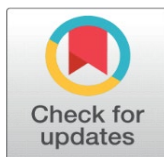
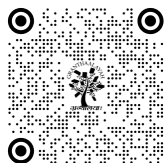


MANIPURI RAAS LEELA: THE REMARKABLE MANIPURI CLASSICAL DANCE

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ABSTRACT

Manipur is renowned for its cultural heritage, particularly in dance i.e., Manipuri Raas Leela, Pung Cholom, Lai Haraoba, Khamba Thoibi etc. Manipuri Raas Leela, the classical dance form is deeply rooted in the Vaishnavite tradition, depicting the love story of Shrimati Radhika and Lord Shri Krishna. It combines graceful movements, lyrical music and expressive gestures. Pung Cholom knew as the drum dance, this performance features dancers playing pung while performing acrobatic and vigorous movements. It is often performed during religious and cultural festivals. Lai Haraoba is an ancient ritualistic dance celebrating the creation of the universe. It involves intricate movements and is performed in honor of traditional deities called Umang Lai. Khamba Thoibi, a popular folk dance depicting the legendary love story of Khamba and Thoibi, characters from the ancient Moirang folklore. It involves synchronized movements and is often performed during the Lai Haraoba festival. These dance forms reflect the rich cultural and spiritual traditions of Manipur, blending storytelling, music and intricate choreography. This paper is showcase about the Raas Leela of Manipur.

Keywords: Raas Leela, Nata Sankirtana, Vaishnavism

1. INTRODUCTION

Objectives

- 1) To explain the Raas Leelas of Shri Shri Govindaji Temple
- 2) To explain the Local Raas Leelas performance
- 3) To explore the sequence of the five Raas Leela
- 4) To showcase the instrument of Manipuri Raas Leela

Manipur is a state in north-eastern India surrounded by the Indian states of Nagaland to the north, Mizoram to the south, and Assam to the west. It also shares an international border with Myanmar to the east. Manipur has a long history, with records of its existence going back to ancient times. It was an independent kingdom until it was merged with India in 1949. The state has witnessed significant historical events, including conflicts and movements for autonomy. The state has a vibrant

cultural scene, known for its classical dance form called Manipuri Raas Leela, Nata Sankirtana and Lai Haraoba.

The Manipuri Raas Leela is a classical dance form from the North-eastern Indian state of Manipur. Known for its delicate, graceful movements and devotional themes, this dance is deeply rooted in the Vaishnavism tradition and is dedicated to the love story of the Hindu god Shri Krishna and his consort Shrimati Radhika, along with the gopis. The narratives of the Raas Leela are derived from the Bhagavata Purana. They typically depict episodes from Shri Krishna's life, focusing on his youthful dalliance with Shrimati Radhika and the Gopis in the idyllic setting of Vrindavan. These stories symbolize the soul's yearning for divine love and union with the Supreme Being. In the Raas Leela, the Bhakti and prem of Bhagavata could be seen. Raas Leela is one of the ritualistic performances that lead to the Lord and also fulfil the eternal happiness of all the devotees.

The Raas Leela is believed to have been introduced to Manipur in the 18th century by Rajashree Bhagyachandra Maharaj, who had a vision of Shri Krishna and subsequently dedicated himself to the propagation of Vaishnavism. Under his patronage, the dance evolved as a significant form of spiritual and cultural expression. The Raas Leela had taken the essence from varied texts which in performance bring out the unique piece of art. The Raas Leela only represents a fragment of the vast Sankirtana tradition.

Nata Sankirtana is a traditional form of devotional music and dance. It is closely associated with the performance of Raas Leela, which is a significant cultural and religious event. Nata Sankirtana often accompanies the Raas Leela, enhancing the spiritual and emotional atmosphere with its devotional music and dance. Before the Raas Leela, Nata Sankirtana performance begins as Purvaranga and concludes with Brindavan Varnan through Gouranga Bhavi. Nata Sankirtana and Raas Leela are deeply spiritual and are performed during religious festivals and ceremonies, fostering a sense of devotion and communal harmony.

2. MANIPURI RAAS LEELA OF SHRI SHRI GOVINDAJI TEMPLE

The Manipuri Raas Leela at Shri Shri Govindaji Temple in Imphal, Manipur, is a captivating and spiritually enriching performance that holds immense cultural and religious significance. Govindaji Temple, dedicated to Shri Krishna and Shrimati Radhika, serves as the perfect venue for this classical dance, which narrates the divine love stories of these deities. Under Rajashree Bhagyachandra Maharaj's patronage, the temple became a central site for Vaishnavite worship and the performance of Raas Leela, embedding it deeply into the cultural fabric of the region.

The Raas Leela performances at Shri Shri Govindaji Temple are meticulously choreographed to depict various episodes from the life of Shri Krishna, especially his playful interactions with Shrimati Radhika and the Gopis. Performing the Raas Leela at Shri Shri Govindaji Temple is more than just a cultural event; it is a profound act of devotion. For the dancers and the audience, the performance is a form of worship, aiming to evoke divine presence and blessings. The event fosters a strong sense of community and continuity, connecting the people of Manipur with their rich spiritual and cultural heritage.

In Shri Shri Govindaji Temple, three forms of Raas Leela i.e., Maha Raas, Basanta Raas and Kunja Raas perform. These Raas Leelas perform last the whole night begins with Nata Sankirtana around 8 p.m. and continues the whole night till to the next day's early morning around 2 to 3 a.m. In Shri Shri Govindaji Temple, there is no

Krishna and Radha abhisar due to the representation of Shri Radha Govinda idols at the centre of the Raas Mandal.

3. RAAS LEELA OF LOCAL TEMPLES

The Raas Leela at local temples in Manipur is a cherished tradition that showcases the region's rich cultural and spiritual heritage. Performed primarily during religious festivals, these enactments of the divine love stories of Shri Krishna and Shrimati Radhika hold deep significance for the local communities, blending devotion, art and tradition.

In Manipur, numerous local temples, apart from the renowned Shri Shri Govindaji Temple, serve as important venues for the performance of Raas Leela. These temples are often the centre of community life, providing a space for worship, social gathering, and the continuation of cultural practices. Each temple has its unique customs and styles of presenting the Raas Leela, contributing to the diversity within this classical dance form.

The Raas Leela at local temples is a community-centred event. It involves participation from various members of the community, from young girls and women who perform the dance to musicians and singers who provide the musical backdrop. For the local community, the Raas Leela is not just a form of entertainment but a deeply spiritual experience. It is seen as an act of devotion, with the performers and audience alike engaging in a collective expression of reverence and love for Shri Krishna and Shrimati Radhika. The dance serves as a medium to invoke divine blessings and foster a sense of unity and continuity within the community. The Raas Leela at local temples in Manipur is a beautiful manifestation of the religion's cultural and spiritual ethos.

In the local mandaps five Raas Leela i.e., Maha Raas, Basanta Raas, Kunja Raas, Nitya Raas and Diva Raas are performed begin with Nata Sankirtana. In the local mandap Krishna and Radha abhisar are performed due to no Shri Radha Krishna idols are not represented.

4. FIVE RAAS LEELA OF MANIPUR

In Manipur tradition, Raas Leela is a classical dance form that narrates the divine love story of Lord Shri Krishna and Shrimati Radhika through expressive dance and music. There are five types of Raas Leela, each with its unique themes, moods and presentation styles. These performances are deeply rooted in the Vaishnavite tradition of Manipur and are integral to the cultural and spiritual life of the region. Here are the five types of Raas Leela:-

Maha Raas: Maha Raas is the most elaborate and significant form of Raas Leela. It depicts the divine love play of Lord Shri Krishna with Shrimati Radhika and the Gopis on the full moon night of Kartik (October – November). The storyline revolves around the Raas Leela in the forest of Vrindavan, where Lord Shri Krishna multiplies himself to dance with each Gopi simultaneously, symbolizing the omnipresence of the divine. And also show about shedding ego and pride. His Gopis feel sorrow with Lord Shri Krishna antadhyana (disappearance) due to their pride and ego. Lord Shri Krishna reappears on seeing their true love and devotion.

Sequence of Maha Raas

Raga Macha i.e., Nuwa Raga play by Rasdhari follow Kanraga by Sutradhari, Vrindaban Baranan, Vaishnav Vandana, Krishna Abishar, Punglon Jagoi (Dance with music), Arrive Lord Shri Krishna at Kunja, Song of Sutra, Lord Shri Krishna Ukta, Gopi

Ukti, Gopi Lengthokpa, Gopi Raga, Jagoi Mapop, Men, Tanchap, Chali, Bhangi, Krishna Nartan, Menkup, Punglon Jagoi (Dance with Music), Chali, Radha Nartan, Menkup, Chali, Tanchap, Punglon Jagoi (Dance with Music), Chali, Chari, Chali, Krishna Antadhyan, Gopi search Krishna, Gopi Dialogue, Radha Krishna Lengthokpa, Radha Ukti, Krishna Ukti, Radha Ukti, Gopi Ukti, Radha Ukti, Sakhi Ukti, Gopi Ukti, Krishna Abirbhut Krishna Ukti, Dui Taal, Gopi Lengthokpa, Punglon Jagoi (Dance with Music), Rupak Taal, Tanchap, Punglon Jagoi (Dance with Music), Jalkeli chali, Punglon Jagoi (Dance with Music) and Grihagaman.

Kunja Raas: Kunja Raas focuses on the secret rendezvous of Radha and Krishna in the groves of Vrindavan. It is performed on the full moon night of Aswin (October/November). It portrays the playfull and intimate movements shared by the divine couple, emphasizing the theme of divine love and union.

Sequence of Kunja Raas

Raga Macha play by Rasdhari follow Raga Alap by Sutradhari but in Govindaji Temple start by Vrindabali Raga, Vrindavan Barnan, Vaishnav Bandana, Krishna Abhisar, Krishna arrive at Kunja, Murali Nad, Sakhi Ukti, Radha Ukti, Radha Abhisar, Krishna Ukti, Gopi Ukti, Chali, Gopi Lengthokpa, Gopi Raga, Mapop, Rasmen, Tanchap, Chali, Sur Bhakta, Bhangi, Krishna Naktak, Vishnu Taal, Chali, Radha Nartan, Sanja of Binodini Radha, Chali, Atma Sampan, Pushpanjali and Prathana Aarti.

Basanta Raas: Basanta Raas is performed during the spring festival of Holi, celebrating the season of renewal and love. On the full moon night of Chaitra (March/April), Basanta Raas is performs. It depicts Krishna's playful interactions with Radha and the Gopis, involving the throwing of colour and joyous celebration. And also depicts the Radha Man, this episode is about Lord Shri Krishna dalliance with Chandrabali, Radha's anger and Lord Shri Krishna attempt to appease her.

Sequence of Basanta Raas

Raga Macha play by Rasdhari follow Lalit Raga by Sutradhari, Vrindaban Baranan, Vaishnav Bandana, Dialogue the idea of Krishna and Abhisar by Sutra, Krishna Abhisar, Menkup, Tanchap, Longlei Uplei, Menkup, Muruli Nad, Bangsi Anuraga of Radha, Men Tanchap, Menkup, Sakhi Santana, Chamor Seba, Chali, Krishna Ukti, Gopi Ukti, Sutra Geet, Gopi Raga i.e., Basanta Raga, Vrindaban Barnan, Tintaal, Menbhusna, Tanchap, Chali, Chari Taal, Chali Areibi, Krishna Rup, Duitaal, Tanchap, Chali, Radha Nartan, Menkup, Chali, Punglon Jagoi (Dance with the rhythm of Pung), Chali, Abir Khel, Sakhi Ukti, Chali, Menkup, Chali, Krishna dance with Chandrabali, Radha Man, Song of Sutra, Krishna Ukti, Sakhi Ukti, Sutra Geet, Radha Ukti, Krishna Ukti, Radha Geet, Radha Ukti, Sakhi Ukti, Krishna Ukti, Song of Sutra, Sakhi Seba, Song of Sutra, Yugal Prathana, Lei Chaiba (throwing flower), Yugal Aarti, Grihagaman and Gopi Ukti.

Nitya Raas: Nitya Raas is a daily devotional dance performed as a form of worship, rather than a specific narrative. There is no strict codifications regarding the specific day and season. It can be perform on any day and season. It embodies the eternal love of Krishna and Radha, symbolizing the perpetual and timeless nature of their divine relationship.

Sequence of Nitya Raas

Raga Macha play by Rasdhari follow Raga Alap by Sutradhari, Vrindaban Baranan, Vaishnav Bandana, Bandana Slok, Sutra Geet, Krishna Abhisar, Punglon Jagoi (Dance with Music), Menkup, Krishna arrive Kunja, Krishna calling Brinda, Brinda Ukti, Sutra Geet, Making Saja by Krishna with Brinda, Krishna looking the way, Krishna Ukti, Brinda Ukti, Krishna Ukti, Muruli Nad of Krishna, Sutra Geet,

Radha Abhisar, Menkup, Krishna Ukti, Radha Ukti, Sutra Geet, Tintaal, Brinda Ukti, Yugal Rup, Chali, Gopi Lengthokpa, Taal Khoirabit, Gopi Raga, Tintaal Macha, Men Bhusna, Tanchap, Chali, Bhangi, Krishn Tandab, Mala Hunba Dance of Krishna, Chali, Radha Nartan, Chali, Prathana, Lei Chaiba (throwing flower), Prathana, Aati, Grihagaman and Gopi Ukti.

Diva Raas: Diva Raas is performed during the day and focuses on specific episodes from the life of Krishna and Radha. It is the depiction of Shrimati Radhika's arrival at Shri Krishna Radhakunja. The main reason for creating Diva Raas is to give an opportunity to the VaishnavBhaktas to offer Bhakti and prayer at the convenient day time throughout the season.

Sequence of Diva Raas

Raga Macha play by Rasdhari follow Kandap Raga by Sutradhari, Geet Bhabi, Krishna Abhisar, Krishna Aagman, Geet, Punglon Jagoi (Dance with rhythm of pung), Geet, Punglon Jagoi (Dance with rhythm of Pung), Geet, Radha Anuraga Slok, Geet, Bow down by Gopi, Geet, Duti Sampad, Geet, Sutra Geet, Geet, Krishna Dialogue, Tulsi Geet, Krishna Geet, Tulsi Kasturi Dialogue, Geet, Tulsi Geet, Geet Sajol, Jatra, Radha Abhisar Geet, Geet, Abhisar, Geet, Sara Darsan Krishna dialogue, Radha Dialogue, Sakhi Geet, Yugalrup, Geet, Making Rasmandal by Brinda, Geet, Gopi Raga, Mapop, Chali, Geet, Bhangi Achouba, Krishna Nartan, Geet, Radha Nartan, Geet, Punglon Jagoi (Dance with the rhythm of Pung), Aananga Manjuri Geet, Geet, Phagul Kel geet, Start Taal, Phak Taal, Sutra Geet, Slok, Diba Sayan, Sambhok, Sabadhin, Prathana, Geet, Prathan, Yugal Aarti and Kunja Aarti.

Each of these Raas Leelas plays a crucial role in the cultural and spiritual life of Manipur. These performances are not just artistic expressions but also act of devotion, aiming to connect the audience and performers with the divine.

Instrument of Manipuri Raas Leela

The music of Manipuri Raas Leela is integral to the dance, providing both rhythm and melody to enhance the performances emotional and spiritual depth. The instruments used are traditional and contribute to the unique soundscape that characterizes Manipuri classical music. Here are the primary instruments used in the Raas Leela:

Conch Shell – The conch shell represents purity and the primordial sound of creation. Its use emphasizes the divine nature of the events being portrayed and sets a spiritual tone.

Pung – The Pung is a key instrument in the Manipuri Raas Leela. It is a barrel-shaped drum played with the hands, producing a variety of rhythmic patterns essential to the dance.

Mandira – The Mandira are a pair of small cymbals used to accentuate the rhythm and add a bright, metallic sound to the music.

Flute – The Flute is a bamboo flute that brings a melodious and lyrical quality to the music.

Esraj – The Esraj is a traditional string instrument. The instrument typically has four main playing strings and several sympathetic strings, which resonate to enhance the sound. It provides the melodic accompaniment to the dance.

The Instrument of Manipuri Raas Leela, each with its unique role and technique, come together to create an enchanting and immersive musical experience.

5. CONCLUSION

Manipuri Raas Leela is a profound expression of the cultural and spiritual heritage of Manipur. Rooted in the Vaishnavite tradition, these performances are more than just artistic displays; they are acts of devotion that seek to embody and celebrate the divine love in Krishna and Radha. Each of the five distinct Raas Leelas brings a unique aspect of this narrative to life, showcasing the region's rich traditions, intricate dance forms and melodious music.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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