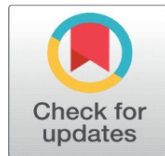


EVOLUTION OF PUNG IN MANIPURI NATA SANKIRTANA

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ABSTRACT

'Time/Hour' is Pung to the Meitei and it is Wanglen archaically and also the percussive instrument of rhythm in dance and music is also known as pung. Definitely a Pung is a percussion made of a cylindrical object covering its face end or ends with leather. On the other hand, affixing different sylleptic term to the Pung denotes different types of Pung; e.g. (Tyanyei+Pung) Tanyeipung, (Langte+Pung) Langteping, etc. However, in present days the term Pung simply denotes only the kind of Pung used in the Manipuri Nata Sankirtana as it is named Nata Sankirtana Pung. This may be reason of the Pung in the Manipuri Nata Sankirtana becoming so popular.

The Meities have been using Pung in festivals rituals since earlier day. So the origin of Pung may categorized in two definitive forms as:- (1) Prehistoric, and (2) Historical. In protohistoric or prehistoric days where conventional Pung was not known to be made of, when men used logs for percussion purposed may be termed as the first kind of Pung; e.g. Khong and Howon to the meities. After the event of this type of percussion, Meitei developed Pung using cylindrical wooden log covered in hollow side ends with leather to fasten with cane. Afterward the fastening cane was replaced with leather strips with rings: Chago. Different types of Pung used by the Meiteis in the earlier days are- Lagteping, Tanyeipung, Khunping, Laipung, Lanping, Haraopung and Paujelpung.

As per the history, Bhagyachandra Maharaj reascended the throne of Manipur with the help of Ahom King Swargadeva. The king ordered his artisan Hao Chaoba who was a resident of Nungba Village to bring wooden log for making Pung for using in the worship of Lord Krishna. The said man brought a log Wang, a special kind of tree. The log was given to one Lakshman Singh and entrusted to make Pung especially for Nata Sankirtana. Forwarding thus, in 1779 A.D. SriSriGovinda was initiated and installed at Canchipur with five days performance of Ras Dance at the Rasmandal. In the Nipa Pala of that Ras Dance, Maharaja Bhagyachandra himself led the part of playing Pung with Ojha Premananda, where Ngoubam Shai and Dhar Shai participated in the opening Nata Sankirtana respectively as the lead singer and second lead singer. Thus the type of Pung used in the Nata Sankirtana became to be commonly known as Nata Sankirtana Pung, Meitei Pung or simply Pung. Sometime at different places the Meitei Pung is also known as Mridanga. Alongside the Meitei Pung has become to play an important and big role in the day life of a Manipuri Gaudiya Vaishnavas from its birth to death.

Likewise consecutive successors after Maharaja Bhagyachandra like- Chourjit, Chandrakirti, etc. also worked to contribute to the development of Meitei Pung by introducing new rhythmic forms of Taals. Further, Meitei Pung has taken big roles in introducing our state Manipur and its peoples in India and abroad after introduction of its stage performances since 1939 A.D.

Keywords: Pung = Drum in Manipuri; Nata Sankirtana = Form of Manipuri Kirtan singing with dance; Chakpa = An indigenous schedule caste of Maipur; Panam Ningthou = Guardian god of Andro; Kaab / Gaab Thaab = Rubbing of black polishing material mixed with iron dust and rice layer by layer on the faces of Pung

1. INTRODUCTION

'Time/ Hour' is *Pung* to the Meitei and it is *wanglen* archaically and also the percussive instrument of rhythm in dance and music is also known *Pung*. Definitely a *Pung* is a drum made of a cylindrical object covering its face end or ends with leather.¹ On the other hand, affixing different sylleptic term to the *Pung* denotes different types of *Pung*; e.g. (*Tanyei+Pung*) *Tanyeipung*, (*Langte+Pung*) *Langteping*, (*Haraao+Pung*) *Haraopung*, (*Khun+Pung*) *Khunping*, (*Lan+Pung*) *Lanping*, etc. However, presently the term *Pung* denotes only the kind of *Pung* used in the *Manipuri Nata Sankirtana*. This may be reason of the *Pung* in the *Manipuri Nata Sankirtana* becoming so popular.

Etymologically, the origin of the term *Pung* may be related to the Meitei belief of cosmological creation myths. When *Laibungthou Mapan* (Nine Gods) and *Lai Nura Taret* (Seven Maiden Goddess) started mounding for creation of this earth, they stopped to rest and drank wine at the completion of every mound (*Leipung*). The drinking time of wine by the God and Goddesses came to be known as *Yuthak* (drinking of wine) and their time of *Yuthak* at the completion of every eight mounds as *Yuthak Ama* (one resting and drinking time). For that reason the God and Goddesses took the time of a *Yuthak Ama* to another *Yuthak Ama* as one *Pung* (hour).² From this mythical belief, it is believed that the term *Pung* is deflected from the term *Leipung* which denotes the hour of time as well as percussive instrument drum of the Meitei.

Objective: This write up is to highlight the genesis of Nata Sankirtana Pung in Manipur to determine the exact time period of the performing art form of Pung started in Manipur.

2. ORIGIN OF PUNG IN MANIPUR

The Meities have been using *Pung* in festivals rituals since earlier day. So the definitive form as:- (1) Prehistoric, and (2) Historical. In protohistoric or prehistoric day when conventional *Pung* was not known to be made of and where men used logs for percussion purposes may be termed as the first kind of *Pung*; e.g. *Khong* and *Howon* to the Meiteis. After the event of this type of percussion, Meitei developed *Pung* using cylindrical wooden log covered in hollow side ends with leather to fasten with cane. Afterward the fastening cane was replaced with leather straps with rings; Chago.³

In the developmental process of *Pung*, there must have been notable stages of development. People of Manipur, especially by Meiteis divides its earlier epoch of civilization into four era known as *Hanko*; (1) *Ko Hanko*, (2) *Thoi Hanko*, (3) *Tayo Hanko*, and (4) *Poi Hanko* and; and later into another four stages of civilizational era known as *Chak*: (1) *Hayichak*, (2) *Hayachak*, (3) *Khunnungchak*, and (4) *Langbachak*.⁴ And it is generally taken that the *Pung* might have been developed among the Meiteis since the start of the epochs of *Chak*.

Though with little dose of obscurity, most scholars have agreed of starting the recorded history of Manipur from the reign of Meitei King Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33-158 AD) during the period of *Langbachak* epoch. As such record of first making *Pung* in Manipur during the reign of Meitei King Khuiyoi Tompok is found in the Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Royal Chronicle of Manipur.

*Sakabda 76 to Khuiyoi Tompokna ningthou ouye, Mahakthakta Shaji mawunna pung tinduna yeibada Shajigum khongye. Madudagi Kei mawunna amuk tingbada Keigum khongye. Adu matungda Shan mawunna tingbadagi Pung makhon thokhiye.*⁵

From the above, it can be understood that the first ever making of *Pung* was experimented and completed during the reign of Meitei King Khuiyoi Tompok (154-264 AD) by firstly using buckskin which produced sound like deer cry, secondly used tiger hide which produced sound of roaring tiger, and finally used cowhide which produced desirable sound of a drum. As such, it can be said that since that time *Pung* could have been developed technically to some extent with composition of true drumming forms of different rhythm, beats, etc. The event of making and introducing *Pung* in its general drumming form also led to the establishment of *Tanyeishang* (clock house) to announce time of day by beating *Pung*. The kind of *Pung* used for heralding time in *Tanyeishang* is known as *Tanyei Pung*.

According to *Chakpa-Tingshanglon*, an old Meitie Manuscript, the first ever kind of *Pung* for dance and music was made and introduced by Chakpa Tingshang in around 159 AD. Also the kind of double sided *Pung* was started introducing from the time.⁶ Hence it can be concluded that *Pung* was greatly developed in Manipur during the time of Meitei King Khuiyoi Tompok. Thus there are different types of *Pung* which have been used in Manipur since much earlier than historical days like; *Khong*, *Howon*, *Langtepung*, *Tanyei pung*, *Khunpung*, *Laipung*, *Panapung*, *Haraopung*, *Lanpung*, *Paujelpung*.

3. NATA SANKIRTANA PUNG

The arrival of Sankirtana in Manipur brought changes in the forms of *Pung*. Originally most of *Pung* used by the Meiteis was made of hollowed cylindrical log covered at side faces with leather at its faces, and fasten with straps, and almost the entire faces are rubbed with black polishing material mixed with iron dust and rice layer by layer to make slightly thicker which is known as *Kaab/Gaab Thaaba*. But, there is no any concrete evidence to prove that the *Kaab/Gaab Thaaba* in the face of *Pung* was introduced during the time of any particular Meitei King. However, there are different views of scholars in the field of Nata Sankirtana in this regard, as:

- 1) Singing of Sankirtana started in Manipur with the worshipping of Lord Vishnu from 1404 AD, during the reign of Meitei King Kiyamba. During the reign, three Kirtana singers which were known as *Kittana* came from Bangladesh for singing in the worship of Lord Vishnu. The team of *Kittana* singers was known as *Bangadesh Pala* and the Pung they used as *Bangadesh Pung*.
- 2) During the reign of Meitei King Khagemba (1597-1652 AD), group of immigrants from *Nongchup Haram* (West) brought with them a kind of *Pung* known as *Khol* for using in their hymn and other rituals.
- 3) Yet in another view, *Kaab/Gaab Thaaba* in the faces of *Pung* might have introduced in Manipur not earlier than the time of Meitei King Garibaniwaz and not later than the period of Maharaja Bhagyachandra.

From the above different views, it can be assumed that the *Nata Sankirtana Pung* had been shaped since the time of worshipping Lord Vishnu with introduction of Sankirtana singing and *Bangadesh Pung*. However as per a book: *Ariba Pala Bangadesh Leibakchaba Sevakki Sankirtana amasung Eshei*, there was no Sankirtana at the time of worshipping Lord Vishnu.⁷ Secondly, by reviewing the narration of coming *Khol* during the time of Meitei King Khagemba, the book: *Meitei Jagoi Anishuba* mentioned that the advent of *Khol* was only during the reign of Maharaja Chandrakiti.⁸ Thirdly, *Kaab/Gaab Thaaba* in the faces of *Pung* which is in the view, was introduced not earlier than the time of Meitei King Garibaniwaz and not later than the time of Maharaja Bhagyachandra is a matter of further discussion.

The foundation of Sankirtana was laid during the time of Meitei King Garibaniwaz is understandable as per the record in *Cheitharol Khumbaba:- In the Kum (year) of Ngairangbam Mungyamba, Saka 166... that day sang death anniversary of Sija Khuraileima Punyabati*.⁹ This might have been a form of introducing Sankirtana singing as the predecessor of the present days Nata Sankirtana in Meitei; death rituals. Then again, an entry of performing Sankirtana during the time of Meitei King Bharatshai is also found in the same Royal Chronicle: “On the 5th of Ingna, Ibungshi Anantashai goes to Tomphang Hiden for collecting bones of his late father, performed shradha with Sankirtana Singing.”¹⁰ From this, it can be clearly assumed that Sankirtana singing though under developed to its fullest form, its performances were in vogue on the ritualistic occasions of Sankirtana performances, what kind of *Pung* was used is also an important matter of assumptive study.

According to some scholarship views, the *Bangadesh Pala* was introduced during the time of Meitei King Garibaniwaz. Elangbam Nilakanta asserts about the introduction of Bangadesh Pala as:

“During the reign of great Manipuri King Garibaniwaz (1709-1748 AD) who adopted Ramandi Cult, an old school of ‘Bangadesh or Ariba Pala’ became popular and is still preserved and practiced at the royal palace and some other centre of Manipur.”¹¹

From the above, it can be noted that Bangadesh Pala or Ariba Pala was introduced along with Ramandi Cult during the reign of Meitei King Garibaniwaz. In this regard Aribam Chitreshwar Sharma also mentioned in his book *Manipuri Sankirtana Vichar* as follows:-

*Meidingu Garibaniwazgi matamda Bangadeshtagi lakpa Kirtania kharana Manipurda Sankirtana Shakkhi Masi Garibaniwaz Maharajna Maisnam Laibagi kum shaka 1639 Mera thaada Guru Gopaldasta Ramandi Dharma louraba matamda oigani. Maramdi sheishak asigi ragada “Ram Ram Govinda Ram” ashinachingba shijnnei. Bangadeshtagi laakkhiba Kirtaniashingna “Maharaj eikhoydi Bangadeshtagini” haina paukhumjabdagi makhoygi Palabu Bangadesh – Bangadesh Pala haina khangnari. Houjik houjikfaoba Bangadesh Palagi esheigi Raga da “Ram Ram Govinda Ram” haiba shabda chatnari.*¹²

The above assertion clearly indicates that the Bangadesh Pala became a Sankirtana Pala for the king during the time of Maharaja Garibaniwaz. However to the contrary, there are also scholarship views of not starting Sankirtana till 1752 AD in Manipur.¹³ This is also a matter of thorough discussion. In the book *Meitei Punglon Sheigonnabi*, it is mentioned the most Gurus of the Bangadesh Pala opined the introduction of the same only during the reign of Maharaja Bhagyachandra (1763-1798 AD).¹⁴

From the above discussions, it may be said that the *Bangadesh Pala* though might have been introduced during the reign of Maharaja Garibaniwaz, it was not a form of Sankirtana commonly popular among the masses. It might have developed more in a complete form only during the time of Maharaja Bhagyachandra. The word “Pala” in the nomenclature “Bangadesh Pala” itself is a term of Maharaja Bhagyachandra. Hence it can be concluded that the type of *Pung* used in the *Bangadesh Pala* is a form of *Nata Pung*. The *Nata Sankirtana Pung* introduced during the time of Maharaja Bhagyachandra is the type of *Pung* which has bulging centre and faces rubbed with black polishing materials: *Kaab/Gaab Thaaba*. So, to

trace the origin of this type of Pung, it is necessary to study from the view points of developmental Manipuri cultural traditions.

It is impossible to denote accurately of the term “culture” in Manipuri. Generally accepted meaning of “culture: is defined as “the tastes in art and manners that are favoured by a social group and all the knowledge and values shared by a society.” Culture has no definite forms or norms. It is a form of tradition accepted and follows by a group if community peoples’ society within a society. It is simply termed as “Naat” in Manipuri.

In this regard it may be mentioned about the different norms of culture adopted by a group of community. These aspects of culture are not self originated along with the progress of a community society in its accompanying history of the community, but a thing slowly penetrated through simulation from others to the traditions of a group of community. Therefore the present colours of Manipuri cultural traditions are form of milieu that are blended forms of local cultural traditions and those entered from outside.

There have been many events and advents in relation to the history of Manipuri song, music and dances. Also there had been many courses of changes in religion, politics, etc. in Manipur. Many from outside came to Manipur for business purposes and many others arrived for settlement and brought many changes in way of communication and other aspects. Therefore, there must have been outside influences in the original forms of Manipuri song, music and dances too. In this context, studying the events of political courses that took place during the reign of Maharaja Bhagyachandra will be helpful in tracing the introduction of *Kaab/Gaab Thaaba* in the side ends of *Pung* in Manipur.

As soon as Maharaja Bhagyachandra ascended the throne of Manipur, king of Moirang Khellei Nungang Telheiba in conspiracy with Ava, uprose and brought chaos in Manipur. Maharaja Bhagyachandra fled and with the help from Cachari King, took refuge in the court of Ahom King Swargadeva Rajeshwar. Ahom King Swargadeva gave an audience with the Cachari king and Manipuri king at Bar Tora of Rangpur palace where the two kings showed their respects to the Ahom king, which was grandeur to nearby spectators. On that occasion a song and music programme led by one Jayananda was performed on which the two refuge kings were so attracted and pleased. The occasion is described by Rajkumar Sanahal Singh as:-

Manipur amasung Cachargi ningthoushingbu pelhannabagidmakta Assam leibaakki Bhauna “Ravan Bodha” haiba shumaang leela adu utlammi.”¹⁵

The show of *Ravan Bodha* was a play in the format of *Bhauna*, a traditional vaishnav cultural show of Assam with the essence of Indian *Natya* in which about 700 artists participated. Meitei King Bhagyachandra was impressed and inspired by the play so much that led to introduced Ras Dance in Manipur.¹⁶ L. Birendrakumar Singh writes of *Ravan Bodha*, Ahom King Rajeshwara also arranged a performance of *Pakhawaj*, and Indian drum for King Bhagyachandra:-

Reception of Jai singh..... on that occasion the band headed by Jayananda supplied a musical “Soiree” to the accompaniment of “Pasouj” at which the Rajas took exceedingly delighted.¹⁷

In view of the above it is clear that Ahom King Swargadeva Rajeswar had shown exhibition of *Pukhawaj* performances to King Bhagyachandra as the term *Pasouj* is *Pakhawaj* to the Ahom, which is a double sided Pung having *Kaab/Gaab Thaaba* portion in its both sides and is used in North Indian music in singing *Dhrupad* and *Bind*. The right side face of *Pakhawaj* is its trebble and metallic dust is used for its *Kaab/Gaab Thaaba* making a black circle in the centre of the face which is known as *Syahi* in Hindustani drums: and the left side is its bass on which wheat granules or flour dough is usually polished just before every performances.¹⁸ The technique of *Kaab/Gaab Thaaba* on its faces of *Meitei Pung* may be taken as a thing of influenced from *Pukhawaj* and introduced during the time Maharaja Bhagyachandra as no any record in Manipur. As mentioned earlier, in Manipur different types of *Pung* which were made of hollowed cylindrical log with leather coverings on its sides were used since much earlier days. So, adoption of *Kaab/Gaab Thaaba* in a form of Meitei Pung as inspired by *Pakhawaj* must not been a hard thing to complied. It is also mentioned earlier that the term “*Pala*” in Bangladesh *Ariba Pala* is also a term adopted from *Oja Pali* of Assam. Laishram Birendrakumar asserts about similarities in singing of *Nata Sankirtana* and *Oja Pali* as:-

Manipurigi Malab haiba Raga asimadi Assamgi Ojapali sheishakki Maalafka yaamna maanakhare atei Ragasu maannaba lei. Ojapaligi sheishakki Raga houbada makhoyndi “Guru Bandana” hai masida ahoubada ha-ta-na-dha-dhata asinachingba shabdu shijinnaduna houyi. Asinachingba marum kaya asidagi taakpadi Assam amasung Manipuri markta sangitki itihaski chauraba mari amadi shoydana leiramba tare.”¹⁹

The above mentioned “Malab” is opined by Guru of Nata Sankirtana as a Raga of Nata Sankirtana. This simply shows that there are similarities between the Ragas of Nata Sankirtana and Oja Pali and also similarity even in the name of Raga

of these two forms of singing which might have been a result of exchanges and adaptations between one another as it is quite natural in culture and traditions. As such it may be assumed that the term *Pala* is deflected from *Oja Pali* of Assam to use in naming *Bangadesh Pala* or *Ariba Pala* from time of Maharaja Bhagyachandra and thereby arising a question that whether the *Bangadesh Pala* or *Ariba Pala* was introduced during the time of Maharaja Bhagyachandra? During the reign, new faces of cultural looks from outsiders. Though the Sankirtana is said to be introduced during the reign of Maharaja Garibaniwaz, it was not in a form popular among the masses. It is mentioned in *Meitei Punlon Sheigonnabi* that most of the noted Gurus of *Bangadesh Pala* are found to be of during the time of Bhagyachandra. It is therefore questionable that the *Bangadesh Pung* might have developed only after the introduction of *Nata Sankirtana Pung*; as the *Nata Pung* is a kind of *Pung* introduced only after the returns of Maharaja Bhagyachandra from Ahom and initiation of Sri Sri Govinda. Whatever the case may be the kind of *Pung* with *Kaab/Gaab Thaaba* in its faces was introduced during the time of Maharaja Bhagyachandra and became *Nata Sankirtana Pung*.

Coming back to the historical events, Bhagyachandra with the helps from Ahom King Swargadeva reascended to the throne of Manipur. It is said that the king summoned and tasked his skilled artisan Hao Chaoba, a villager of Nungba to find log to develop *Pung* for the purpose of worshipping Lord Krishna. He brought a special log of a *Wang* tree from his village and entrusted to one Lakshaman of *Sapam* lineage of surname to make *Nata Sankirtana Pung*.²⁰ As follow-ups Sir Govindaji was initiated and installed in 1779 AD at Canchipur with performance of five days *Jagoi Ras* at Rasmandal. The *Jagoi Ras* was just preceded by a performance of *Male Sankirtana Pala* singing as its inaugural in which, the king himself played *Pung* in the lead followed by Oja Premananda, where Ngoubam Shai was lead singer followed by Dhar Shai as the second lead.²¹ The kind of *Pung* used in the *Nata Sankirtana* is nowadays known as *Nata Sankirtana Pung* or *Meitei Pung* or simply *Pung*. The kind of *Pung* known as *Mridanga* is made of clay and is a type of *Pung* used in northern India. Terming of *Meitei Pung* sometimes as *Mirdanga* is only a matter of cultural and linguistic exchanges and adaptations through the ages between communities and societies.

4. FORM OF BEATS IN MEITEI PUNG/NATA SANKIRTANA PUNG

Meitei Pung has taken an important place in a life of a Meitei in the Manipuri Vaishnav Society. Also in the Manipuri *Nata Sankirtana* the *Pung* occupies top position among the percussions. Sarangadeva, in his *Sangeet Ratnakar* give definition of *Sangeet* as: “Kāt;³ ꠠāf;³ t;³ =ā >ōt;³ &Ū³ ĪKāt;³ āW;³ it;³ ū” as to say that the combination of singing, percussions and dancing is called *Sangeet*. But in view of the Manipuri *Nata Sankirtana* the *Pung* come first in order to mean it as: *Pung*, *Eshei*, *Jagoi* (percussion, singing, dancing). This shows the tradition of considering *Pung* as foremost and as the soul of song and dances. Then again, Manipuri Vaishnavs considered *Pung* as a form of living god. It is also believe that every component in a *Pung* together makes a complete form of Sri Gouragna. A *Pung* player artist first worshipped *Pung* before playing considering it as a living god.

According to Gurus, the essences of *Pung* are:- “though the faces of *Pung* is differed as *Maru* (bass) and *Manao* (treble) in two parts, it is considered as one in its combined form. Inside *Manao* (treble) of *Pung*, there are six spirally coiled leather straps representing six Gosais and the *Maru* (bass) with 8 strapes representing eight *Asta Shakhis*. Thick leather placed inside the *Beri* (rim) or the *Manao* (treble) of the *Pung* is considered to represent Narottam. The 64 fastener straps in the outer part of *Pung* also considered representing 64 *Shakhis*. The round black *Kaap/Gaab Thaaba* part in both the faces of *Maru* and *Manao* of *Pung* is considered as the eyes of Lord Sri Krishna and the *Kata Beri* (edges) as iris. The cord of fabric for holding *Pung* is meant representing *Anantadeva*. The ring of *Maru* (bass) is Mahadeva, and the ring of *Manao* (treble) is Brahma. The wrapped white cloth is its apparel. Black in the inner portion of *Pung* is to mean concealment of the black complexion of Lord Krishna, whereas the red edges represent complexion of Radha. The sound represent five souls.³⁴ Manipuri Vaishnav society worships *Pung*, believing that combination of all components of *Pung* represents a complete form of Lord Sri Gouranga.

5. DEVELOPMENT OF NATA SANKIRTANA PUNG

Along with the initiation of Lord Govinda and performances of *Jagoi Ras*, *Pung* was played in the *Nupa Pala* during the time if Maharaja Bhagyachandra. The king during its reign introduced three types of *Jagoi Ras*: (1) *Maha Ras*, (2) *Kunja Ras*, and (3) *Basant Ras*. Also during the period. Gurus of *Pung* consulted and introduced various *Raagas* like *Nata Raag* (*Raag Achouba*).²² The *Nadiya Raag* which is played in *Rasheswari Pala* was also composed and introduced during the time by Gurus- Langlenhanba, Kitana Rupa, Swarup Nanda, Tensuba, etc.²³

The tradition of maintaining composed and introduced *Raagas* of *Pung* by king in consultation with Gurus has been carefully maintained from generations to generations till today. Maharaj Chourajit in his time introduced *Mahadhumel*.

During the time of Maharaj Marjit (1813-1819 AD), Guru Irabanta with Thakur Shyama in consultation with other Gurus composed and introduced Nityai Dhumen.²⁴ Along with the introduction of Ratha Jatra during the reign of Maharaj Gambhir Singh (1825-1834 AD), the form of *Nupa Pala* singing and *Jaidev Chongba* also introduced along with another form of singing: *Dhop Kirtan*.

The reign of Maharaja Chandrakirti (1850-1886 AD) is said to be the golden period of Manipuri Culture and Traditions. During this period Yumnam Oja Jadunath and Sinam Indra in consultation with other Gurus composed and introduced *Devi Dhumen*. Other than this Manipuri Gurus and Pundits were sent outside for learning in field of arts, religion, philosophy, etc. Experts in various fields from outside were also invited and brought in Manipur for exposures so that one could aspire for exploration of new cultural horizons. As such Rasa 64 was introduced first time in Manipur during the time. Various *Taals* (musical rhythms), *Raagas* (tunes), *Sanchar* (movement) like: *Nadiya Raag*, *Dutla Raag*, *Nalini Raag*, *Harinamrita Raag*, *Jaganatha Mangal Raag*, *Tekhao Ahouba Raag*, *Turi Raag*, *Leela Ahouba Raag* were also composed and introduced by Pung Gurus of the time. In addition, Guru Chongtham Oja alone composed *Nadiya Champa Raag*. Numbers of *Sanchar* of Pung like *Nityai Sanchar*, *Brahma Sanchar*, *Veishnav Sanchar*, *Jiva Sanchar*, *Pancham Sanchar*, *Yughal Sanchar*, *Papmochan Sanchar*, *Abdeita Sanchar* were introduced by Oja Jadunath. All these Ojas had contributed in making the wealth of *Nata Sankirtana* Wealthier and fuller by composing and introducing various beats of Pung.²⁵

As there was a social awakening of using Meitei language among the masses, singing Sankirtana in Manipuri was introduced during the time of Maharaja Churachand Singh. From that period to the time of Maharaja Bodhachandra, Gurus contributed many more *Raagas*, *Sanchars*, *Taals*, 12 *Mels* (concord of musical sounds), five different forms of *jagoi Raas*, *Bhangi Punglons*, four forms of *Dhumel*, *Taanchap Pareng*, *Sheigonnabi*, *Taangonnabi*, *Menkup Pareng* etc. along with various forms of *Pung Cholom* (drumming and dancing) and dignified the cultural wealth of Manipuri *Pung*, *Nata Sankirtana* and *Jagoi Raas*. Among the forms of male dances in India, *Manipuri Pung Cholom* is an unique form on its own accord of drumming and *Cholom* (dancing).

Pung Cholom is a kind of dance performance with Pung in particular costumes, body posture, feet and hand gestures, steps and eyes movement along rhythms of beats or holding *Pung*. This is fact inseparable with *Manipuri Nata Sankirtana*. Without *Pung Cholom*, *Nata Sankirtana* is not complete. *Pung Cholom*, other than being the soul of *Nata Sankirtana*, its performances on stages nowadays have attracted audiences worldwide. This is truly an example of progression of *Meitei Pung*.

This invaluable Manipuri art form of *Pung* started achieving laurels in national and international level that could identified our tiny state and its peoples to the world since around 1939. Among the exponents Gurus of Manipuri *Pung* who took *Pung Cholom* to stages worldwide that could identified Manipuri community to the world. Thiyam Tarunkumar and Yambem Mahabir, the two great exponent of Manipuri *Pung* can be mentioned as pioneer. The two Manipuri Pung Guru along with Uday Sankar, the renowned dance Guru of India visited America and for the first time in the history of Manipuri *Pung*, showed a performance of *Pung Cholom* on stage and enthralled spectroators in that year of 1939. Following footsteps of the two Gurus another two great exponent of Manipuri *Pung* and Dance, Guru Thingbaijam Babu Singh and Tourangbam Nadiya, who initially performed individually in places of India, paired together and a stage performances of *Pung Cholom* at places of Russia in 1960, as the second ever performance of *Pung Cholom* on stage abroad. Till about 1970, the performances of *Pung Cholom* on stages were restricted to performance by a single artist or a duo. But in around that year. Guru Chingangbam Angou Singh of Khurai introduced and showed group performances of *Meitei Pung* on stages in all over India. Among the renowned exponents of *Meitei Pung* who came out on the line, Guru Konsam Leibakmacha Singh, Guru Shougaijam Thanil Singh, Oja Nipamacha, Thanga Babu, Sharangthem Iboton, Guru Thokchom Ibohal, Oja Bokuljao Singh, etc. may be mentioned and remember.

6. CONCLUSION

It can be assumed that, Meitei, though maintaining the cultural traditions of using indigenous percussive in worshipping rituals of god and goddesses since much earlier days: evolved Pung in a unique way but by simulations or rather by inspirations from outside percussion culture of drum. In keeping the cultural traditions of regarding percussive instruments as god or goddess by the Meitei since much earlier days before Vaishnavism, Maharaja Bhagyachandra

introduced Nata Sankirtana Pung to used by the Manipuri Vaishnavas in Nata Sankirtana Pung has been strictly maintained from king to king and from generation to generations with more than recognizable progressions. Today we can be proud of Nata Sankirtan Pung being internationally famed.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None .

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