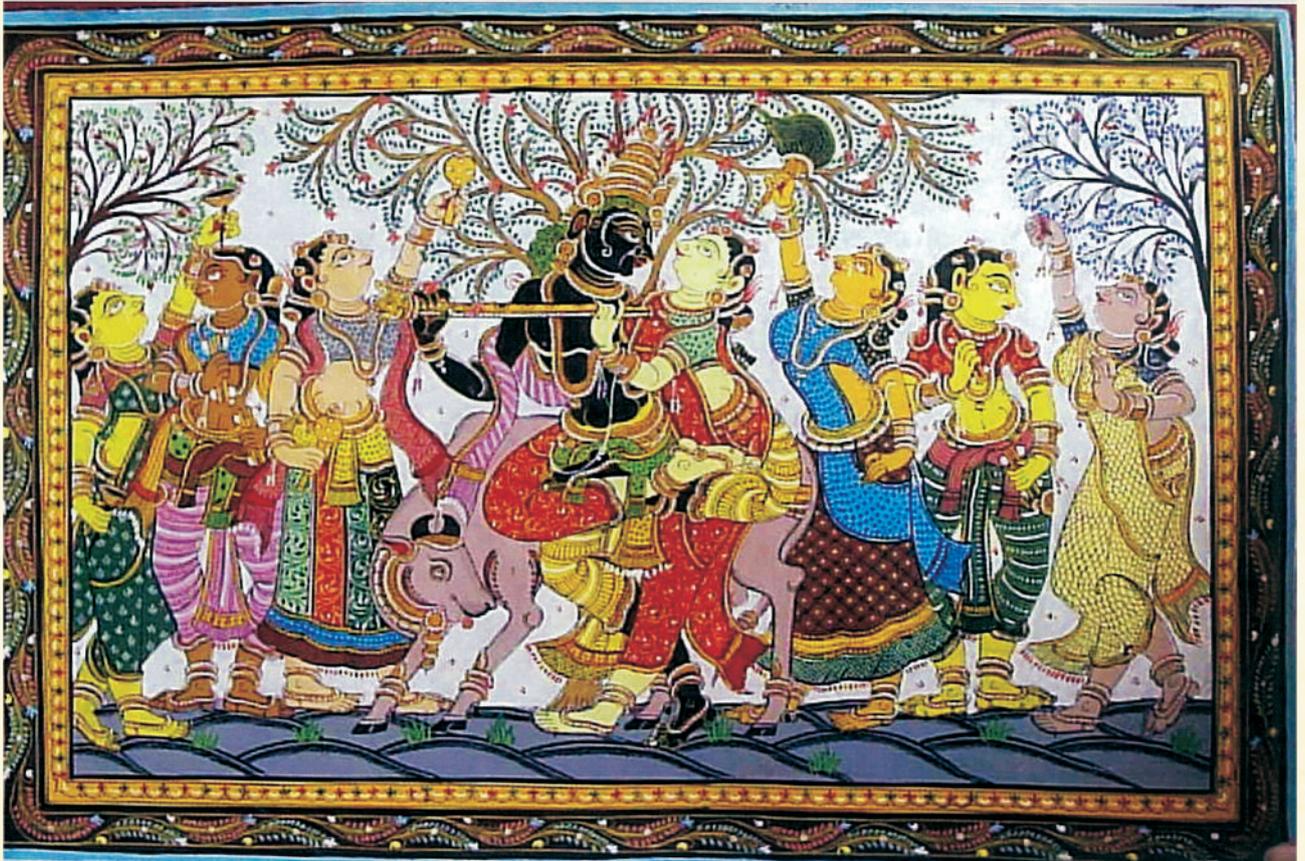


match refined tastes. The three types of brushes used, namely broad, medium and fine, are made from the tail hair of the buffalo, calf and mouse respectively.

*Pattachitra* style of painting is also done on wooden and bamboo boxes, pots and other decorative items.

The most important theme of *Pattachitra* is *Lord Jagannath*, the Lord of the Universe. Themes are also taken from Hindu mythology and the Indian epics. Over the centuries, the art form has absorbed many features from Mughal miniature paintings and also west Indian (Gujrat) and south Indian (Andhra Pradesh) styles of painting.







# TALAPATRACHITRA

*Talapatrachitra*, or palm leaf etching and painting, is one of the most ancient forms of folk art in the state. The art originated when written communication began. Writing of manuscripts and messages was done on palm leaves. Some artists felt the need to decorate the texts with images, such as borders, etc., to increase their visual appeal. Later it evolved into a form of painting, and now *Talapatrachitra* is considered an important item of home décor. The palm leaves are cut into a standard size and supported by two wooden planks stringed through a hole in the centre. The artists who practise this art live mainly in Puri and Cuttack.

To prepare the palm leaf for painting, the unripe leaves of the palm tree are first cut and semi-dried. They are then buried in swamps for four to five days for seasoning and dried in the shade. These are stitched or stringed together according to the requirement. At times they are stitched together only after the etching has been completed. Etching is done within the drawn lines on the leaf strips using an iron pen. A paste made of bean leaves, charcoal (made of burnt coconut shells), *til* oil, and turmeric, is



rubbed on the etchings to highlight the figures. Vegetable and mineral colours, in very subdued tones, are used only as fillers.

As in all forms of folk paintings, the themes are mainly drawn from India's rich mythology. Figures of gods and goddesses, complete with details of their dress and hair-styles, animals, flowers and trees, are also favourites of the artists. Among the deities, *Radha* and *Krishna*, *Durga*, *Ganesha* and *Saraswati* are most popular. Stories and incidents of the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and other epics, are also depicted. Scenic beauty is etched in great detail.



# JOHTI AND CHITA

*Johti* and *Chita* are a folk art form of rural Odisha, drawn on the floor and walls. They are created using only a semi-liquid paste of rice, known as *Pithau*. The fingers act as the brushes. This art is not used for merely decorating the homes but also has a social and religious significance. During the harvesting season, when the grains are thrashed and stored, the rural women offer prayers to *Goddess Lakshmi*. On this auspicious occasion, the walls and floor of the mud homes are decorated with the *Chita* and *Johti*. Sometimes a brush is prepared by attaching a piece of cloth to a twig. This is dipped into the white rice paste to draw patterns on the wall. At times, the paste is sprinkled on the walls and a pattern resembling bunches of paddy emerges on the wall. Throughout the year, the women of Odisha perform several rituals to seek the blessings of the divine powers and to establish a relationship between the mystical and the material. For every ritual there is a specific motif for the wall and the floor. The motif used for *Lakshmi Puja* is a stack of paddy and for *Durga Puja* it is white dots superimposed with red, signifying the worship of *Shiva* and *Shakti*.



# MURUJA

*Muruja*s are patterns drawn on the floor with powders of different colours. The powders are all made by indigenous methods. The white powder is obtained from powdered rice, black from burnt coconut shells, yellow from the petals of marigold flowers or turmeric, and red from clay or bricks. In the Indian month of *Kartik* (November), women of Odisha observe different kinds of *Vrats* and draw *Muruja* designs near the holy *Tulsi* plant. These are also drawn on the containers used for storing grains, on the pavilions erected for household deities, on the threshold of homes, and on earthen pots used during weddings and other auspicious occasions.



# SIKKIM THANGKA PAINTINGS



*Thangka* is a form of Buddhist art, a Tibetan silk painting, in which the painting is done on flat surfaces, like embroidered banners. They usually depict a Buddhist deity, a famous scene, or a *Mandala* of some sort. *Thangkas* are found hanging in the monasteries or are carried by the *Lamas* during ceremonial processions. When they are not required, they can be rolled up and stored, and thus they are also known as scroll paintings. The most common form of *Thangka* is the upright rectangular form. The *Thangka* is not a flat creation like an oil painting or acrylic painting, but consists of a picture panel which is painted or embroidered, over which a textile is mounted, and finally there is a cover, usually of silk. Generally, *Thangkas* last a very long time and retain much of their lustre, but because of their delicate nature, they have to be kept in dry places to prevent moisture from affecting the quality of the silk. Originally, *Thangka* paintings became popular among travelling monks because the scroll paintings were easily rolled and transported when they travelled from one monastery to another.

The *Thangkas* served as important teaching tools as they depicted the life of the *Buddha*, various influential *Lamas*, and other deities, and the *Bodhisattvas*. One popular subject of the *Thangkas* is *The Wheel of Life*, which is a visual representation of the *Abhidharma* teachings (Art of Enlightenment). To Buddhists, these visually and mentally stimulating religious paintings offer a beautiful manifestation of the divine.



# TRIPURA

The north-eastern state of Tripura is small, but its canvas is large. Nature has been abundantly generous in Tripura – with undulating topography, hills and hillocks, meadows and bamboo groves, Nature seems to be at her best here. Beautiful paintings of Tripura's tribal people depict images of their amazing and interesting life-styles through colours and designs. Local paintings of Tripura are a depiction of tribal village life, and their traditions and rituals from a close distance. Though the paintings may not be spectacular, they are a true depiction of the faiths and beliefs of the many tribes inhabiting the state. The *Maharajas* who ruled the state prior to Independence patronized the artists, thereby giving dignity to the art and culture of the state. *Maharajkumari* Kamalprava Devi played an important role in popularizing the art of the state. The folk paintings of Tripura are known and appreciated the world over.

# WEST BENGAL

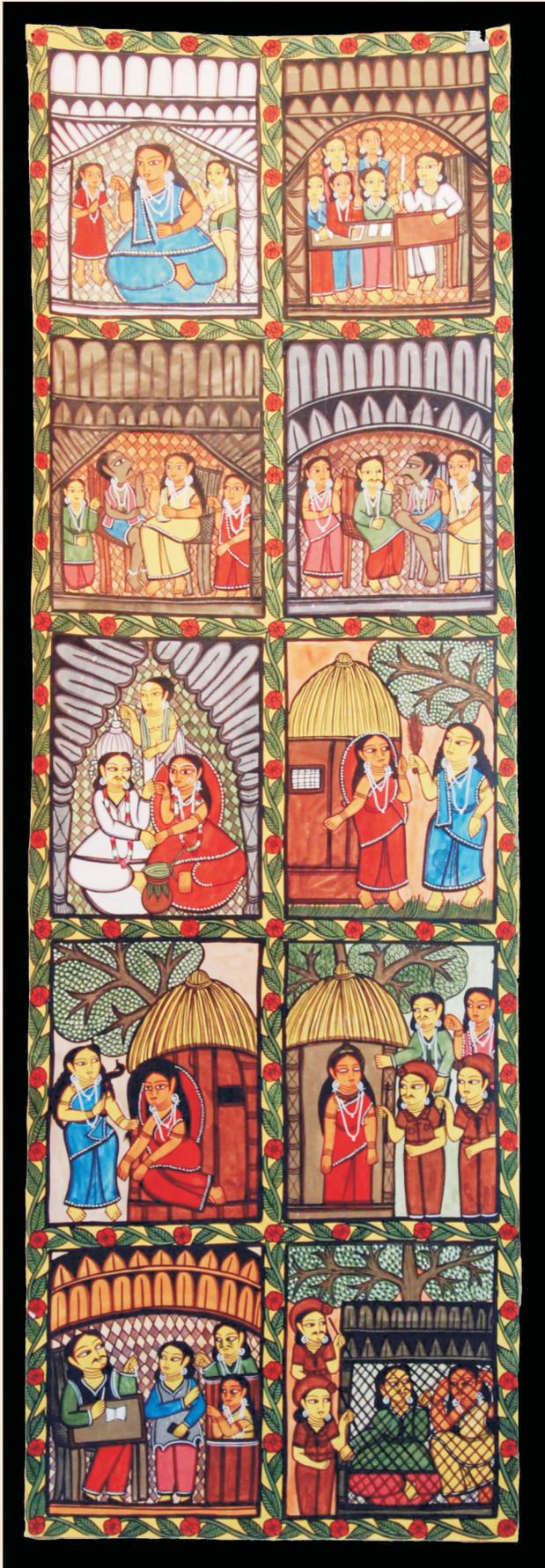
## PATASHILPA



The Bengal *Patashilpa* is an art form that can be traced back to over a thousand years. The style of painting has a strong linkage with the paintings of *Harappa*, *Mohenjodaro* and the *Ajanta* caves, the earliest Asian civilizations. *Pata* painting in Bengal is far removed from court life and the convention of temple art. This style of painting originated in the *Kalighat* area of Kolkata and the painters, known as the *Patuas*, used simple bold lines and flat colours to describe the Hindu gods and goddesses like *Shiva*, *Durga*, *Kali*, *Krishna*, *Lakshmi* and *Ganesha*, as well as everyday rural life.

There are two types of *Pata* paintings – the *Chauka*, which is a square or rectangle, and the *Jarano* or *Gutano*, which is a scroll. Scroll painting is the earliest form of painting in Bengal. With the advent of the *Brahmanical* influence, some of the artists or *Patuas* became Hindus. Again, during the Buddhist period, many *Patuas* embraced Buddhist thoughts. That was perhaps the golden age of the *Patuas*. Then, in the Muslim period, most of the *Patuas* adopted Islam as their religion and were influenced by the Rajasthani type of painting imported to Bengal by the Mughals. This influence still survives.

*Patashilpa* is actually a combination of *Patachitra* and *Patergaan*. The *Patua* sings the story as he or she shows the pictures by unrolling the bottom of the scroll and re-rolling the top. After completing a painting, the artists roam around the village narrating the story depicted in the painting in the form of a song. These songs are known as *Patergaan*.



*Patashilpa* is more or less a family affair, where every member of the family contributes in some way or the other. The popular themes are from India's rich Hindu mythology and great epics. Contemporary themes and social issues also find a place in the *Patachitras*.

The paintings are made on a piece of cloth known as *Pat*. The brushes are made from bamboo sticks and goat's hair. The colours used are extracted from natural herbs and plants. The art form is learnt by the younger members of the family by observing their fathers and grandfathers. The *Chitrakar* families cannot depend entirely upon the income the *Patua* earns from the making and showing of scrolls.

There are three styles of *Patua* art:

- 1 The Tribal style, as seen in *Santhali Pats*.
- 2 The Bengal style, as seen in *Kalighat Bazar* Paintings
- 3 The Popular style, influenced by Rajasthani Art

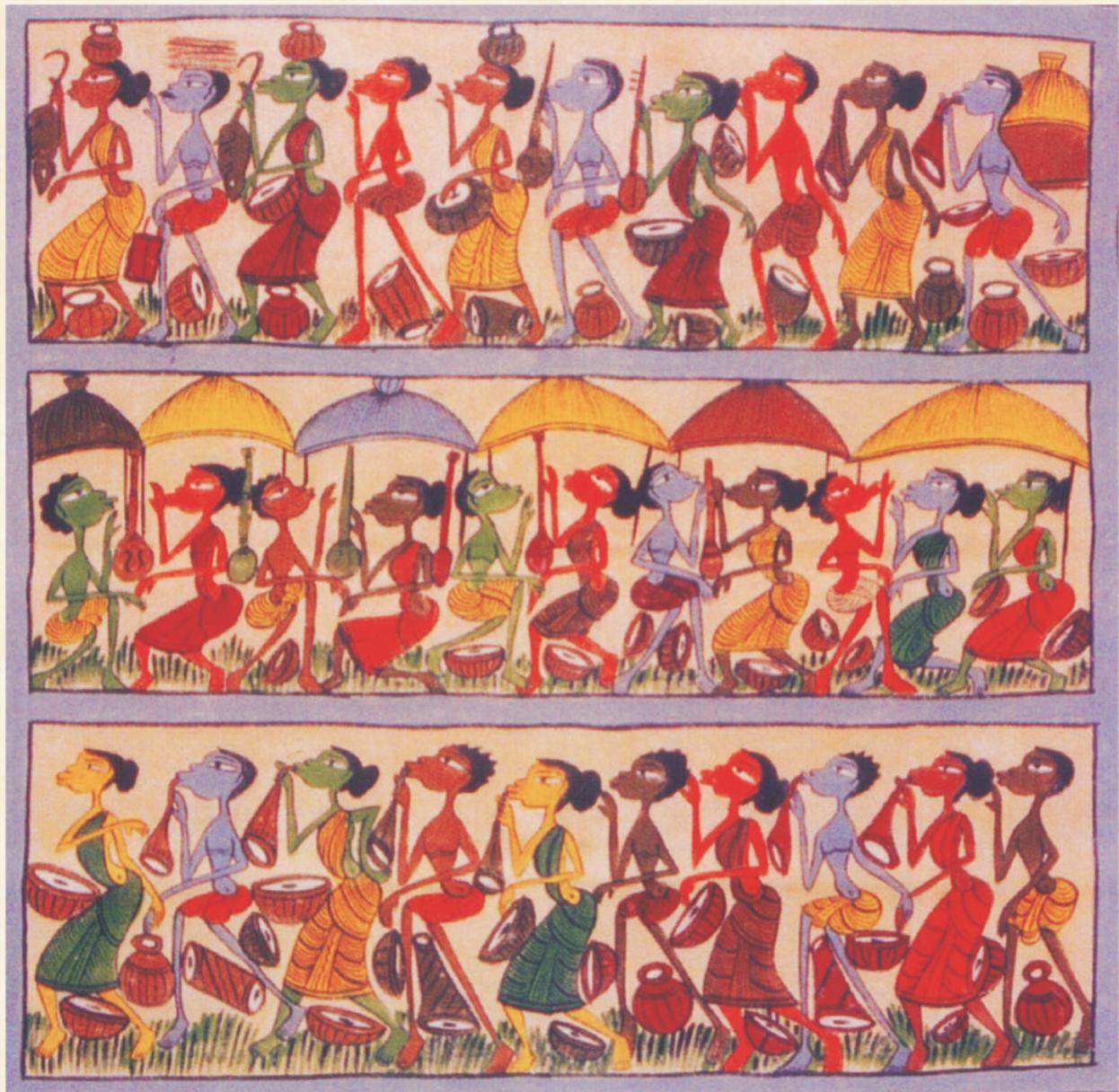


The *Chauka* canvas is used for painting one particular deity or a mythical or social subject. On the other hand, a scroll painting depicts a story serially in picture. It is about one to three-feet-wide and ten to twenty-feet-long, according to the length of the story, and the two ends are attached to two bamboo sticks. *Manasa Mangal* is an all-time favourite subject of this style of painting.

# JADU PATUA

The *Jadu Patua* scrolls are a very old tradition of painting among the aboriginal *Santhali* people of West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand. The *Santhals* speak in their own pre-Dravidian language of *Santhali*, worship their own *Santhal Bongas* or spirits, regulate their village life in a democratic manner, and celebrate their own *Santhal* festivals with dancing and feasting. The scrolls are painted by minstrel-healers known as *Jadu Patuas*, or 'magic painters'. The *Jadu Patuas* chant the traditional tribal stories of creation, death, and life in the underworld. The scrolls consist of twenty or more individual story panels arranged vertically, which are unrolled and rerolled as the story is sung.





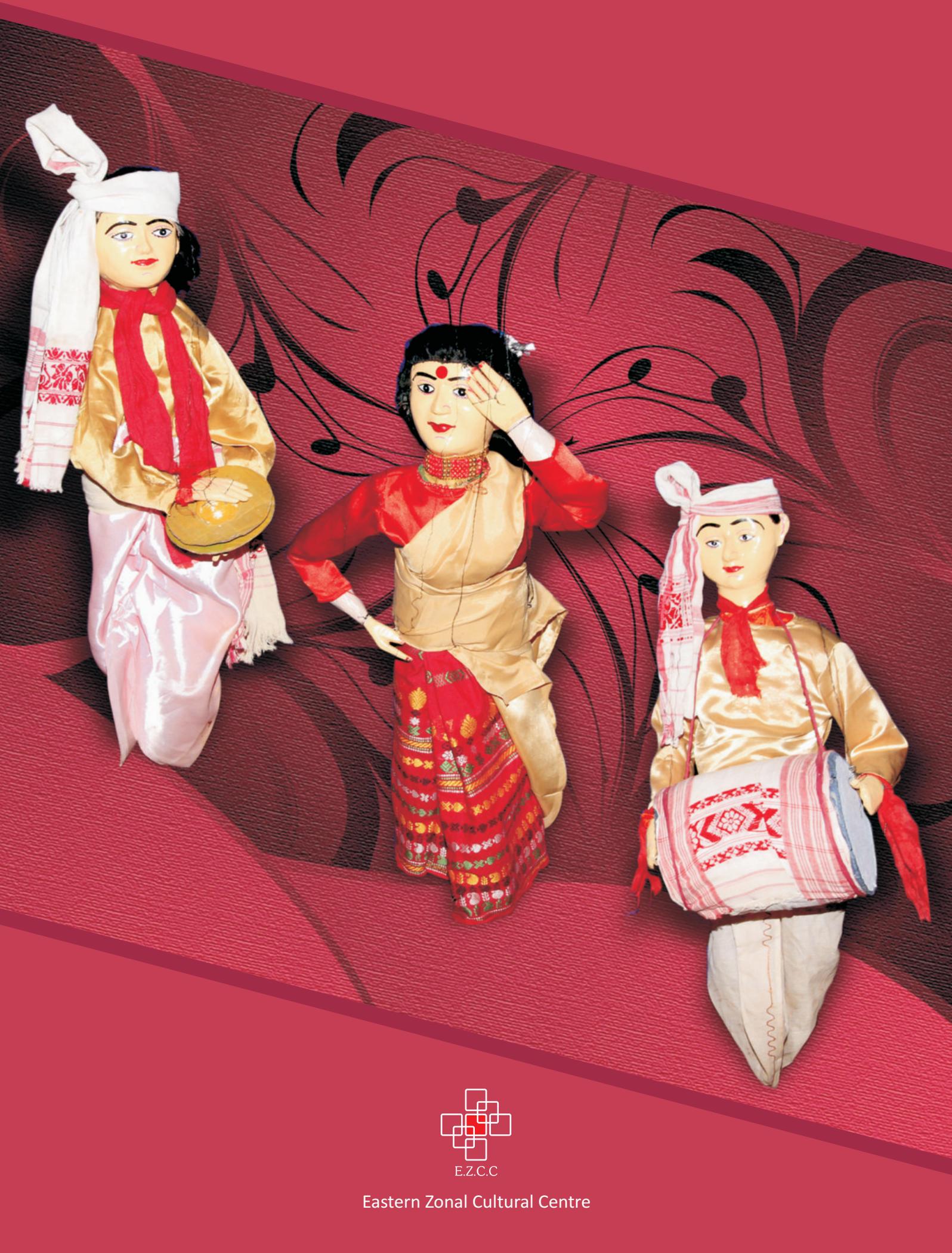
Like the *Patuas*, the *Jadu Patuas* are painters and story tellers, and wander from village to village carrying their painted scrolls made of paper sheets sewn together with a bamboo stick on each extremity. The themes they represent on the scrolls are more limited as compared to the *Patuas*. There are just about a dozen themes. However, they overcome the problem of having a less number of themes by having several interpretations for each theme. A *Jadu Patua* can, looking at one scroll, say different stories depending on whether his audience is Hindu, Muslim or *Santhal*. This last ethnic group is the most important audience for the *Jadu Patuas*. The *Jadu Patuas* live on the money that the villagers give them after listening to their stories. The fact that they are magicians adds a special aura to their performances.







**Gouri Basu** graduated from Presidency College, Kolkata with Honours in Chemistry. She did her post graduation in Bio- Chemistry from the Calcutta University College of Science. She has taught at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, and is presently the Vice-Principal of Loreto House, Kolkata. Gouri Basu is one of Kolkata's best known show anchors and is seen regularly on stage and on television. She has written a very well researched book on the dance forms of Eastern India, *Rhythmic Rhapsodies*, published by the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Her translation of Bengal's hundred year old book of Fairy Tales (*Thakurmar Jhuli*) has also been very well received. Her most recently published books on the dance forms from North East India and the Kantha traditions of Bengal have also been published by the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre. Her many awards include the Lifetime Achievement Award for her contribution as an educationist from *The Telegraph*. A highly talented individual, Gouri Basu strikes an excellent balance between her many activities.



E.Z.C.C

Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre