



Call of the North East



FOLK DANCES OF NORTH EAST INDIA • GOURI BASU





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Compiled & Edited by:

Gouri Basu

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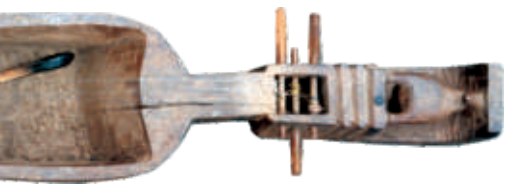
FOREWORD

It is my pleasure to write the foreword for the book, Call of the North East. The Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre has four North Eastern states as its member states. A complete compilation of the dance forms of the North East required us to include the other North Eastern states as well. The EZCC has earlier documented the Dances of Eastern India, which was well received. There is no comprehensive documentation of the dances of the North East. We have presented the compilation in a coffee table book format, so that more people flip through the pages and experience the cultural diversity and richness of the dance forms of the eight sisters of the North East. All through the year, the EZCC through its North East fund allocation, presents colourful programmes from the North East in its different member states. The rich tapestry of the art, craft, music, food and costumes of the North East is presented in these programmes, which introduces the people of the other states to this lesser known Paradise on Earth. The Octave Festivals (Celebrations of the North East) organized by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, since 2006, have also been an excellent vehicle for the promotion of the art and culture of the North East.

We have tried to limit the book to the major dance forms of each of the eight states. The book does not claim to be an all-comprehensive compilation. The aim is to bring into focus the distinct cultures and traditions of the numerous communities that inhabit this region. We hope that the book will be useful to dancers and scholars working on the performing arts of the North East, as well as to the people interested in the performing arts. If we can create an awareness about this fascinating region of our country, among all Indians, our purpose will be served.



Anup K. Matilal
Director
Eastern Zonal Culture Centre

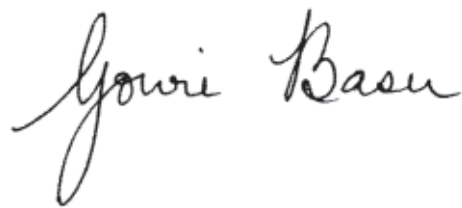


ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Compiling the dance forms of North East India has been an extremely enriching experience for me. I have earlier put together an edition on the Dance Forms of Eastern India, in which four of the North Eastern states were included. The colourful and vibrant performing art forms of the North East have always attracted me and it has been my desire to assemble an edition that would include dances from all the North Eastern states.

Connected to the rest of India by a narrow twenty kilometre corridor of land, the North East is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse regions of our country. While compiling this book, I have not only enjoyed the many splendoured charms of the different North Eastern states, but have also made many good friends. To each one of them I owe my gratitude – their simple lifestyles, contentment with less, faith in the Almighty and happy-go-lucky nature has helped me to completely change my own perspective in life. I thank them most sincerely for sharing their inner worlds with me – this has helped me greatly in compiling this edition.

I would like to thank the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, for giving me so many opportunities to interact with my brothers and sisters from the North East. Special thanks are due to Mr. Anup K. Matilal, Director, EZCC, for having faith in me and Mr. T. K. Basu, Dy. Director (Finance) for his constant support. Many of the photographs used have been given to me by Ashim Datta Gupta and Sucheta Das. My sincere thanks to them. Thanks are also due to Gautam Mukherjee and Tapas Samantaray of EZCC for sharing with me photographs taken by them on their personal cameras. Last but not the least my thanks to everyone of the performing artistes whose performances I have enjoyed so much. Though most of our communication has been through gestures and smiles, they have touched my life in a very special way.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gouri Basu". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, stylized 'G' and 'B'.



INTRODUCTION

North East India – the land of spectacular sunrises and sunsets - the region of our country that is greeted first by the sun each day. This is a land gifted with Nature's bounty - lush green valleys, meandering streams, lofty mountains, deep gorges, tumultuous rivers and a rich variety of flora and fauna. The magical beauty and enchanting diversity of the North East is reflected in the mystic and mesmerizing art forms of the region – an extremely wide range of dance, music, theatre, handicrafts and handlooms. The octagonal formation of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura has its own distinct cultures, traditions, fairs, festivals and numerous colourful celebrations which reflect their lifestyles. Demographically, culturally and linguistically, the North East is a perfect example of a beautiful amalgamation of co-existing cultures. The warm and hospitable people welcome you into their homes, where celebration of life is an everyday affair.

If each of the eight sisters has a different cultural bouquet to offer, sartorially too, the charm of each of the states of North East is stunning in its uniqueness. The textures are timeless, weaving together the acumen of generations, the drapes are striking in their traditional simplicity and the colours are as vibrant as the landscapes they are born out of.

I have had the opportunity to interact very closely with performing artistes from the North East, while being a part of the different Festivals of the North East over the last five years. These festivals have given me an opportunity to get to know our cousins from the magical North Eastern States. Festivals like the Octave organised by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, is also a time for the performers from the eight sister states to interact among themselves. As they spend time with each other and us, the barriers of language and cultural differences melt away – and they share with their new friends, their joys, hopes, dreams and aspirations. I have enjoyed my long association with the friendly people of the North East and learnt from them much about the splendid and harmonised aesthetics of the region.

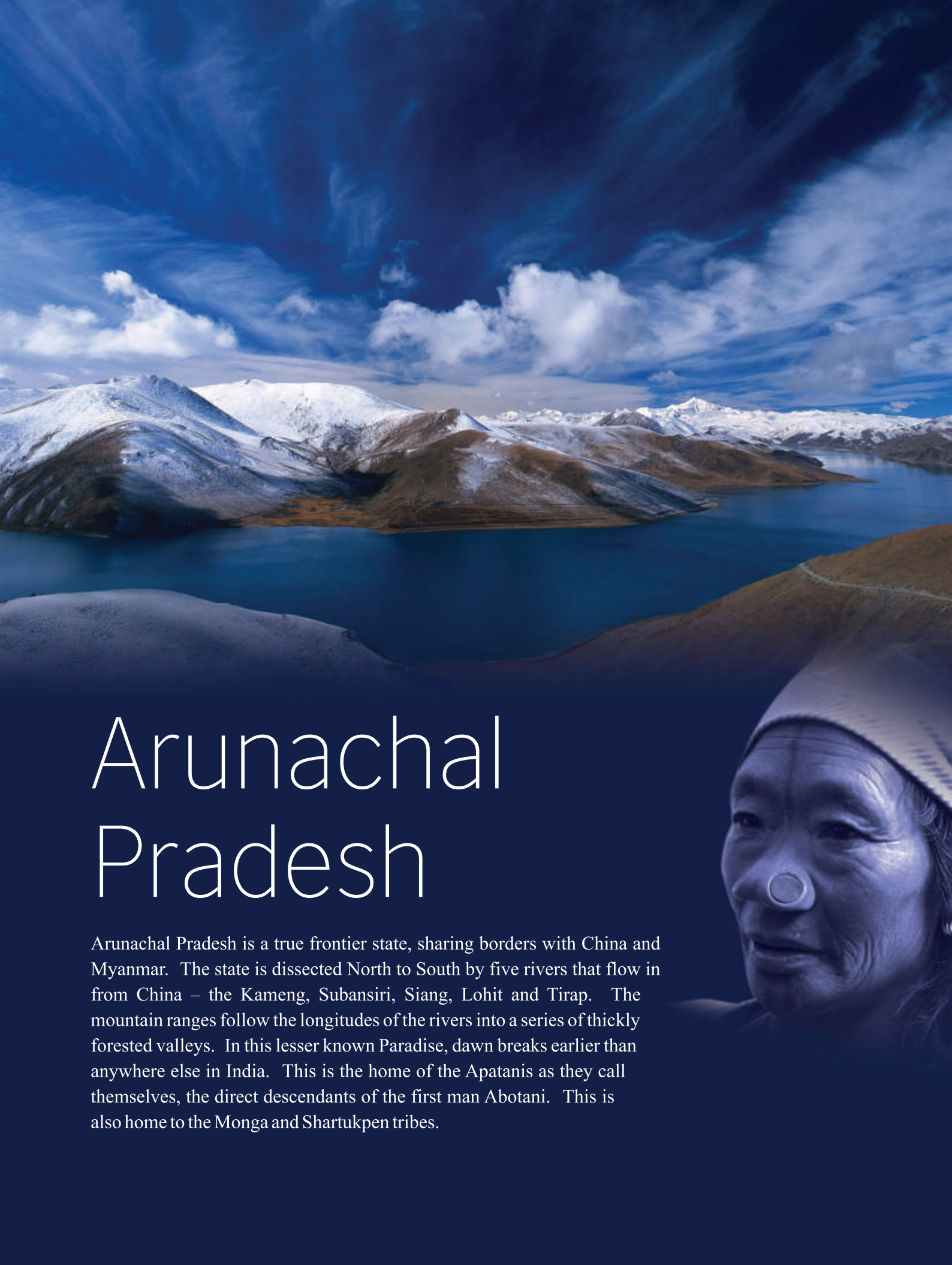
India's unity in diversity is seen most vividly in the North East. The region is an extraordinary anthropological amphitheatre housing more than three hundred communities, speaking different languages and dialects. Yet, barriers in verbal communication do not prevent the people from interacting with and enjoying each others' company and sharing experiences. Music unites us – music has no language, for in it soul speaks to soul. The shy Reang girls from Tripura try on the costume of the snow lion from Sikkim, as the Sikkimese dancers look on fondly. The drummers from Manipur and Assam experiment with different fusion beats, which make the girls from Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh break into an impromptu dance. The tinkling laughter of the beautiful Mizo girls can be heard as they teach their new friends from the other North Eastern states the skills of the Cheraw Dance. The elderly drummer from Nagaland, shares his thoughts with us, through his daughter, a dancer in the troupe and also his interpreter. As we join in the fun and frolic, our young cousins teach us that happiness lies not in plenitude but in being at peace with oneself, living in harmony with Nature and accepting life as it comes.





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Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh is a true frontier state, sharing borders with China and Myanmar. The state is dissected North to South by five rivers that flow in from China – the Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap. The mountain ranges follow the longitudes of the rivers into a series of thickly forested valleys. In this lesser known Paradise, dawn breaks earlier than anywhere else in India. This is the home of the Apatanis as they call themselves, the direct descendants of the first man Abotani. This is also home to the Monga and Shartukpen tribes.

Rikham Pada Dance

The Nishi community of Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh, performs the Rikham Pada Dance as a part of the celebrations of their main festivals. The Nishis perform a medley of dances and songs, which are collectively called Rikham Pada. It is believed that the forefather of the Nishis – Abotani – who migrated to Arunachal Pradesh along with his tribe many centuries ago introduced these dances. Many of the songs are prayer songs, sung in honour of the different tribal gods worshipped by the tribe. Some of the songs are in the form of ballads that describe legends of love. Women express their love for their husbands through these songs. The dancers wear elaborate headgear made of cane shavings, which is considered auspicious, and an antique belt of beaten bell metal, which is a family heirloom, handed down through the generations. The most important festivals of the Apatanis are Morom and Mloko, combinations of thanksgiving and fertility rites. They are celebrated in Winter after the harvesting has been completed and in Spring to commemorate the beginning of the life cycle.



Lossar Monpa Dance



Lossar is the New Year celebrations of the Monpa community of Arunachal Pradesh. It is celebrated during late February or early March and is the most important festival of the Monpas. The celebrations are accompanied by much gaiety and colourful dances. The songs describe the natural beauty of the surroundings and express hope, joy and optimism for the New Year. This is a time for families to get together and seek the blessings of the elders.



Erap Dance

The male members of the Galo tribe, belonging to the West Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh perform the vibrant Erap Dance, as a part of marriage ceremonies of the community. The groom and his family welcome the Nyida or the bride's family by performing this dance. The dance is accompanied by the thumping of the Yoksha, a sword like musical instrument, on the floor, and it is believed that the sound produced will drive away all evil spirits, that may have accompanied the bride's family. This fast-paced dance, which is accompanied by acrobatic body movements, is also performed to entertain the guests and well wishers attending the ceremony.

Emi Relo Dance

The Emi Relo Dance is also a traditional folk dance of the Galo community of West Siang district and is symbolic of the creation of rivers in the region and its rich marine life. It is performed by the young girls to celebrate a good catch of fish from the rivers, which will be served at the community feast. All sociocultural occasions in the Galo community are accompanied by feasting.



Goya Sedong Se

The Akas are a tribe inhabiting both the Eastern and Western regions of Kameng district in Arunachal Pradesh. The Akas have fascinating dance forms, which are accompanied by lilting songs and soothing music. The musical instruments used include the Dholak, cymbals and an indigenous stringed instrument. The costumes worn by the dancers are eye-catching and the rhythmic intricate footwork and graceful postures make the dances very enjoyable. The Goya Sedong Se Dance is one of the dances of the Aka tribe, which is performed in praise of the god and goddess of the Fine Arts, Music and Dance, namely Saslong and Pasla.



Sadinuktso

Another well known dance of the Akas performed at different socio religious festivities is the Sodinuktso. In this dance, the performers divide themselves into two groups on the basis of gender. A member from the boys group comes forward and performs a dance and goes back to join his group. A member from the girls group then comes and presents her dance. This goes on till all the boys and girls of the two groups have presented their solo performances. This dance is usually performed as a part of marriage ceremonies, housewarming parties and for the entertainment of guests.

Neichu Dau

Neichu Dau is a dance of happiness, performed by the Aka youths. The performers have painted faces and this is the distinctive feature of their costume. The songs accompanying this group dance, glorify the beauty of Nature and speak of the omnipresence of the Creator.

Loku Bawang Dance

The Nocte tribe of Tirap district in Arunachal Pradesh performs the Loku Bawang Dance during the Loku Festival. The dance celebrates the unity and strength of the village society. The dance also describes the beauty of Nocte Land, the home of the Nocte tribe – the dense forests with its abundance of flora and fauna.

Aji Lhamu Dance



The Aji Lhamu Dance is the traditional dance of the Shertukpen community, performed at the Gompa during the Chhokor Festival. The myth about the origin of this dance form is interesting. There was a time, long long ago, when evil forces were wrecking havoc on the human civilization. To escape these evil forces, the people started building a bridge across the river. They wanted to go away to the other side, where the evil forces could not touch them. But the evil forces would not allow the construction of the bridge. So Lupon Rimpoche created the five characters of the Aji Lhamu Dance from his fingers to distract the evil forces. Thus the men were finally able to complete the bridge and flee.

Nongrom Dance

Many subtribes of the Tangsa tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, perform the Nongrom Dance during all festivities of their community, particularly the Moh Mol Festival. As the Tangsas are primarily an agricultural community, the dance signifies either the end of a particular agricultural activity or the beginning of the harvesting season. 'Nong' means drum and 'Rom' signifies a ritual. The Moh Mol Festival is celebrated sometime between April and July, the exact date of celebration depending on the convenience of the village community. The dance displays the traditional and colourful costumes, ornaments and crafts of the Tangsas. The accompanying traditional folk songs narrate, among others, the story of evolution.





Kaa Kong Tokai (Cock–Fight) Dance

The Cock–Fight Dance or Kaa-Kong Tokai as it is known in Taj Khamli language, is the most famous dance of the tribe. The dance is performed to welcome special guests to the village and also during festive occasions. The colourful costumes of the dancers are adorned with cock feathers. On their heads they wear the familiar red crown and a beak over their foreheads. The dancers carry a Kong-Toi (a long narrow drum) around their necks. The dance resembles a cock-fight. The other musical instruments used include the Kong-Pat (a big drum), Yam Mongs (gongs) and Paisengs (cymbals).

Taapu Dance

The Taapu Dance is a war dance, which is based on a myth about a man, Tani, and his struggles for survival. Tani's supremacy was not liked by his enemies who tried to crush him. But Gumin Saying, who was appointed as his guardian by his divine protectors, along with Boying Bote and Kiine Naane saved him. As advised by his saviors, Tani began performing the Taapu Dance to drive away evil forces. In this martial dance form, the dancers hold long swords and the dance is characterised by rapid movements and vigorous cries.



Yak Dance

The Yak Cham is one of the most famous pantomime dances of the Buddhist tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The masked dancers represent the members of a family who are said to have discovered the yak, with the help of a magical bird, many hundreds of years ago. The discovery of the yak resolved the family's internal property disputes and provided a permanent source of income and prosperity for the entire community.



Chanting Music

Chanting is an important aspect of Buddhism. The sound of the chanting pacifies and stabilizes the mind and brings in a sense of peace. It reduces stress and helps one to cope with the struggles of everyday life.



Ponung Dance

The Ponung Dance is the dance of the Minyong group of Adis and is performed on the occasion of the Solung festival. In this dance, which is performed to the accompaniment of songs, the girls form a circle, holding each other by stretching their hands over each others' shoulders. The leader of the dance, usually a man, is called the Miri. The Miri stands in the centre of the circle, holding aloft and shaking a sword like musical instrument called the Yoksha. The Miri sings a line, which is repeated in chorus by the girls, who move rhythmically in a slow pace while singing. Ponung is arranged on all important festivals of the Adi tribe.

Popir

A dance similar to the Ponung Dance, but is performed by the Galo community on the occasion of Mopin. The dancers are dressed in white and wear elaborate headgear made of straw.

Dishang

Dishang is a community dance, performed by the menfolk. This interesting dance form makes extensive use of sticks, which are held by the dancers.

Assam

Assam, once known as the Light of the East is the land of the mighty Brahmaputra, one of the longest flowing rivers. 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.

Among the repertoire of festivals celebrated in Assam, the Bihu stands at the pinnacle bearing the most importance. The Bihu is a festival, most anticipated, and 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 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).

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. Though the dance is inspired by agricultural operations, the songs and the graceful dancing builds up an atmosphere of love and romance. The dance has been noted for maintaining authenticity and at the same time displaying the traditional Assamese handlooms and handicrafts in their beauty and glory.



Bohag Bihu or Rongali Bihu

With the advent of Spring come 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 Pepa made from buffalo horn 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 is completed. Bonfires, social get togethers and feasts are an integral part of Magh Bihu. Most of the

rituals connected with this season's Bihu are observed in front of Agni Devta, the God of Fire. Various offerings are made to Agni Devta, 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 month of Pous 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 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. 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 practised 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 an indigenous bamboo-house known as the Bihu-Ghar. The Ghar is separated into two areas – one for the 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 traditions, religious beliefs 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 sowing to reaping. The Bihu songs of the Mishing tribes 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 Mishings have a starkness in their Bihu that 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 the 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

This dance is similar to the Rongali Bihu. 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 buffalo horn pipes and bamboo clappers paint a portrait of Spring that is not seen anywhere else. 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.



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

Bordoishikla



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 forms. They have contributed towards upholding the cultural traditions of Assam to a large measure. Bordoishikla, a very special folk art form of the Bodo community, is dedicated to the Goddesses of Storm (Bordo) and Water (Shikla). It is also closely associated with harvesting and is performed to welcome a good Monsoon. The dancers perform with Khanjanis or bamboo clappers in their hands, which provides the rhythm for their movements. The colourful costumes worn by the dancers and graceful body movements make the dance fascinating. This group dance is performed to the accompaniment of traditional musical instruments like Kham (drum), Siphung (flute), Jotha, Charinda and cymbals.

Muchaglangnai Dance

The Bodo community is known for its rich cultural heritage. The lively tunes and the colourful attire of the dancers (consisting of the dekhona and aarnia), make this dance particularly interesting and attractive. The young girls dance to the lively beat of the traditional musical instrument, Kham.



Bagroomba

The most attractive of all dances of the Bodo community is the Bagroomba, which has young girls assembling in a particular area of the village, to perform the dance as a means to relieve themselves of their wearisome day's work through singing, dancing and merrymaking. Holding the ends of the colourful scarves strung around their necks, the dancers move forwards and backwards in a swinging motion, dancing with gay abandon. 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 (drum) and Siphung (flute).





Ranachandi Dance

The Ranachandi Dance is 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 the women seek the protection of their men and also vow to take up arms and fight shoulder to shoulder with the men should the need arise. Wearing colourful traditional costumes, known as the Dokna, the girls begin the dance in slow graceful movements and end with highly rhythmic martial movements.



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 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 this tribal community resort to Hamzar for cultivating Ahu paddy because they do not have suitable plainland 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 womenfolk scrub and sweep the land. Both men and women take part in

ploughing the land and sowing 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 womenfolk do the reaping of the harvest. All this 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 been faced with 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

Hanoghora is an attractive folk dance of the Pati Rahbas 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 is performed during the festivals observed in the months of November, December and January. The theme of the dances 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. This beautiful dance is performed in the evening. The girls, sometimes wearing masks, begin with the lighting of 360 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 plain tribes of Assam. Ali-Ai-Ligang is their most important festival, held every year in the 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 is charged 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 during this time 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 North East 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, one is performed by the Karbi tribes living in the hilly areas of Assam and the other is performed by the Karbi residents of the plains. The Karbi youths carry decorated swords and present a very enchanting dance.

Zemi Naga Dance

The Zemi Nagas have a set of distinctive dances which imitate the movements of birds and animals. The dancers display tremendous histrionic skills in recreating the movements of the bee, the hornbill and the butterfly.



Jhumur



The Jhumur Dance is a traditional, highly rhythmic folk dance of Assam, usually performed during Autumn. It is secular in concept and has a distinct identity. The dance is performed to the rhythmic accompaniment of 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. Cha Baganer Jhumur Nach is the Jhumur Dance of the tea gardens. The dance is performed by the men and women workers together and sometimes by the women alone. Holding each other by the

waist, the dancers sway to interesting beats. Precision of footwork is a noteworthy feature of the 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 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.

Ojhapali and Deodhani Nritya

This traditional dance belongs to the pre-Sankarite era. It is performed during the celebration of Manasha Puja. The dance has a vigorous rhythm and the dancers often go into a trance during the performance. The Ojha narrates the Manasha Purana with his Paalis. The Ojhapali is followed by the Deodhani Nritya, which cannot be performed without the former.

Nowadays, during an Ojhapali recital, stories on different social themes besides those from the Puranas are also enacted. The Ojha expresses the content of the stories through

songs and gestures and the Paalis follow it by repeating the lines. In the course of the performance, they present short items depicting the movements of animals and birds. The musical instruments used are the Dhol and Khanjani (small cymbals). The Ojha wears the conventional dress of the Sutradhar. Young unmarried girls dedicated to Goddess Manasha perform the Deodhani Dance. The dance is performed in front of the deity to the accompaniment of the Jai-Dhol and Bhortal (big cymbals) with graceful hand gestures and intricate footwork



Goalparia Songs & Dances

Songs and dances are an integral part of the lives of the people in Goalpara district, and are varied in their interpretation. 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 buffalos to the fields for grazing.

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, known as Naoriar Geet and dances that cheer the boatmen to win the race are associated with this sport.



The Goalinir Geet is the harvest song of the Goalpara 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 and dance. The dance begins with a Laxmi Baran or an invocation of Goddess Laxmi. 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.

Kushan Dance



The Kushan Pala and Kushan Dance is a folk art form popular in undivided Goalpara district of Western Assam, Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar districts of North Bengal, Purnia region of Bihar, Rangpur and Mymensingh district of Bangladesh, Tuochoi region of Bhutan, Jhapa region of Nepal and the Western region of Meghalaya. 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 is based on 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 used — 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, 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 Mrudanga. 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 the Bena, Khol, Mandira, Sarinda and Bansi.

The play opens with the Kholabar or Opening Concert. This is followed by the Abahan or Ram Vandana. The dancers then perform the Saraswati Vandana. This is followed by the Saptakanda Ramayan.

Zikir & Zari

During the time of the Assamese Vaishnavite saint and social reformer Sri Sri Shankaradeva, Muslims joined in devotional prayers sung in Hindu temples, while Hindus joined in the chords of Zikir songs (the word Ziqr in Arabic means remembering Allah’s name). A Zikir is a religious or philosophical poem and a Zari, narrating the tragic tale of the Karbala, is elegiac in character and content, much like a Marshiya. The Muslim Saint Shah Milan, popularly known as Ajan Fakir, who had migrated from Baghdad to Assam, composed the original Zikir songs. Generally, Zikir songs are accompanied by dance and performed by the Muslim villagers on social occasions such as community feasts and weddings.

Tokari Geet

Tokari Geet are the songs of the wandering mistrels of Assam. Through these songs they preach about the transitory nature of life and say that salvation can only be attained through complete submission to the Supreme Being.



Bhortal

The Sattriya Dance form was introduced in the 15th century A.D. by Srimanta Shankaradeva, as a powerful medium for the propagation of the Vaishnava faith. He integrated art and Bhakti through music, dancing and drama. His aim was 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.

Sutradhari Nach

The Sutradhar is an important character, who links the different sequences of the traditional classical theatre form of Assam, 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.

Shankha

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



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 or 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 Laviningthou Soraren, the Lord of Heaven, 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 god's search for a consort, continues till date and is performed by priestesses.



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 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.

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.





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.

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 them 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-defense 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.



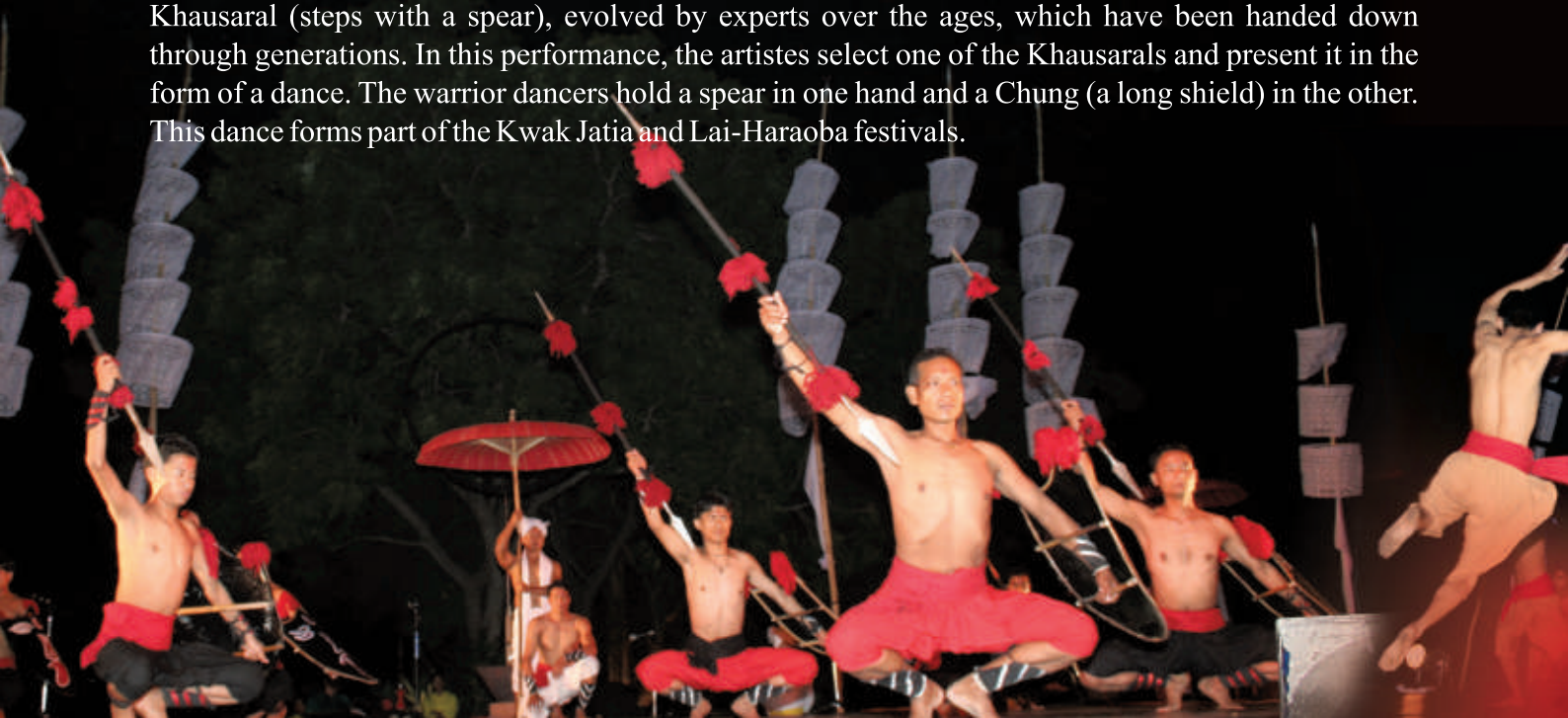
The different variations of the Thang-Ta include:

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 called 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 stylised for stage presentations. It is mainly performed during royal functions and at the Lai Haraoba Festival.

Thang Leiteng Haiba

Also known as decorated sword play, this dance is only performed by highly skilled swordsmen. The choreography combines martial steps with complete mastery of the weapon.

Thang Amaga Aniga Yanaba

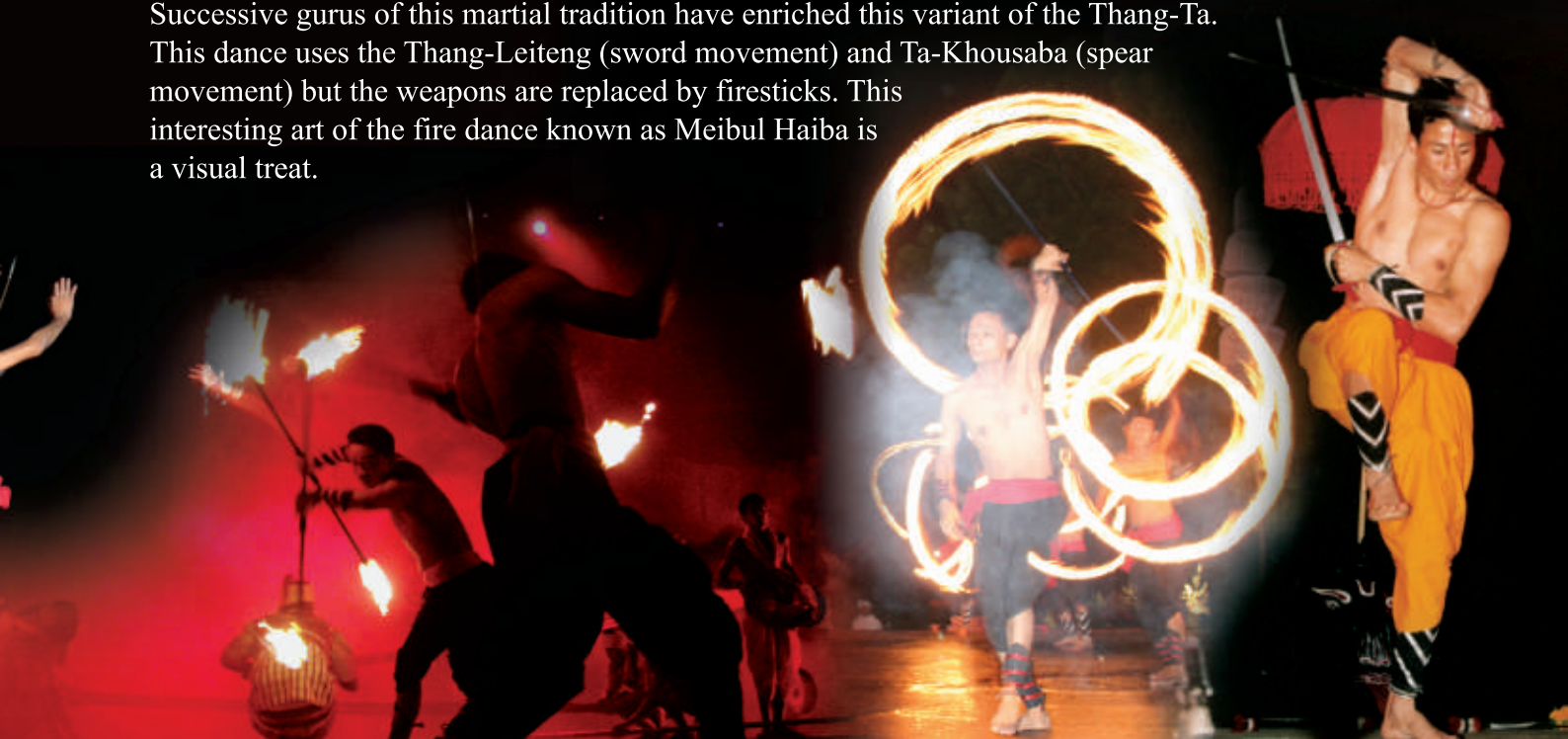
In this fight, a man equipped with two swords fights two men at a time, one handling a sword and the other, a spear. The principles and rules of Thanghairol are followed in this dance too.

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 art of the fire dance known as Meibul Haiba is a visual treat.



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 Lam Dance and the Kit Lam 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 the 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 merrymaking. The rhythmic dance imitates the movement of the crickets.



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. The Kabuis, through their dances, pay homage to their ancestors and worship the spirits of the home and hearth.

Khurpi Laam

After the process of transplantations is completed around August and September, the cave men (Kom's) hold a grand festival. The celebrations which are held amid great pomp and show, have young boys and girls singing and dancing together. This festival of rejoicing and feasting continues for a month.

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.



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 Sankirtan tradition and is acclaimed as one of the best art forms of the state.





Dhol Dholak Cholom

The 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, Sankirtan, 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. Sankirtan, 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 drums. Dressed in colourful costumes, the drummers play a spectrum of rhythms and perform acrobatic feats simultaneously. The dance beautifully combines vigour and grace.



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 Sankirtan tradition. Dhol Cholom, which involves the intricate interplay of drums, is performed during the Yaoshang Festival, as the Festival of Colours is known in Manipur.

Mandil Nartan

This is a festival dance performed during the Jhulan Yatra in Manipur. The dancers use small cymbals (Mandila) 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.

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 hand and legs.



Moibung Conch

Moibung or Conch shell is a beautiful instrument used in Vaishnav 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.



Meghalaya

Situated in the Eastern sub – Himalayas, Meghalaya is one of the most beautiful states of the country. Nature has been very generous with her gifts – virgin forests, tumbling waterfalls, crystal clear rivers, meandering streamlets.

Meghalaya is the homeland of the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos. The Garos inhabit Western Meghalaya, the Khasis are in central Meghalaya and the Jaintias are in Eastern Meghalaya. The Khasis and the Jaintias are the ethnic group of settlers belonging to the Proto Austroloid Monkhmer race. The Garos prefer to call themselves Achiks and the land that they inhabit is called Achikland. The inherent rhythm present in the people of Meghalaya is seen in their dances.



Wangala

The Wangala Dance is associated with the Wangala Festival, which is the most important festival of the Garo community of Meghalaya. The festival is celebrated with great pomp and grandeur in the month of November, after the harvest. According to an ancient Garo legend, man did not know the art of cultivation. One day, by chance, he met Susime – Saljong, the Goddess of Wealth. They had lunch together. The man was reluctant and ashamed of sharing his food because it was not appetizing. The goddess felt sorry for him and taught him how to cultivate a good crop and prepare delicious food out of the produce. She also gave him some seeds. She then requested him to remember her during the harvesting season. Since then, the Garos celebrate the Wangala Festival to honour Susime – Saljong for her kind help and blessings. The festival includes a propitiation ceremony of the deity in every village. This is followed by elaborate festivities, which last for two days and sometimes continues for a week. People, young and old, dressed in colourful traditional attire and attractive headgear join in the festivities, which includes singing and dancing.



The first day's ceremony is known as Rugala or Chu Rugala (Chu is rice beer and rugala means pouring out). This ceremony is held at the house of the village chief or Nokma and is presided over by the priest or Tuara Nangapa. Amidst the burning of incense known as Sasat Soa, beating of the drum or Nagara and chants, the ceremony is performed with great solemnity. On the second day of the festival called Kakkat, young men and women dance, matching their steps to the beating of drums and the blowing of trumpets, made of horn. The dance begins in the house of the Nokma and then the dancers move from house to house, spreading happiness and goodwill.

The Wangala Dance is the most colorful and spectacular dance of the Garo community of Meghalaya.



Hazong Dance

The Hazongs, a small tribal group who live in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya, celebrate a festival every year just before the harvest. It is believed that proper observance of this festival not only invokes God's blessings for a good and plentiful harvest, but also ensures the well-being of the community throughout the coming year. The Hazong Dance is an integral part of this festival, with men and women dancing together to express their joy and happiness.

Chorkhela Dance

The social life of the Hazongs is associated with many other indigenous festivals too. One such important festival is Chor. The music and dances associated with this festival is known as Chorkhela. The young boys of the village form Chorkhela groups, comprising of ten to twenty five members. The boys move around the village singing and dancing and return home at night. This is called 'Dhawa Maga'. The boys sometimes also move from village to village displaying their singing and dancing talents. They spend the nights at different villages. These performances continue for four to eight days. The whole village community turns up to see the performances. The young performers take this opportunity to choose companions from amongst the young girls in the audience.



Lewatana Dance



The Hazong tribe of Meghalaya observe many Hindu festivals too, of which Diwali is the most important. The Lewatana Dance is an integral part of the Diwali festivities. Young boys and girls of the community perform this group dance, dressed in traditional attire. Through the words of the song they describe the interdependence of man and Nature.

Dorsegata Dance

A festival dance, in which, the women try to knock off the turbans of their male partners while dancing. If the woman succeeds, it is followed by peals of joyous laughter.

Shad Ksing/Phor (Drum Dance)

The rich cultural heritage and tradition of the Khasi community of Meghalaya has been preserved through the ages in the form of festivals, folk songs, folk dances and folk tales. Music, singing and dancing are an integral part of all their festivals and celebrations. The Shad Ksing/Phor (Drum Dance) is performed after the completion of all rituals associated with ensuring a safe journey to the heavens for the departed soul of a family member. The relatives and friends rejoice, as the departed soul has been united with the Almighty.



Harvest Dance

With the advent of Winter, the Khasis are busy in the fields thrashing the paddy. On an appointed day friends and relatives are invited to come to the fields for harvesting. In the field, the 'Nongshoh Kba', or the harvesters sing 'Phawars' (traditional Khasi couplets) calling for the winds to blow away the chaffs. After returning home the merriment continues. Men and women in traditional costumes dance with gay abandon and delight.





Shad Suk Mynsiem

Shad Suk Mynsiem is a colourful thanksgiving festival celebrated during Spring by the people inhabiting the Khasi Hills. Young virgin girls dressed in traditional finery and menfolk in colourful costumes participate in this dance to the accompaniment of drums and indigenous pipes called Tangonuri (considered by the people of Meghalaya as the queen of musical instruments). Through this festival, the people express their gratitude to the Almighty, who showers His blessings on them throughout the year. Prayers are also offered for the new year. The Shad Suk Mynsiem or Dance of the Joyful Heart includes the Shad Padish and the Shad Mastieh. The Shad Mastieh Dance celebrates victory in battle.





Ka Shad Mastieh

Ka Shad Mastieh is an ancient war dance of the Khasi community performed by a group of male dancers. The dance has repetitive movements of moving forward and backwards, bowing their heads and dropping their swords to their sides. The dancers stand in two groups facing each other and repeat the movements several times. Besides the highly decorative costume, the important accessories include the sword, the silver quiver and arrow. In their left hands, the dancers hold whisks, which signify purity, in their right hands, they hold swords which symbolise bravery. The dance is performed to honour the memory of their forefathers who had laid down their lives to protect the honour and dignity of the womenfolk of the community and to protect their land from enemies.



Shad Nongkrem

Shad Nongkrem, another interesting dance of the Khasi community is associated with Ka Pomblang Nongkrem. The dance is performed to propitiate the all powerful Goddess Ka Blei Synshar for a rich harvest and prosperity of the people. It is also a dance of thanksgiving, to express gratitude to the Almighty for a good harvest and peace and prosperity in the community. There is no fixed date for this festival, but is usually celebrated sometime in November. The steps of the dance are simple, so that the entire community can take part.

Behdienkhlam

Behdienkhlam is the most important Dance Festival of the Jaintias. It is an annual celebration, held in the month of July, after the completion of the sowing of seeds. The festival is primarily to invoke the blessings of the Creator for a good harvest and to drive away disease, illness. and unhappiness.

Shad Pliang

Shad Pliang or the Plate Dance is performed by the Jaintias on all festive occasions. Every festival and dance of the Jaintia community has its own history, some are connected with religious rituals whereas others are secular in character. Shad Pliang is not connected to any religious sentiment. The dance is performed by the women of the Jaintia community. Wearing the traditional Pnar, the dancers very skilfully balance plates on their bodies, in this interesting dance form. Through this dance, the young village maidens spread merriment and good cheer all around.

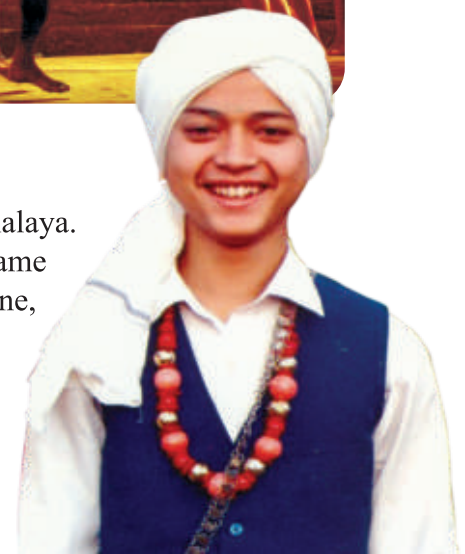
Hoko Dance

The Koches are a very ancient tribe of North East India. The Koches ruled the Western part of undivided Assam and North Bengal around the 15th century AD. The Koches are also found in Meghalaya. A ritualistic dance of the Koches is Hoko, performed to pay homage to the departed soul of the king or a leader. Through this dance, the members of community offer a guard of honour to the departed soul and inspire his family to be optimistic and look ahead.



Lahoo Dance

The Lahoo Dance is another traditional dance of the Jaintia tribe of Meghalaya. The original name of this dance is the Chipiah Dance. Presumably, the name Lahoo has its origins in the rhythmic chant of the singer to the dancing tune, 'hoo – ah – hoo'. The members of the tribe perform the Lahoo Dance to express gratitude to God for His bounteous blessings, mercy and love.



Mizoram

The mountainous state of Mizoram, perched on the high hills of the North Eastern corner of the country is a storehouse of natural beauty. It is flanked by Bangladesh on the West, Myanmar on the East and South, Assam and Manipur in the North. The hilly terrains, meandering streams, deep gorges and rich wealth of flora make Mizoram one of India's most beautiful states. Most of the Mizos are Christians. They form a close-knit society with a peculiar code of ethics. The Mizos love to sing and dance. They have a number of community dances, in which the musical accompaniment is provided by the drum and gong. The happy go lucky attitude of the people of Mizoram is reflected in their colourful dances.





Cheraw

Cheraw is a very old traditional dance of the Mizos, or people of Mizoram. It is believed that this dance form existed even in the 1st Century AD, when the Mizos were still in their early abode in the Yunan Province of China. They brought their dance with them when they migrated to the Chin Hills in the 13th Century AD and later to present day Mizoram. Some tribes of South East Asia also have similar dances in one form or the other, which are known by different names.

In the past, the Cheraw Dance used to be performed to ensure a safe passage for the departed souls of mothers who died at childbirth. Today, the Cheraw Dance is performed at harvest festivals, marriages and other happy occasions, where it has a role of sanctifying the proceedings.

It is not a community dance but a dance performed by a few select girls with exceptional skills. Full moon nights are also occasions for performing the Cheraw Dance. This dance is also known as the Bamboo Dance. Long bamboo sticks are used in the dance, held cross-wise on the ground by men who sit facing each other. The women dancers step alternately in and out of these spaces between the bamboos which close shut as the dancers feet are lifted out of them. The formations and footwork of the dancers have many variations. The sharp sounds produced by the sticks marks the rhythm of the dance. Girls dressed in colourful Mizo costumes of Puanchei, Kwarchei, Vakiria and Thibna dance in and out between the bamboo sticks.



Khuallam



Khuallam literally means ‘Dance of the Guests’. This dance is usually performed at the ‘Khuangchawi’ ceremony. In order to attain a place in ‘Pialral’ (Paradise), one has to earn the coveted title of ‘Thangchhuah’. To earn this title one has to prove his mettle in war or in hunting by killing many animals (which should include deer, barking deer, wild boars, wild gayals, vipers, hawks etc). The title can also be earned by performing various ceremonies, which includes playing host to community feasts. Thus, the title of Thangchhuah can be attained only by the brave or the rich. The community feasts are known as the ‘Khuangchawi’ ceremonies. Invitees from other villages attending this ceremony enter the dancing arena of the celebrations, dancing the Khuallam. The traditional hand woven Mizo cloth, the Pundum is wrapped over the shoulders of the dancers. The dance is performed by swaying the Pundum, which has black, red, yellow and green stripes. As in most other folk dances of the Mizos, the dance is accompanied by a set of gongs known as Darbu and usually no songs are sung. Many people take part in the dance.

Thanglam

Thanglam is another popular community dance of Mizoram, performed widely all over the state. Several varieties of the dance have evolved, based on the music of traditional songs known as Puma Zai. The men and women dancers, dressed in colourful traditional attire and headgear, are accompanied by musicians playing traditional musical instruments. The dance is an expression of the gay and carefree spirit of the people of Mizoram.

Chheihlam

The Chheihlam Dance, developed after AD 1900, is based on the traditional dance movements of the Thanglam. The dance is an expression of joy and happiness. In this dance, the people squat around in a circle on the floor, and sing to the beat of a drum and soft strains of a bamboo flute. Two dancers stand in the middle of the circle and sing the song and dance along with the music. The dance is usually performed after a round of rice beer in the cool evenings. The lyrics are



spontaneous, on the spot compositions, recounting the heroic deeds and escapades of members of the tribe and also songs of praise welcoming honoured guests who are spending the evening with them. A notable feature of this dance is the presence of an expert dancer who performs various movements with bent knees, stooping low with his limbs close to the body. The dancers wear colourful costumes and as the excitement of the dance increases, the people squatting on the floor join the dance and the audience is also invited to join in. The people of Mizoram get together in the evenings, after the days work and enjoy themselves by performing the Chheihlam Dance together. Nowadays, the dance has been adapted for performance on stage.

Sarlamkai / Solakia



The Sarlamkai or Solakia Dance is an impressive dance performed by the Pawi and Mara communities of Southern Mizoram. The dance is known as Sarlamkai by the Pawi community and Solakia by the Mara community. In the olden days, when the tribes were constantly at war with each other, a ceremony was held with the beheaded skull of the vanquished enemy. This ceremony was performed to ensure that the vanquished soul remained a slave to the victor, even when the victor died. The Sarlamkai or Solakia Dance is an integral part of this ceremony. Any member of the community who performed such a heroic deed that called for

such a ceremony was highly regarded and respected by all members of the community. Every member of the Pawi and Mara communities strived to be such a hero. When faced with external aggression, the members of the community depended on their heroes. As it is a dance of warriors, celebrating victory in war, there are no accompanying songs. Drums, cymbals and gongs are used to keep the beat. Boys and girls dressed in colourful traditional costumes, form a circle. The leader, dressed in his warrior's costume stands in the middle of the formation.

Chawnglaizawn Dance

The Chawnglaizawn Dance is another popular folk dance of the Pawi community of Mizoram. The dance is performed on the occasion of different festivals and also to celebrate a successful hunt. This community dance is performed by large number of dancers. Boys and girls standing in rows, dance to the beat of drums. Shawls kept over the shoulders, add colour to the dance, during the movement of the arms. Drums are the only musical accompaniments of this dance. The dance is also known as Pawi Chawiiglaizawii.



Chai

Chai is a popular dance performed on the occasion of Chapchar Kut, an important festival of the Mizos. According to ancient legend, once a king went out for a hunt with his men. The hunt was unsuccessful and they were returning without a kill. The men were disappointed and the king tried to enliven the atmosphere by inviting everyone over for a drink of rice beer at his palace. The get-together ended with singing and dancing and a sumptuous feast. The community continues to enliven the memory of this occasion, by celebrating it with music, dance and entertainment. This has given rise to the most important festival of the Mizos, the Chapchar Kut. In this dance, men and women stand alternately in circles, the women hold the men's waists and the men affectionately have their arms on the women's shoulders. The musicians are in the middle of the circle with their drum and Mithun horn. The musician who plays the drum choreographs the dance, while the one who plays the Mithun horn also chants the lyrics of the Chai song. The performance begins with the drummer beginning to beat the drum. At the fourth beat of the drum, the singers begin singing the Chai song. The dancers sway rhythmically in accordance with the beats of the drum. The dancers sing as they dance and use only a few musical instruments. Depending on the nuances followed, the Chailam has four versions - 'Chai Lamthai I', 'Chai Lamthai II,' 'Chai Lamthai III' and 'Chai Lamthai IV'.

Zangtalam

Zangtalam is a popular Paihte dance performed by men and women. In this dance, as in most folk and tribal dances, the dancers are the singers too. A drummer is the leader of the dance and provides the rhythm.

Mim Kut

In Mizoram, the word Kut means Festival. Mim Kut is a harvest festival, celebrated in the month of Bhadra. The girls wear their traditional attire of the Powan in Burmese style and sing and dance to celebrate the end of a good Jhum season.





Nagaland

Nagaland is a land of unimaginable beauty – the exquisitely picturesque sunrise and sunset, lush and green surroundings is home to several major tribes and many subtribes. It is a land of folklore passed down the generations through word of mouth. Music is an integral part of the lives of the people of Nagaland. Folk songs tell us about the brave deeds of the warriors and traditional heroes and also immortalise ancient love stories. The Nagas are fun loving people and life for them is one long festival. Singing and dancing is a part and parcel of all their festivities. Most of the dances are performed with a robust rhythm by dancers dressed in traditional colourful costumes or ceremonial attire distinct for each tribe.



Dances of the Ao Nagas

Tuti Testsu Tepong Tsungsang

The people of Nagaland greatly admire India's national bird, the peacock. The members of the Ao Naga tribe are very fond of watching the dance of the peacock. On festive occasions, young boys and girls, dressed in peacock feathers, imitate the movements of the peacock.



Archu Tasen

In other parts of the country people wait for occasions to celebrate, but in Nagaland the occasion is life itself. Singing and dancing are an integral part of all their celebrations. In the evenings they all gather at the Morungs which is like a community centre, to indulge in fun and frolic. This dance is performed by the Ao Naga tribe at the inauguration of a new Morung. As the Morung symbolizes feelings of brotherhood and oneness within the community, it is dedicated to the members of the community and this is an occasion to celebrate.



Moatsu Dance

Moatsu is an important festival of the Ao Naga tribe, celebrated in May, during the sowing season. From time immemorial, the Ao Nagas have celebrated this festival to please the Gods of Nature and invoke their blessings for a plentiful harvest. The entire community is involved in the preparations for this six day long festival. Singing and dancing is an important part of this festival. Unique dance compositions and dance movements make this a very interesting dance.



Wadir Naga Dance



The Wadir Naga Dance is regarded as one of the most respectful dances of the Ao tribe of Nagaland. The dance is performed in front of a warrior's house. The warrior has brought fame and glory to the village by bringing home the severed head of the enemy as a war trophy. The villagers pay their respect to the warrior for saving the village from enemy attack. In this dance, the thumping of the feet by the dancers symbolizes the crushing of the enemy force. Chorus singing accompanies the dance. The dancers enter the performing area in a single file. The dance begins with hop and step movements and the dancers form a circle. As the tempo of the dance increases, two concentric circles are formed and the dancers pretend to attack their enemies. The dance is usually performed in the month of January. The dance has no musical accompaniments, but war songs called 'Kaobolimshon Usouho Diamsho' are often sung which keep the rhythm of the brisk movements of the dancers.





Aluyimer Tsungsang

On completion of the sowing of seeds, the young boys and girls of the Ao Naga tribe get together and express their hopes for a rich harvest through joyous singing and dancing.





Naknarar Tsungsang Dance

Nuknarar Tsungsang is an aesthetic and emotive dance form of the Ao tribe of Nagaland, which is known for its love of singing and dancing. Literally translated, Nuknarar Tsungsang means 'Lovers' Dance', and this dance is performed by young men and women at various social events and on festive occasions. The youngsters gather at a Morung –which is a meeting place - where they celebrate their new found love through singing and dancing. The performers are usually lovers, or young people who have attained marriageable age and are in the process of getting to know each other better. Through this dance the young people express their feelings for their beloveds.

Chang Lo



The Chang Lo Dance is performed by the Chang tribe of Nagaland. The elaborate costume of the traditional Naga warrior and the finery of the women dancers makes the dance a visual treat. Also known as the ‘Sua Lua,’ this dance is an integral part of all festivities of the Chang community. It is performed during important festivals like the Poanglem and Nyaknyulem or in earlier times to celebrate victory over an enemy. The Poanglem Festival comes each year after the seeds are sown. Rice beer is brewed for the festivities and sprinkled on the ground to invoke the blessings of the deity, Sambule Maigha, for a good harvest and the prosperity of the village. The feasting and dancing last for three days.

Khupielile

The Nazu Festival is one of the most important festivals of the Pochury tribe of Nagaland. This festival is celebrated in February just before the sowing of seeds. The Khupielili Dance is an integral part of this ten day festival. The womenfolk of the village perform the dance and it is more entertaining and competitive than ritualistic. The dancers wear the Asounyi (a ribbon like head dress), Kileninyi (a long mekhala worn from the chest down to the calf), Achukhre (a necklace like ornament worn around the waist) Akhi (a traditional Naga armlet) Akhusa (a bangle for the forearm) and Asakhru (necklaces). This dance is noted for maintaining its harmonized movements, while the tunes and beats of the songs change constantly.

Akok Khi

The Akok Khi Dance is regarded as one of the most solemn dances of the Sangeim tribe of Nagaland. Holding hands, the men and women perform the Akok Khi dance during ceremonial festivals like Among Mong. The Among Mong Festival is a prayer festival in which the God of the House and the Three Cooking Stones of the kitchen are worshipped. The villagers gather together in the open fields and perform this community dance.

Mungyanta Harvest Dance

Mungyanta Harvest Dance is performed by the womenfolk of the Lotha tribe of Nagaland during the Tokhu Emong Festival. The dance is an expression of solidarity and brotherhood amongst the community. The Lothas believe that even if they have had a plentiful harvest, or have all the material comforts of the world, their happiness is incomplete if they cannot love each other and bond with every member of the tribe. Through this dance, they share their love and blessings with all and celebrate the end of a years hard work.



Litho Shele Pheta



The Litho Shele Pheta Dance of the Chakhesang community of Nagaland was originally performed only during the Sekrenyi Festival, in January, to celebrate a good harvest. The wealthy people of the village would invite everyone to a community feast, where this dance would be performed. Nowadays the dance is performed on all happy occasions. Melodious songs are sung in different octaves by the dancers themselves. The words of the song remind us that our home on earth is not our permanent home. But while we are here we should love each other and live in harmony. Fast and complex foot work, which keeps changing as the dancers change their formations is the unique feature of this dance.

Dances of the Rongmei Nagas



Dances are an integral part of all festivals of the Rongmei Naga community. Dances are different for the different festivals and different occasions.

Matri Lam or Matri Dance Festival is a festival celebrated by the younger members of the community. The festival is hosted by one village and the young people of other villages are invited. This conference of the youth is celebrated in the last week of December. The celebrations continue for three consecutive days. Feasting, dancing and merrymaking are an important part of the festival.

Gan-Ngai or Winter Festival is the grandest festival celebrated by the Rongmei Nagas. This festival of thanksgiving is celebrated in the months of December or January – the actual dates depend on the sighting of the moon. The celebrations continue for seven consecutive days. Traditional sports like long jump, wrestling and shotput are played. As in all festivities of the community, singing and dancing play an important role.



Thuanmei Lam

Thuanmei Lam, another colourful dance of the Rongmei Naga community, a dance of prayer and praise, is performed as a traditional welcome dance. This dance is also performed to celebrate success and to offer congratulations. The dance, accompanied by drums and cymbals, begins and ends in a slow rhythm.



Rengma Dances

The folk dances of the Rengma community are also expressions of joy and happiness. It is performed during the Ngado Festival. The dancers wear the traditional warrior's attire. All people, young and old, can join in the dance. Chanting sounds, folk tunes, war cries and yelling accompany the dance. Yellings express excitement, challenge and delight in victory. The different movements such as



stamping the ground, jumping and flexible zig zag movements reflect the strength, flexibility and alertness of the dancers who are representing warriors. The traditional costume worn by the dancers include shawls, sashes, aprons, leg-guards, necklaces, earrings, decorated head gear etc.

Bai Maijai

‘Busu’ is the annual post harvest festival of the Dimasa community. Feasting and merry-making are the highlights of the festival. Singing, dancing and playing traditional sports and games are an integral part of the festivities. As a preparation for the festival, rice is cleaned using a maijai (a home made rice sieve made from fine bamboo splits). In the olden days, the young boys and girls, who would be very excited about the arrival of ‘Busu’ would sing and dance with the maijai in their hands. Over the years this dance form became sophisticated and was adopted for stage presentation. Now a days the Maijais have been replaced by plates. But the name of the dance continues to be Bai Maijai or the Dance with the Rice Sieve.

Dances of the Zeme Community

Hecha Lim (Python Dance)

The Hecha Lim or the Python Dance is a popular dance of the Zeme community of Nagaland. The Zemes are a peace loving community and their dances reflect their devotion to peace. This is a dance of joy and happiness. The young and the old come together to enjoy themselves. The dance begins in a single file. They also end the dance in a single line – the formation resembles the python and hence the name of the dance.

Nkui Lim (Honeybee Dance)

The Nkui Lim or Honeybee Dance is another interesting dance of the Zeme community. The honeybee flits from flower to flower drinking nectar. The movements of the dancers are as dainty and delicate as those of the honeybee.

Ngaine Lim (Swallow Dance)

The swallow is a bird that always flies in groups in the sky. The young dancers of the Zeme tribe imitate the swallow in their lively and energetic movements.

Here Lim (Hornbill Dance)

The Here Lim Dance of the Zeme tribe also reflects the community's devotion to peace and harmony. The dance is performed at all happy occasions and festivals. The young boys and girls dance with joy and happiness like the hornbills.



Tamliakpe Lim (Butterfly Dance)



The people of Nagaland live in harmony with Nature. Every tribal community has dances that imitate the movements of animals, birds and insects.

The Tamliakpe

Lim is a dance performed during festivals and at social gatherings of the Zeliang tribe. Wearing colourful costumes, the dancers move gracefully, matching their steps to shouts and cries which form the rhythm of the dance. Through the dance, the performers seek the blessings of the Almighty for a plentiful harvest that will bring prosperity to the village. The dance is also performed to celebrate the home coming of warriors.



Tuluni Aphilo Kuyo

The Sema tribe of Nagaland celebrates one of their most important festivals, Tuluni for seven days in the first week of July. In the Sema language, Tulu means rice beer, while Ni means day. As the name suggests, the festival is characterized by days of drinking rice beer. The festival coincides with the ripening of crops, when the people are hopeful of a good harvest. The young and old both join in the celebrations. Eating and drinking, singing and dancing are an integral part of the festivities.



Sumi Naga Dance (Saulili)

Saulili or Imupi Sujo is an indigenous game belonging to the Sumi Naga tribe of Nagaland. The game which has been stylised into a dance has the underlying message of brotherhood and unity. Young boys of the community form a chain of people bound together, signifying cooperation, love and harmony. The dance is performed during all festivals especially the Tuluni festival, celebrated after completion of the cultivation work, as they wait for the harvest. The dance is also performed to celebrate victory in war. The warriors dressed in colourful costumes gather at the residence of the village chief to display their war trophies and to perform this dance of celebration. Through this dance they also assure the villagers that they would always ensure full security and protection for them.





Roina Dance

Many traditional dances of Nagaland, imitate the different forms, gestures and graceful movements of animals and birds. This particular dance calls upon the youth to be adorned in their beautiful costumes and to dance like the skylark, which hovers in the sky and lands merrily on the ground.



Yo Ho

Yo Ho is another interesting dance form of Nagaland. As in most of their dance forms, the dancers are the singers too. The dance is characterized by fast and complex foot work. Usually the theme of the songs is celebration of victory.

Angami Dance

The Angami Dance is the dance of the Angami community inhabiting the Kohima district of Nagaland. This traditional dance is performed by the men and women, young and old, right after the harvesting season to celebrate a good harvest.

Nyapou – Poangbu – Konyak Dance



The word Nyapou means woman and Poangbu means to sing and dance. Therefore, this dance is performed by women. Unlike the upper Konyak region of Nagaland, the lower Konyak region comprising of Wanti, Chingkhao and Chenlaisha has only one distinct dance form that is performed by only women. This dance is usually performed to welcome an important guest and to celebrate the installation of a new Kham (log drum).





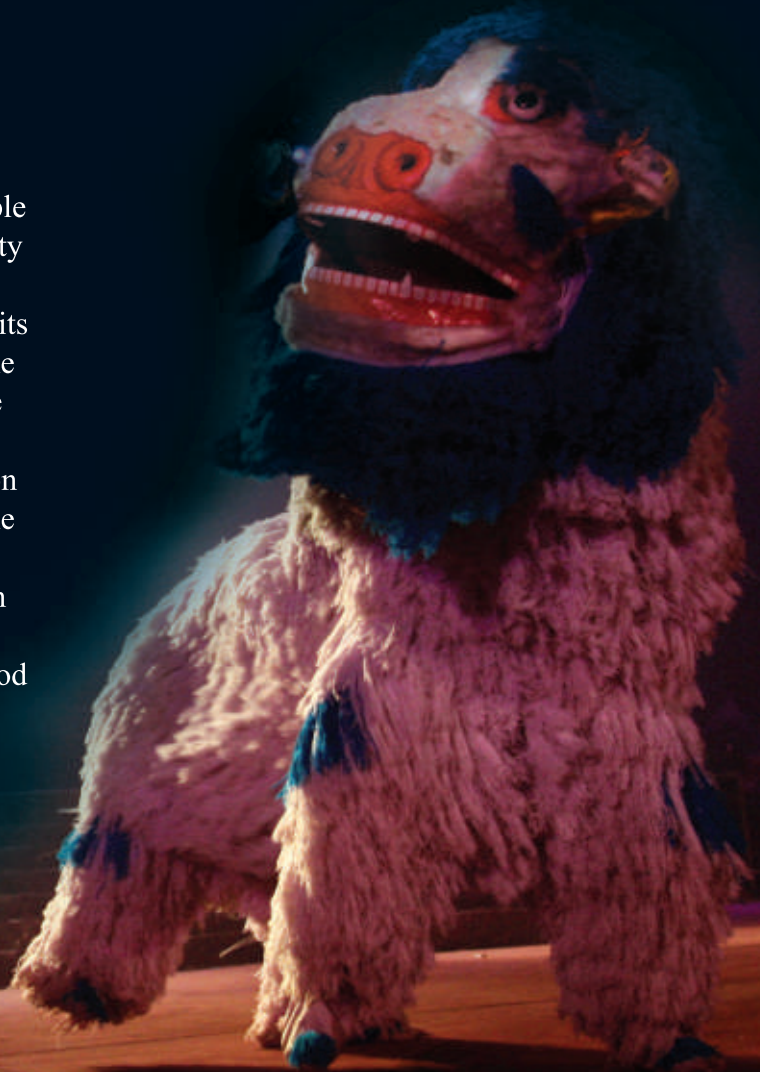
Sikkim

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.

Singhi Chham



Mount Khan-chen Dzongpa (Kanchanjunga) 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 hues 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 herdsman'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 rich mane is woven into cloth that protects him from the biting cold, its rich milk is churned into cheese and butter and its rich fibre is woven into blankets. This dance depicts the movements of the yak and the simple lifestyle of the herdsman of the mountains. The dancers don the costume and mask of the yak, and tune their steps to traditional songs and instrumental music.





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.





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.



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 every day 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.





Ghantu

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 fun and vigour is performed by young girls 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. The rains have been plentiful and the sunshine too has been generous—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.





Damsang – Lyang

The Lepcha community of Sikkim is a community of very hardworking 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.



Chu Faat

This is an ancient dance of the Lepcha community of Sikkim, performed in honour of Kanchanjunga 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.

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.



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.

Nyongri – Nyot

Cultivation of maize is an important agricultural activity in Sikkim. The dance depicts the entire process of ploughing the fields, tilling and 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.

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 served. Melodious songs accompany the dance.



Masked Dances of Sikkim – Monastic Dances



Sikkim's spectacular Masked Dances, the Chhams, are performed by monks in the courtyards of the Gomphas (monasteries) to celebrate religious festivals. Gouthar (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 in the courtyard of the Gomphas to celebrate religious occasions. Dressed in 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 of the Tibetan Buddhist Calendar, parallel to the months of December and January. The theme and style of the dances are different, but they all portray the triumph of good over evil.

Lama Dances are an inherent part of prayer meetings and 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.

Chabrung Dance



The Chabrung is an indigenous drum of the Limboo community of Sikkim, and part of their traditional and cultural identification. Legend goes 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 a pair of twins, one a man and the other a tiger. 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.

Lu Khangthamo



Lu Khangthamo is a Bhutia folk dance, performed to thank the Gods and deities of the three worlds, Heaven, Earth and Hell. The dancers are dressed in traditional costumes and ornaments. Accompanied by melodious songs, the dance is performed on all happy occasions like New Year Celebrations, House Warming Gatherings etc.

Tashi Sabdo

A Bhutia folk dance, which describes the custom of offering Khadas or Scarves.

Rechungma

Rechungma is a typical Simmimese folk dance, performed to show gratitude to the Almighty for his continued blessings. It is performed on all special occasions like marriages, child birth, social gatherings etc.



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 communities 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 Lusai community perform the Welcome Dance to welcome visitors to their home 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. 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 life style, mode of cultivation, culture and traditions. This 'working song' serves as an inspiration for them to work harder.

Dailo Nritya

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.

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.



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 goodbye 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).



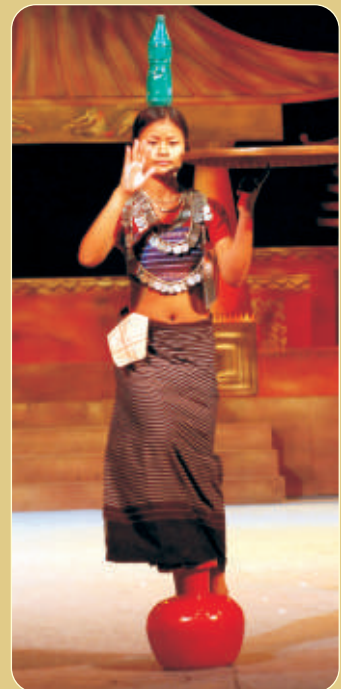
Galamuchamo

The Tripuri community 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.



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 is 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 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.





Sangrai – Mog Dance

Sangrai is a special festival of Tripura. During this three-day festival, the younger members of the Mog community move from one house to house carrying the pious wish yielding tree (Kalpataru) 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 in the premises of the Buddha temple. This traditional dance is known as the Wya Dance or the Lamp Dance.

Hai Hak Dance

The Hai Hak Dance is another dance connected with Jhum cultivation and 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.



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, Nandi and Bhiringi (the associates of Lord Shiva), the performers dance to the beat of drums and sing songs in praise of Lord Shiva.







Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre