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THE RASLILA PERFORMANCE TRADITION  
OF MANIPUR IN NORTHEAST INDIA

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
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ABSTRACT

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IN NORTHEAST INDIA

By  
Angana Jhaveri

For over two hundred years, the temple bells of Manipur in northeastern India have announced the raslila performance, and since its first production in 1779, the raslila has been performed annually in the temple arenas of Manipur.

This study on the raslila performance tradition of Manipur documents the performance elements in the context of their tradition and analyzes its inherent principles to derive their value and meaning.

The research is based on observation and analysis of the four major raslilas produced during the years 1981 and 1982, at two most significant royal temple sites in Imphal, the capital of Manipur. The study arrives at an understanding of the inherent cosmic principles of the raslila performance that draw a deep spiritual response from both performer and spectator.

The introductory chapter includes a general introduction, the purpose, a definition of the term raslila, justification for the study, its methodology and its scope.

Chapter Two traces the origins of the raslila form to an ancient idea of a circle dance in which several women surround a male figure in the center. It explains the religious phenomenon of Krishna-bhakti (devotional worship of Lord Krishna), tracing its spread from Bengal to Manipur. The chapter concludes with a brief description of the raslila in the environment of Manipur.



Chapter Three documents performance elements in the context of the tradition. It includes a detailed description of the plot structure, the training, acting techniques of music and dance, the staging, costuming, and audience participation.

Chapter Four draws the inherent cosmic principles from the time, space and action structures of the performance and assesses the meaning and value of the raslila tradition.

The final chapter offers a conclusion to the study and suggests areas for future research.

I would like to dedicate this paper to my parents, Nayana and Susheel Jhaveri as a tribute to their pioneering work on the Manipuri Raslila. Their encouragement, guidance and understanding ensured its completion.

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I thank my parents for their support and courage in allowing me to carry on with the field work in Manipur through turbulent and therefore risky political unrest. I especially acknowledge and pay deep respects Guru Bipin Singh and the Jhaveri Sisters (my mother and her sisters) for facilitating my research in Bombay, Calcutta and Manipur with their most generous assistance and guidance.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Raslila is a performance tradition of Manipur a northeastern state of India (Figure 1). This tradition of over two hundred years was initiated and institutionalized by the Manipuri king Bhagyachandra,<sup>1</sup> who was inspired by the religious movement of Krishna bhakti<sup>2</sup>(devotional love for the God Krishna).

The raslila was the first production on the Krishna theme and is still produced annually in the temples of Krishna or Govindaji<sup>3</sup>(as He is often called in Manipur). It is usually described as jagoi ras or dance-drama in Manipur as dance (with musical accompaniment) is its major acting technique.

Dance and music traditions have existed in Manipur since very ancient times and are perhaps her most highly developed forms of artistic expression. When the Krishna theme, which had gained immense popularity in other parts of India was introduced to Manipur, they developed into the most effective means for its promotion.

The theme of the raslila is romantic, depicting Krishna's love-play with the gopis (celestial milkmaids). The nature of this love is devotion or bhakti which is the fundamental emotion of the performance. Bhakti is also a form of worship, and therefore, religion and rituals play a significant role in the raslila productions. Performances of the raslila are considered to be auspicious and are revered by the Krishna-bhaktas (devotees) of Manipur, whose utmost concern is to safeguard the tradition.

Most performances are scheduled on full-moon nights, opening at dusk and closing at dawn. They occur annually on dates determined by the local



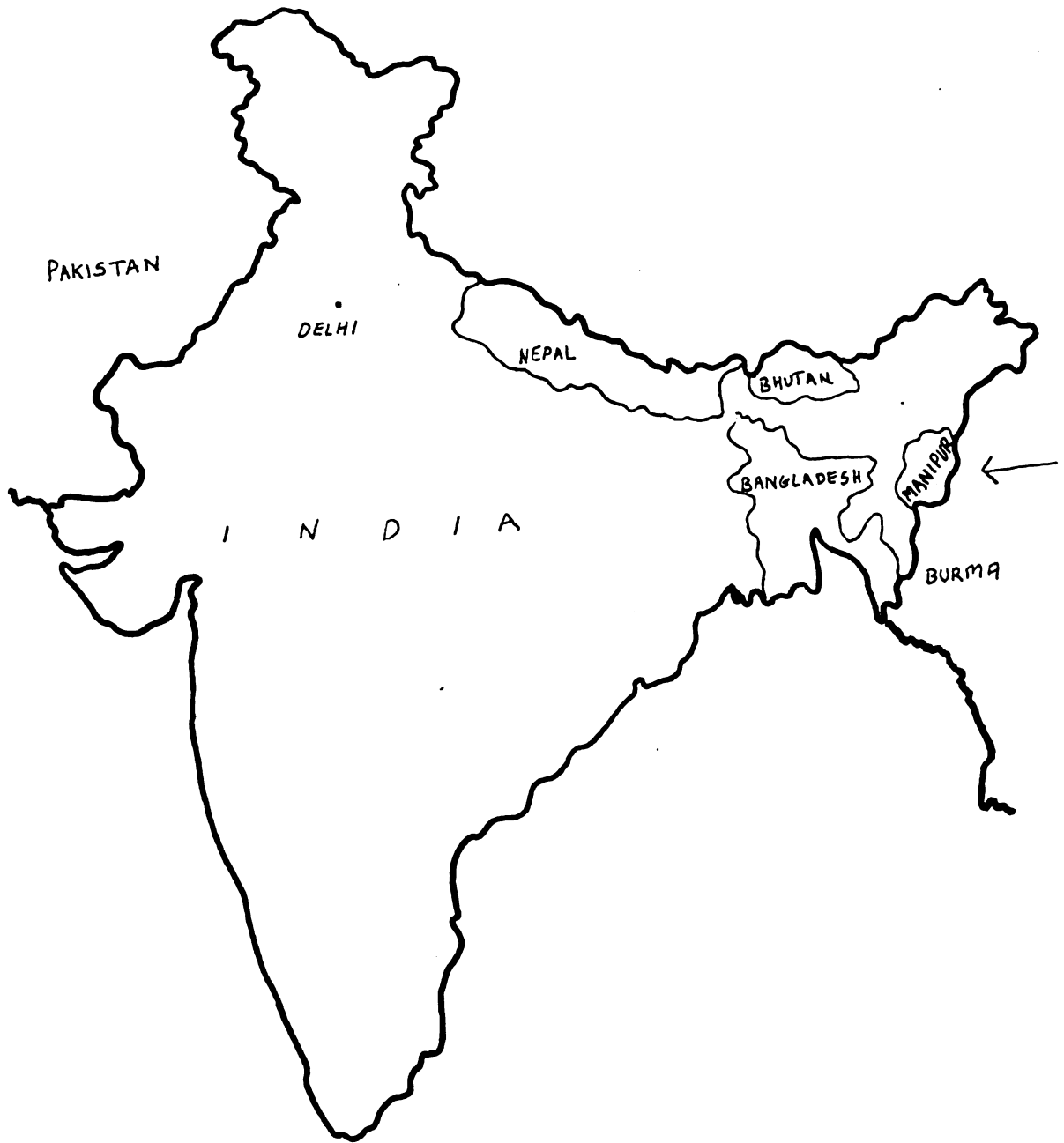


Figure 1 Location of Manipur

lunar calendar in the seasons of autumn and spring; as prescribed in textual sources like the Bhagwat Purana and the Gita Govinda.<sup>4</sup> The performances observed for this study were of the Govindaji Temple (attached to the palace in Imphal, the capital of Manipur) and the Vijay Gobindaji Temple in the Sagolband district of Imphal.<sup>5</sup> Performances at the former site are generally referred to as Govindajigi raslila and those at the latter site as khulakgi raslila. Khulakgi means those of the villages, but generally refers to all productions outside of the palace.

The raslila performances are a part of the practices of the Krishna devotees of the vaishnava sect of Hinduism. The devotees cherish these re-enactments of the playful God Krishna and the Gopis. It is believed that every sincere devotee longs to dwell in Brindavan, an idyllic forest site where Krishna and the Gopis performed the legendary raslila. Manipur's depiction of the raslila as a theatrical performance is both esthetic and spiritual, evoking a peak experience of bhakti ras or esthetic enjoyment of devotional love.

#### Purpose

The major purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the raslila tradition and present a detailed documentation of its performance elements through an examination of the four raslilas Vasantaras, Maharas, Kunjaras, and Nityaras during years 1981 and 1982.

#### Definition of the Term Raslila

Raslila is a generic term for the phenomenal cosmic dance of Krishna and Radha. It is also a term for regional performance traditions of India based on the Krishna-gopi theme. The raslila of Manipur is perhaps one of the finest examples of these performance traditions. It is commonly described as a dance-drama just as the generic raslila is described as a

cosmic dance. The emphasis on dance may be justified as dance is a predominant acting technique of the raslila, but the dance is also accompanied by music, poetry, and dramatic emotion which form as significant a part of the performance. Dr. Friedhelm Hardy explains:

The usage of the word dance is conventional, but suggests less than a name like *rasa* in fact implies....the *rasa* includes not only dance steps, but also some form of acting, music, specific poetic themes and a particular poetic genre.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore this study refrains from using the term dance-drama to describe the raslila and uses the more general word performance, which has a larger connotation of music, lyrics, and other elements.

The word lila is perhaps best translated as play. It suggests play as in drama or performance, and also adds in playfulness of the character of Krishna. According to the devotees, Krishna was always at play, either in games with his cowherd friends or in dalliance and love-making with the gopis (milkmaids). Therefore, the word raslila would mean a play about a performance on the playful sport of Krishna.

To avoid confusion that the word play may create the raslila is referred to as a performance in this study. The term performance is usually accompanied by the word traditional in this study as preservation of the traditional patterns of the performance is perhaps as important as the performance itself.<sup>7</sup>

#### Justification

The raslila exemplifies the sublime vaishnava view that the arts have the capacity to express the divine. It is a splendid exposition of the profound principles of the vaishnava religion, that expound both the spiritual and the esthetic experience as bliss.

The entire vaishnava community participates in the various raslila performances held throughout the year. The performers include professionals and nonprofessionals enabling community members who may have had only some training to participate. Children play a major role, as only they may play the deified roles of Krishna and Radha. The royal family takes an especially active interest as the tradition is as much of the court as it is of the temple. Learned gurus (masters), the elders and those of the brahmanic orders are given an elevated position in the event, and attend most enthusiastically. And so, at any raslila performance, almost every facet of the Manipuri community is represented.

The raslila (especially of the Shri Shri Gobindaji Temple) is probably the most significant socio-religious event of post-vaishnava Manipur. It embodies the best of the result of the merger of two distinct and rich cultures the indigeneous manipuri and the pan-indian sanskritic; an influence that entered Manipur mainly through her adoption of vaishnavism,

In comparison with other traditional performance forms in India, the raslila of Manipur has received relatively little attention. Perhaps this is due to Manipur's remote location. Until recent times, before the introduction of air transportation, Manipur was rather difficult to reach. Miles of hilly road routes discouraged most travellers from visiting this exquisite state. Thus, the raslila continued as an uninterrupted and relatively unknown tradition outside of Manipur for at least two centuries.

The national awakening for independence in the 1930's and 1940's spurred Indians to a rediscovery of ancient traditions and their inherent classicism.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, when the manipuri raslila became known, it

was more for its classical dance style, than its existence as a traditional performance in the temples of Manipur.

Most works published on the raslila are therefore works on its classical dance form. In relation to the dance form various aspects of the traditional performances have been examined, for example: costume and musical accompaniment. For the most part, the raslila as a traditional theatrical performance in the temples of Manipur has been treated only as historical background in terms of its being a classical dance. A voluminous work in the Manipuri language called Meitei Jagoi, documents the lyrics, rituals, management procedures dance movements, musical time measures, and the social protocol associated with the raslila performances. This collection of rather important factual information fails to include an analysis of the observations or meaning and significance of the raslila.

Other major works in Bengali and Hindi focus primarily on the raslila's classical dance form. In the English language there is no book or dissertation on the traditional raslila as a composite theatrical performance. There is some valuable material in journals and magazines, of which the most significant is the 1961 issue of the Marg magazine on Manipuri dance.<sup>9</sup> It is a compilation of scholarly articles on the various aspects of the Manipuri dance tradition.

The present study takes a comprehensive account of the raslila as it is performed in the temples of Manipur. The intent of this study is to document the entire performance within its temple tradition. An attempt will be made to assess the value and meaning of the raslila in the socio-religious context of Manipur and Vaishnavism while drawing on the inherent principles of its time, space and action structures. To my knowledge, this study on the raslila is the only work of its kind.

## Methodology

The methodology for this study can be divided into:

1. Library Research
2. Observation
3. Interviews

### 1. Library Research

Preliminary reading in Asian Theater, particularly Indian traditional theater, occurred at Michigan State University between 1978 and 1980 under the tutelage of Dr. Farley Richmond. Subsequent reading and discussion on the subject of the Manipuri raslila, especially its vaishnava aspects and its history, took place at the Manipuri Nartanalaya, a school of Manipuri dancing in Calcutta under the guidance of its director Guru Bipin Singh, who also assisted in the overall planning of the field work in Manipur.

### 2. Observation

Performances of the raslila were observed in three different trips to Imphal, the capital of Manipur, from April 1981 to April 1982. During this time four raslilas: the Vasantaras, Nityaras, Kunjaras and Maharas were observed at sites considered to be the most auspicious by the Manipuri vaishnavas.

Conditions for research during the time stated above were adverse due to a very turbulent political situation in Manipur. Curfews were being enforced at short notice. There was a daily curfew from 5:00 pm every evening which interfered with the night-time theater activities of the people. However, due to the religious significance of the raslila performance, a special release was obtained from the Indian army on the night of the raslilas, enabling people to attend the performances.

Therefore, it was possible to observe only the four most auspicious performances in the largest temples of Manipur, the Shri Shri Govindaji Temple for the Vasantaras, Kunjaras and Maharas, and the Nityaras at the Vijay Govindaji Temple at Sagolband. In all probability these were the only two sites that were able to hold all-night performances that year.

Vasantaras was first observed in April 1981, in a performance at the Shri Shri Govindaji Temple of Imphal. The observation consisted of following the performance action with the help of an interpreter and performer. Photographs of the percussion prelude, the dressing room activity and the performance were taken (examples are included in the paper). Portions of the performance were filmed.

Soon after the Vasantaras, rehearsals began for the Nityaras scheduled for May 1981. Almost every rehearsal was observed for a study of the training process. (I was invited to join in the rehearsals as I have been trained in the dance form since childhood and know the traditional dances used in every raslila therefore, learned some of the dances and choreography created for the Nityaras).

The rituals that initiated every stage in the rehearsal process were observed and documented. Photographs were taken to help record these observations. On May 18th, the Nityaras performance in the Vijay Govindaji temple in Sagolband was observed.

During this time, from April to July, gurus, performers, sponsors, costumers, historians and scholars were interviewed and aspects of Manipur's history and culture were studied.

In October and November 1981, the Kunjaras and Maharas were observed. The interviews were continued, this time concentrating on the role of the rasdhari guru and director of the raslila and studying his compositions in

detail. Translation of the lyrics of Vasantaras with assistance of an expert in Sanskrit and Bengali began at this time.

In March and April 1982, Manipur was celebrating the spring festival of Holi, with color and with percussive performance of various kinds as well as with various forms of theater. At this time the directors and performers were interviewed, the preparation procedures including the rehearsals and rituals for the Vasantaras were observed. Also, considerable time was spent at the temple observing preparation for the performance as well as the management of temple affairs in general.

Thus, the observation included four of the most traditional performances of the manipuri raslila all being the initiating and most auspicious performances of their respective seasons, from April 1981 to April 1982. The performance procedures, training, the student-teacher relationship, the rituals and rehearsals were a part of the observations, which included some participation in learning the dances.

The observations also included a study of the construction of costume and musical instruments in the homes of the craftsmen, and learning how the costumes are worn and some practice of the musical instruments.

Another aspect of the observations included study with the two rasdharis of the two major temples. Their compositions, choreography and their role in the raslila production and performance were observed and documented. The lyrics were notated from the sutradhari or lead singer and translated into English with the help of the Bengali and Sanskrit scholar.

A significant part of the observations consisted of the details of the performance as it progressed through the night and also of audience composition, attitudes and interaction with the performance.



### Interviews

The rasdharis, sutradharis, the managers of the temple board performers of the ras, the professional craftsmen of the costumes and the instruments, the musicians in the orchestra, scholars, gurus (masters) of dance and music were interviewed.

Formal questionnaires were prepared at first but it was more advantageous to allow casual conversation to lead to the answers to the questions. An interpreter, sometimes two always accompanied me, and often my questions would lead to a group discussion, (as the raslila is not a specialized subject to the people of Manipur).

Most often it was impossible to receive direct answers to the questions posed. But although these 'casual' interviews took a longer time and did not appear structured, a great deal was learned from the elder gurus and scholars, remaining respectful of their ways. Most interviews were conducted in Meitei, the Manipuri language by myself and one or two Manipuri assistants. Some of the people interviewed spoke English and/or Hindi, and I was able to communicate directly without the aid of an interpreter. My main interpreter was Guneshwari Devi, the dance instructor of Manipuri Nartanalaya in Imphal. She was also a lead performer in the raslila performance at the Vijay Gobindaji Temple.

Some of the gurus were introduced to me by Guru Bipin Singh, a dance guru of great renown, I was fortunate to have his assistance in the interviews. Equally valuable assistance was offered by Maharaj Kumari Binodini Devi (of Manipur's royal family) who is also Manipur's foremost writer. She assisted me with translation and introduced me to nuances of the Manipuri court which was the environment that created the raslila. Her son L. Somi Roy, a graduate in economics and politics from the

Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi and fluent in English and Manipuri, was also extremely helpful through the interviews. Shri Ranjit Singh, secretary of the Manipuri Nartanalaya, escorted me to various regions of Imphal to the homes of the gurus. He also acted as interpreter.

Most of the interviews were conducted at the homes of those who were interviewed. Some were conducted at Manipuri Nartanalaya dance school of Guru Bipin Singh, at the residences of Maharaj Kumari Binodini Devi and Prof. E. Nilakanta Singh.

#### Scope of the Study

This study on the raslila performance tradition is divided into four parts. Chapter One introduces the subject and its study, Chapter Two supplies the historical, religious and environmental framework of the raslila. Chapter Three presents a detailed documentation of the traditional performance procedures and the elements of form. In Chapter Four, the structure of the raslila performance is examined in terms of its meaning, values and universality.

The organization of the chapters is meant to lead the reader gradually to a comprehension of the subject.

The limitations of this work lie in the areas of analysis of the vocal music technique that is highly complex and requires the attention of a musicologist. Very little work has been conducted on the subject to this date. Also due to the adverse political conditions it was not possible to see too many performances of the khulak category (raslila productions in temples other than the palace temple). I have therefore concentrated on the tradition of the palace temple in Imphal which I found adequate for an intensive study of the inherent principles of the Manipuri raslila.

Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Bhagyachandra was the responsible for the adoption of vaishnavism as the state religion of Manipur. He installed the first image of Krishna and Radha in a temple and inaugurated the temple with the first performance of the raslila in 1779.

<sup>2</sup> The Shri Shri Govindaji temple is located in Imphal's palace compound and houses the first images of Krishna and Radha. It is considered to be the most auspicious performance site for the raslila and therefore stages the first performance of every season.

<sup>3</sup> Krishna-bhakti is utmost devotion to Krishna a young romantic incarnation of the God Vishnu. It was introduced in Manipur in the 18th Century.

<sup>4</sup> These texts are perhaps the most prominent amongst the vaishnava works that consist of emotional bhakti. The stories of Maharas and Vasantaras are found in these works.

<sup>5</sup> This temple site is second in importance in Imphal, Manipur. It also belongs to Manipur's ex-royalty. This site opens the Khulak raslilas of every season.

<sup>6</sup> Hardy, Friedhelm, Viraha Bhakti Delhi 1983, p.600

<sup>7</sup> Various features in presentation and performance procedures conducted in accordance with age-old rules are a very significant and important part of the raslila; which is why the term traditional is crucial to its definition.

<sup>8</sup> Forms like Bharat Natyam and Kathak also came to the fore during this time.

<sup>9</sup> Marg, A Magazine of the Arts Manipuri Vol xiv September 1961.

No.4 Marg Publications, 34-37 Bank Street Bombay.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORICAL, RELIGIOUS and ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES OF THE MANIPURI RASLILA

#### The Raslila Form in History

The raslila performance was produced for the first time in Manipur in the year 1779; but origins of the form may be traced to an earlier period, perhaps somewhere between the first century BC and the tenth century AD.

Historical evidence of performance forms resembling the raslila is found primarily in the literary sources of the ancient period like the Harivamsa (4th century BC), Kamasutra (6th century AD) and other texts which will be discussed in this chapter. The only evidence of performance of that time still existing today may be found in folk dance traditions of certain parts of India, the origins of which are lost in antiquity.

Since the eleventh century AD there is a continuing performance tradition of forms similar to the raslila tradition of Manipur. Performance evidence of this period may be found not only in literary sources but also in visual (paintings) and live performance traditions extant today.

#### The Ancient Period

##### Rupak and Uparupaka (major and minor drama forms)

It is important to note that there is no mention of the raslila form of dramatization in the Natyashastra (3rd century AD), India's most ancient and comprehensive document of drama. The author of this work concentrates on the dasarupakas or ten major forms of drama (and these do not include the raslila). He informs his readers at the end of his work, that all the forms of drama not covered by him will be treated by his son Kohala. According to scholars interpreting the content of the Natyashastra,

the 100 sons of Bharata mentioned in the text, may have been contemporaries from whom Bharata borrowed material. Unfortunately none of these works have been found. The work of Kohala is also lost, and several manuscripts going by his name seem to be much later compilations. The great contribution of Kohala seems to be his discussion of the uparupakas in his work Uttaratantram (as described by Bharata).<sup>1</sup> The uparupaka is theater, with music and dance as its predominant acting techniques and with a musical or rhythmic presentation structure. The rupakas on the other hand have a strictly dramatic structure.

In an authoratative commentary on the Natya Shastra, Abhinava Gupta states ten uparupaka (minor drama) forms such as: dombika, bhana, prasthanā, bhanika, prerana, ramakrida, hallisaka, rasaka, and ragakavya.<sup>2</sup> Of these the hallisaka and the rasaka bear the closest resemblance to the raslila.

#### Hallisaka and Rasaka Forms

An early reference to the hallisaka form may be traced to the Harivamsa, a sixth century literary work and the final part of the mammoth epic poem the Mahabharata. The Harivamsa describes the hallisaka in the following verse:

Chakravalleyiha Mandalleyiha Hallisakridanam/

Ekasya punso bahubhi sribhihi//

Kridanam saiva rasakrida/

Gopinam mandalinrtyabandhnay Hallisakam viduha//

chapter 20 verse 35

Many gather in a group and form a circle or mandali, to play/dance together in a selected arena.

There is only one man

And he is surrounded by several women

Each one participating in the dance

All the gopis dance in a circle formation a group dance, beautifully executed.<sup>3</sup>

This shloka (verse) may be the earliest reference to the raslila although there is no direct reference to the raslila but to its corresponding form the hallisaka, which like the raslila is also concerned with the love-dalliance of Krishna and the Gopis.

The other significant uparupaka or minor drama form that resembles the raslila is the rasaka.

Bharata's Natyashastra refers to three kinds of rasakas although there is no direct reference to the raslila. The three types of rasakas are the Tal rasak, Danda rasak, and the Mandal rasak. Tal Rasaka is a group dance performed in a circle accompanied by the clapping of hands. Danda Rasaka is a group dance performed in a circle accompanied by the beating of the sticks. Mandala Rasaka is a group dance performed in a circle.<sup>4</sup>

The correlating forms practiced in Manipur today are: khubakishei which corresponds to the tal rasaka, goshtha (representing cowherd boys dancing with their sticks) which is a danda rasaka and the raslila (the gopis and Krishna's dance) which is a mandala rasak.<sup>5</sup> One concrete rasaka has been traced to Bhejjala's Radha Vipralambha (10th cent.AD) which gives evidence that it is a musical play on Radha and Krishna with the theme of Radha's separation, where the erotic/romantic love is prominent.<sup>6</sup> Vatsyayana's Kamasutra (300 AD) refers to the hallisaka and also assigns to it, an erotic function. So both hallisaka and rasaka have erotic overtones, and...belong to the repertoire of a sophisticated lover.<sup>7</sup>

Maharaja Bhagyachandra (King of Manipur in whose reign the raslila was first produced) refers to rasaka in his manual on dance and music, the

Govinda Sangeeta Lila Vilas, as one of the two forms of natya or drama (the other is rupaka).<sup>8</sup>

Correlation Between Hallisaka, Rasaka and Raslila

Descriptions of the hallisaka and the rasaka found in ancient sources, demonstrate a fundamental correlation to the raslila as performed in Manipur. Both Abhinava Gupta and Bhoja, a prominent dramaturgist of the tenth century AD, have described hallisaka as:

The dance (of women, Bhoja) which is danced in a circle and is known as hallisaka, in it there should be one (male) leader, like Krsna (was the leader) of the cowherd women.<sup>9</sup>

The description corresponds directly to the formation or choreography of the raslila as performed in Manipur, where for most of the performance action the gopis dance in a circle around Krishna and Radha in the center. The difference between the two forms is the presence of Radha in the center with Krishna, as their dual form is of utmost significance to the manipuri vaishnavas. Another clear correlation between the two forms is cited in an early prakrit dictionary (AD 972) where the word raso is explained as hallisao.<sup>10</sup>

The followers of Chaitanya (Bengal's great devotional saint) during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, who are directly responsible for the spread of Krishna-worship to Manipur, mention the hallisaka form's mandala, a circle formation, as the most appropriate form for the raslila performance.<sup>11</sup>

The Govinda Leelamrtam, a poetic work by Krishnadas Kaviraj is perhaps the most significant text for the Manipuri raslila. It is frequently used as a source of reference by the gurus of the raslila. It refers to the hallisaka form in the context of the dance of Krishna, Radha and the Gopis as:

Adishya halliskakelirange  
 radhamukundau lalitadikalihi/  
 Tatransvinyastabhujau  
 mithastavannrtyatam lasyavidam varishthau//  
 chapter 22, verse 59

Having been requested to perform the hallisaka -a group dance, Radha and Mukunda(Krishna) in dual form, And Latita and other sakhis (friends) all play/dance together. Using both hands in various dance gestures In a dance called lasya They (Radha and Krishna) look so beautiful.<sup>12</sup>

Other sources of ancient India prior to 11th century mention various rasas, rasakas, rasanas.<sup>13</sup> All of these including the hallisaka and the goshti (performance in Orissa) and the raslila performance of Manipur, seem to stem from a single form, the mandala; a circle formation of women with a male leader at the center.

Thus the ancient Indian literary sources cited establish knowledge of a form or forms of performance associated with the Krishna-Gopi theme and performed in the dominant choregraphic pattern of a mandala, or circle with a focal center. Due to the absence of clear evidence of a performance tradition continuing from the ancient time to the present day the question still remains. "Was the raslila ever a performance practice in the ancient period or is the literary documentation simply a poetic vision of the legendary raslila of long ago?"

#### Medieval Period to the Present Day

The direct origin of the raslila performance traditions, extant in India today, lie in the religious movement of Bhakti (the path of devotion) of the medieval period.

The religious sentiment of bhakti or devotion was expressed through poetry, music, dance and drama; and, as the bhakti faith spread across India, a prolific tradition of performing and visual arts emerged. The bhakti movement, particularly Krishna bhakti, reached Manipur in the



18th century AD and led to the creation of the raslila performance tradition, that continues as an uninterrupted performance tradition today.

The abundant source material for the religious history of India points to the supremacy of the brahmanic sect of Hinduism. Various attempts were made over the years to defy the orthodox stronghold of the brahmins who secured the monopoly of conducting opulent religious rites and strangling free spiritual growth. The most successful religious revolutionaries were Buddha and Mahavir (of Jainism). But towards the close of the ancient period (by about the 10th century AD), the brahmins regained their ritualistic stronghold on the largely Hindu population. This is confirmed by the arrival of the texts called the Puranas, a vast conglomeration of religious and mythical and ritualistic information. The next major revolution against of brahmanism was the bhakti movement. The bhakti leaders denounced brahmanic institutions of caste, welcomed women devotees, and did away with the idea of brahmanic ritual as a necessary intermediary between the devotee and God; their only requirement for Krishna-bhakti was an intense and uncompromising love.

#### Artistic Traditions and Bhakti

An abundance of painting, literature and performance traditions developed all over the country during the bhakti period. It seems that whoever was touched by the fervour of devotional love for Krishna, feeling a rush of joy, burst into song and dance to express their emotion. Traditions of music evolved from chanting His name in kirtan (congregational chanting) and led to performance of enactments of His lilas (life's episodes). Schools of painting emerged on the subject of the divine love of Krishna and Radha. Perhaps the most invaluable treasure of

the bhakti traditions are the devotional songs called bhajan or padavali written by the poet saints of the Bhakti cult.

Each region of India that adopted Krishna-bhakti gave it artistic expression of indigeneous regional character resulting in the growth of varied and distinct traditions. Devotional saints appeared from every region of north and south India, and most of them expressed their devotion in poetry or poetic writing, creating a genre of vernacular literature. With their works, they infused a fresh new breath in literary and artistic traditions of India. While Sanskrit was losing ground, languages like Maithili, Brajboli and old Bengali gained popularity. Their tonal quality expressed the bhakti emotionalism which implies softness, fluidity, sweetness and lyricism, as in the lyrics of the raslila performance in Manipur. The two most significant creations of the bhakti movement particularly influential in the raslila of Manipur were the poetic traditions of the bhakti period in the regions of Bengal and Orissa, and Chaitanya's kirtana.

#### Poetic Traditions of Bengal and Orissa

The regions of Bengal and Orissa are known for their rich contribution to the fields of poetry and music. The bhakti poetry of this region is known as padavali sangeet and most of it is set to music to be sung. The most illustrious poet of this period and region is Jayadeva. The Gita Govinda, his major work (12th century AD), has spread far and wide, enchanting readers and listeners and inspiring new works in both the visual and performing arts, for which it provides the poetic material and inspiration. In Manipur, its importance is suggested by Prof. E. Nilakanta when he says, "he (Bhagyachandra) dedicated three things to Lord Govindaji, his kingdom, that is Manipur, his daughter, who remained wedded to her

Lord Krsna throughout her life, a Manipuri Mirabai, and Gita Govinda of Jayadeva."<sup>14</sup>

Other significant poets of this genre are Vidyapati, Chandidas, Gyandas, Govindadas and Narrottamdas. They write mainly about the love of Krishna and Radha with explicit descriptions of their love play. Referring to this phenomena of 'erotic' devotion peculiar to the followers of Krishna Bhakti of eastern India, S.K. De states:

It asserts the rights of the emotional and the aesthetic in human nature, and appeals to the exceedingly familiar and authentic intensity of feelings and sentiments. It transforms the mighty sex impulse into a passionate religious emotion.<sup>15</sup>

#### Origins of Performance in Bhakti Poetry

The lyrics of the devotional poems were sung to lilting music in devotional gatherings all over India. It is possible that the poetic imagery of works such as the Gita Govinda of Jayadeva inspired its development into dramatic performance. Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana indicates the powerful influence of this poem on the artistic traditions of Manipur in her article on the Gita Govinda.

The Kings of Manipur, often in exile in Assam and Vrindavana, were deeply moved by the Bhagavata and the Gita Govinda, and an earlier layer of rich Maitai culture was transformed as if overnight into a rich and vibrant tradition of Vaishnavite music and dance and drama based on the Bhagavata Purana and the Gita Govinda. The tradition of the performances of the varied rasa forms, the lilas plays and the presentation of the lila plays within and without the precincts of the temple was firmly established....Amongst the surviving traditions of music and dance inspired by the Gita Govinda, that of Manipur is easily the strongest and most vital.<sup>16</sup>

Theatrical performance is the sum-total of all the arts inspired by the bhakti movement and therefore its most comprehensive expression. The Radha-Krishna theme has been used prolifically since the bhakti period in traditional dance-dramas of India. This is especially emphasized by Zbavitel, a scholar of Bengali literature, who states, "The subject of the

Krishna-Radha story and its traditional way of presentation, in dialogues and songs, literally calls for a theatrical performance."<sup>17</sup> In addition to the raslila of Manipur, there is the Braj raslila of Vrindavan and dance-drama forms of the South that are still based entirely on the Krishna-Radha theme, like kuchipudi and bhagvat-mela.

#### Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Bengal's Devotional Saint

The Manipuri raslila performance may find inspiration in these great works of bhakti poetry, but its most direct source of its origin is the kirtan form of devotional music developed by the great devotional saint of Bengal, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Chaitanya initiated Gaudiya Vaishnavism. This particular path of bhakti is known for the bhakta's identification with the Gopi in his/her devotion to Krishna. Chaitanya is known to have identified with Radha, Krishna's favorite Gopi.

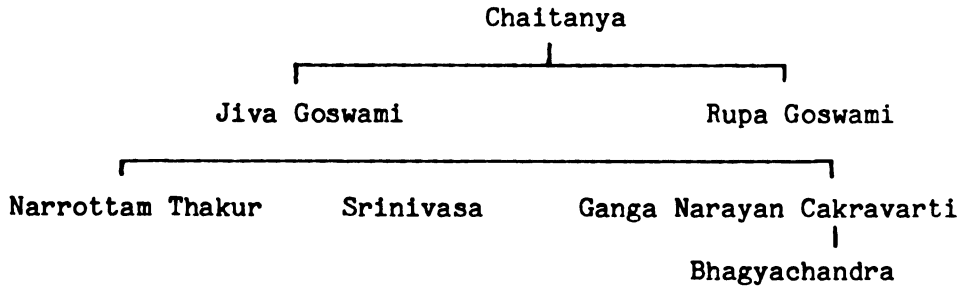
His major contribution to his followers was the promotion of kirtan (ecstatic congregational songs in praise of Krishna, as well as, chanting his many Names.) S.K. De describes the kirtan of Chaitanya in the following passage:

One of his first and most important acts was the stimulation if not introduction of an emotional and unritualistic mode of musical worship, known as Kirtana. This method of congregated devotional excitement by means of enthusiastic chorus singing to the accompaniment of peculiar drums and cymbals along with rhythmical bodily movement ending in an ecstatic abandon of dancing, proved very fruitful indeed in utilizing group emotion, and soon became a distinctive feature of the faith... Kirtana processions (Nagara Kirtan) were organized for parading the streets with lusty music singing and dancing, and carrying the appeal from door to door.<sup>18</sup>

From the very beginning of his religious career, Chaitanya was surrounded, not only by large numbers of devoted disciples and followers, but also by masses of people whom he deeply influenced by his ecstatic worship of Krishna. He had no specific doctrine underlying his religious

practice and experience, only bhakti, an unrestrained devotion expressed by singing devotional songs and by namkaran, repeating various names of Krishna.

The following table traces the guru-pranalika or lineage of Gaudiya vaishnava teachers from Chaitanya to the introduction of vaishnaism in Manipur.



Chaitanya initiated the kirtana form of worship. Jiva Goswami, his disciple, wrote the tenets on the religious sentiment of Chaitanya's faith, Narrottam Thakur, a disciple of Jiva Goswami, was a fine singer and opened a center for kirtana. Ganga Narayan, Narrottam Thakur's disciple spread the faith to Manipur and may have been the one who initiated King Bhagyachandra, who passed it down to his descendants Gambhir Singh and Chandrakirti Maharaj.<sup>19</sup>

#### The Raslila's First Production in Manipur

The first raslila performance of Manipur was produced at the installation ceremony of the image of Krishna. The installation ceremony was held in the rasmandala (performance arena) of the Langthabal palace (Figure 2) on the 11th Hiyengei (September or October) in 1779. The ceremony and the performance lasted for five days.<sup>20</sup> Since that time, the raslila performance tradition has been maintained in the temple housing the image of Govinda.



Figure 2 The Site of the First Raslila

Many temples of Krishna have been constructed in Manipur since that time and each one has a mandap or square hall for the performance of the raslila and other lilas or plays of Krishna. There are several performances besides the raslila presented in the mandap setting that are enactments of the episodes of the life of Krishna and his playmates, or of Chaitanya the great devotee of Krishna. They are: goshtha-lila (Krishna's play with the other cowherds) balya-lila (Krishna's childhood with his mother) and gaur-lila (plays about Chaitanya's life). They are all performances associated with the temples of Krishna and performed in the temple mandaps, and therefore may be described as mandap-lilas.

## The Religious Content of the Raslila

### Krishna as God and Hero of the Raslila

The entire raslila production revolves around Krishna the legendary god-hero. He is the hero of the raslila performance, the play takes place in His temple and is dedicated to Him. The plots of the raslilas, based on the episodes of Krishna's life, drawn from legends passed down the centuries in oral and written form.

### Krishna the Incarnation of Vishnu

Vaishnavism is the term used to describe the religious sect of Hindu India that believes in Vishnu as the supreme God. Vishnu is one of the Hindu trinity of gods which include Brahma the Creator, and Shiva the Destroyer. Vishnu the Preserver provides protection to the good and destruction to evil. He is known to have taken ten incarnations. One of these, a later one, was that of Krishna, a young cowherd boy who grew to rule a kingdom and aid Arjuna, the epic hero of the Mahabharata.

Over the years, Krishna-worship has attracted innumerable followers; the most recent following is that of the world-wide Hare Krishna movement. Manipur adopted Krishna-bhakti during the reign of King Bhagyachandra in the late eighteenth century.

Although their faith is generally called vaishnavism, krishnaism is probably more appropriate a term to describe them, since they worship Krishna as a supreme God rather than as one of the avatars (incarnations) of Vishnu.

### Krishnaism

A comprehensive approach to krishnaism implies a discussion of the historical Krishna, mythical or legendary Krishna, and Krishna as Bhagwan or the absolute god.



It has been suggested that Krishna was probably 'a god who entered human history.'<sup>21</sup> Whether this is historically proven is not of particular relevance to the subject of this dissertation. This study's major concern lies with Krishna as the hero or central character of the raslila performance. It is sufficient for the purpose of this study to concentrate on the legendary Krishna and his significance as the personal absolute god of the vaishnava devotees of Manipur as this information relates to the thematic content of the play and the audience-performance relationship.

### Krishna of the Legends

The legendary Krishna has been beautifully described by Prof. Edward Dimock in the following passage:

Above the highest heaven is the dwelling place of Krishna. It is a place of infinite idyllic peace, where the dark and gentle river Yamuna flows beside a flowered meadow, where cattle graze; on the river's bank sweet scented trees blossom and bend their branches to the earth, where peacocks dance and nightingales call softly. Here Krishna, ever-young, sits beneath the trees, the sound of his flute echoing the nightingale's call. Sometimes he laughs and jokes and wrestles with his friends, sometimes he teases the cowherd girls of the village, the Gopis, as they come to the river for water. And sometimes, in the dusk of days an eon long, his flute call summons the Gopis to his side. They leave their homes and families and their husbands and honor- as it is called by men- to go to him. Their love for him is deeper than their fear of dishonor. He is the fulfillment of all desire. The loveliest and most beloved of the Gopis is one called Radha.<sup>22</sup>

Prof. Dimock explains that the 'earthly counterpart of this highest heaven' is believed to be Brajbhumi, the land extending from the banks of the River Yamuna. The followers of Krishna believe that he came to earth with the river, the peacocks and the nightingales with his cows and the gopis who love him. All these combined to create the wondrous forest of Brindavan, still considered a place of pilgrimage, located southwest of Delhi.<sup>23</sup> (Figure 3)

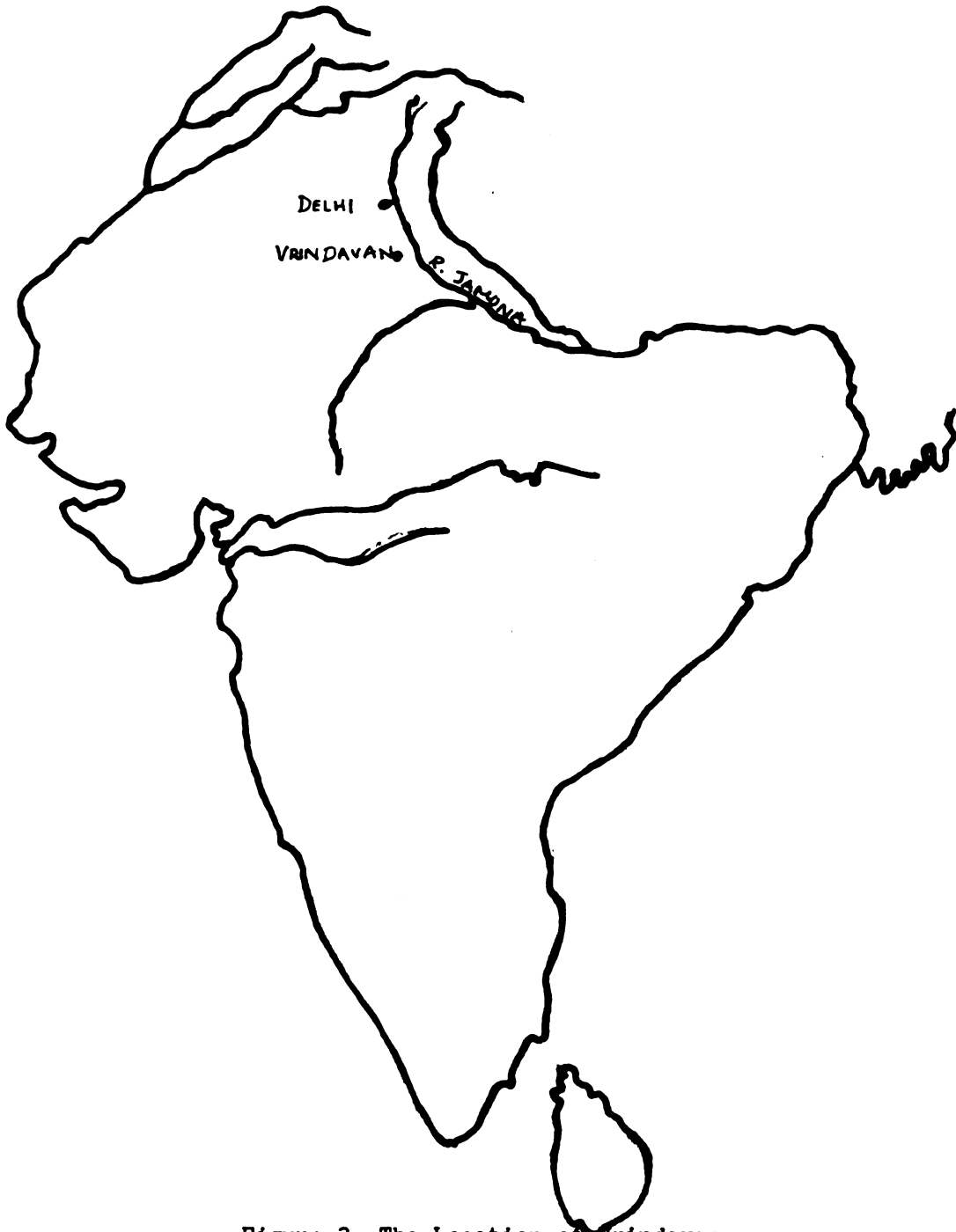


Figure 3 The Location of Vrindavan

The development of the Krishna legend appears to have begun very early in India's religious past. The fact that Krishna grew up among the cowherds of Braja is known to older sources as early as the second or third centuries BC. Texts like the Jatakas, Jain texts, the Purana-Pancalakshana and the Mahabharata, following which in the Harivamsa, we have references to the Gopi myth.<sup>24</sup>

According to these legends contained in the sources mentioned above, Krishna was born to a royal family but due to threatening circumstances, he was rescued and raised by a cowherd chieftan. He had the most spectacular childhood, filled with miraculous occurrences. As a young man, he proved himself to be a heroic warrior. He was God incarnated as a human, endowed with superhuman powers.

The raslila chapter of Krishna's life involves his relationship with the gopis and the Harivamsa is probably its earliest source, although it is given a dramatic form for the first time in the Puranas, particularly in the Bhagavat Purana.

#### The Life and Personality of Krishna

Legends of Krishna's life are called Krishna-lilas. These tales are related charmingly with devotional love for Krishna. Krishna was born in captivity and miraculously saved from the evil King Kamsa. He was exchanged with the newborn daughter of Yashoda, the wife of a cowherd chieftan of the village of Gokul across the River Yamuna.

#### Early Childhood

While growing up in Gokul, Krishna encountered innumerable adventures with his young cowherd friends; killing monstrous demons, playing naughty pranks on his mother, teasing the gopis and stealing butter; he was mischievous but always charming. Episodes of his

childhood are enacted in the ulukhal ras and rakhal ras performances of Manipur (other mandap lilas besides the raslila).

#### Youth

When he was a little older, he wandered in the romantic environs of the forest of Brindavan. He played irresistible melodies on His flute, attracting the young milkmaids. He teased them by vanishing and leaving them in anguish and in search of Him. Krishna was always playing, flirting, in love and attracting lovers. His beauty, like the fullness of the moon, glowed brightest in the presence of the gopis, especially the one named Radha. His radiance was manifest through his dancing and His music. The raslila performances in Manipur (the maharas, vasantaras, kunjaras, nityaras) are the depiction of His dance with the gopis. He dances at the center with the gopis all around Him. This phase of his life is therefore most significant to this study.

#### Adulthood

This, the final stage of his life on earth, is contained in the Mahabharata (India's longest epic) where He is portrayed as a friend, philosopher and guide of the Pandavas, the heroes of the epic. Here He reveals a somewhat different character from that of His youth. He is as responsible and dependable as He was playful and unpredictable in his early life. This has led scholars to question the identity of this character with that of the earlier Krishna. Characteristically, this period of His life is not given much attention by the followers of the bhakti cult and thus we do not find it featured in any of the religious performances of Manipur.

### Aspects of Krishna Worship

As bhakti calls for a deep intimate relationship with Krishna, the episodes of his life are of special interest and fascination to the devotees. The description of Krishna of the early legends of His childhood and youth depicts Him as mischievous but lovable child-hero, a human element of the God, that allows for the intimacy of feeling required for a truly devotional relationship. His devotees recall his childhood and youthful episodes more often than those of his adult life. As an adult and epic hero of the Mahabharata He commands respect and admiration rather than intimate love. The followers of Krishna prefer relating to the youthful Krishna, perhaps because it allows them an emotional closeness not perceived in His adulthood. Four major relationships with Krishna have emerged in devotional worship. Certain devotees worship Him in His child form, loving with a maternal love known as vatsalya bhava. Others worship Krishna as a young playmate. This relationship is called sakhya bhava. The third aspect is of service, called dasya bhava which regards serving Krishna as the highest form of love, and the fourth is rati bhava which promotes a romantic and erotic involvement with Krishna. This final aspect of worship focuses on the Krishna-Gopi relationship, and is known as madhura-bhakti.<sup>25</sup>

Lord Chaitanya of Bengal advocated madhura-bhakti which spread from Bengal to Manipur, and is the major type of Krishna-bhakti practised in Manipur today. The raslila performance is centered around the episodes of Krishna and the gopis is therefore the most significant religious and performance event.

## Bhakti: The Emotional Content Of The Raslila

### An Introduction to the Bhakti Phenomenon

Bhakti, or devotion, is the fundamental emotional bonding between the characters of the raslila: Krishna and Radha and the other gopis. The same relationship exists between the devotees in the audience and Krishna and Radha in the performance arena. The raslila performance explores and unravels this relationship which is essentially a love-relationship.

### A Definition of Bhakti

The term bhakti is generally translated as devotion, and implies loving service to God. A particularly interesting view of the term bhakti is provided by Dr. Friedhelm Hardy, a scholar of Vaishnava history, in his work entitled, Viraha Bhakti. He has researched the term bhakti and its meaning, and found that the 'devotional love' denoted by bhakti varies in intensity from 'a general liking' to a fierce passion.<sup>26</sup> According to Dr. Hardy, the most significant early works referring to bhakti are Panini's Sutras and the Bhagavat Gita. In these texts Bhakti denotes emotion only in a very 'minimal sense'. Panini used the word bhakti in his Sutras to denote a very general liking for something acitta, or material like places or seasons. (Another work called Kasika of 600 AD describes the material things to be sweet tasting things, particularly cakes and sweet milk dishes). The Bhagavat Gita expands on the meaning of the term to denote a loving relationship but it is by no means acutely emotional, rather, it invariably uses the term bhakta to mean loyal, devoted and devout as a loyal subject is to his King.<sup>27</sup> In fact, says Hardy, 'the author of the Bhagavat Gita quite clearly assumes the yogic capacity of bhakti'. It emphasizes self-discipline and a sense of duty and honour which prompts

Hardy to qualify this kind of bhakti as 'intellectual' rather than emotional.<sup>28</sup> The devotional practices of Chaitanya the devotional saint of Bengal, on the other hand, show an intense and uncompromising love which is also described as bhakti, quite distinct from the kind of bhakti taught in the Bhagvat Gita. Chaitanya belongs to the bhakti movement of medieval India, spurred by a great religious fervour of an entirely emotional nature.<sup>29</sup> In Hardy's view, the Bhagavat Purana (7th century AD) the earliest literary source to describe a bhakti which he differentiates from the early 'intellectual kind, qualifying it as 'emotional bhakti'.<sup>30</sup> The extent of devotional fervor characterized by 'emotional bhakti' is suggested in the following description of the ecstatic experiential states of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of Bengal:

At first he went as the wind, then suddenly he turned into a pillar, paralysed and unable to move. The flesh around the roots of his hair swelled like boils, and his hair stood on end all over his body. Sweat was dripping from his hair like blood. Unable to speak, his throat emitted gurgling sounds. His eyes filled with tears, his body turned pallid like a white conch. He began to shake, and shivering and trembling fell down on the ground.<sup>31</sup>

Outside it looked like a poisonous inflammation, but inside it was the fullness of bliss; this is the amazing character of the love of Krishna.<sup>32</sup>

The Chaitanya Charitamrita gives graphic descriptions of Sri Chaitanya's ecstatic singing and dancing manifestations of his emotionalism:

On all four sides the four sankirtana groups chanted very loudly, and in the middle Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu dance jumping high.<sup>33</sup> When Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu danced and jumped high roaring like thunder and moving in a circle like a wheel, he appeared like a circling firebrand.<sup>34</sup>

There were altogether seven parties of sankirtana, and in each party two men were beating drums. Thus fourteen drums were being played at once, the sound was tumultuous, and all the devotees became mad.<sup>35</sup>

All the vaisnavas came together like an assembly of clouds. As the devotees chanted the holy names, tears fell in great extacy like rainfall from their eyes.<sup>36</sup>

These emotional responses may belong to bhakti mystics in high spiritual intoxication. But often the participants of the raslila performance are so overcome with love for Krishna and Radha that they too weep uncontrollably or perform in mad ecstasy.

#### Bhakti Dramaturgy of the Raslila

The correlation between the emotionalism of Krishna-bhakti and the dramatic content of the Manipuri raslila. The theme of the raslila presents a series of actions from the life of Krishna, focusing on his dalliance with Radha and the Gopis, to unravel the drama of their divine love, and by so doing to evoke bhakti ras (the experience or delight in devotional love). The dramatic possibilities of this love relationship which is both devotional and erotic at once, have been carefully deliberated and categorized by the bhakti dramaturgists of the vaishnava faith.

#### Vaishnava Sources on Dramaturgy

There are several treatises on the subject of bhakti dramaturgy. The main contributors are the followers of Chaitanya and of these, Rupa Goswami and Jiva Goswami are perhaps the best known. Two works of Rupa Goswami, the Ujjvala Nilamani and the Bhaktirasamrtasindhu are the most elaborate works on the emotional states of the love of bhakti.<sup>37</sup> The Kram Sandarbh of Jiva Goswami consists of discourses on religious sentiment, with deliberations on every minute variation in the love relationship of Krishna and the Gopis.<sup>38</sup> Other significant works are Alankar Kaustubha by Kavi Karnapur and the Bhakti Ratnakar by Narahari Chakravarti.<sup>39</sup> The major contention or premise of these dramaturgists of the vaishnava faith is in qualifying bhakti as a rasa. They believe that bhakti has the capacity of being an aesthetic and dramatic experience, a view that is not accepted by



the non-vaisnava dramatists of India who uphold only the eight rasas (exclusive of bhakti) stated in the ancient text of the Natyashastra.<sup>40</sup> This controversy on whether bhakti is a rasa, may never be resolved as its argument lies in the experiential state of a particular religious belief.

### Bhakti rasa

An outstanding feature of vaishnavism which distinguishes it from other Indian religious paths is its peak experience of bhakti rasa. The vaishnavas elevated the rasa or aesthetic experience, to the highest spiritual level, practising their belief through their theatrical revelation of devotional love.<sup>41</sup>

The Natyashastra proclaims the theory of rasa as the peak experience of aesthetics, the Upanishads proclaimed Sat-chit-ananda as the highest spiritual state and peak experience of bliss.<sup>42</sup> The vaishnavas of the bhakti following see both as one, which is why the arts were elevated to the status of spiritual experience, and why it is necessary to view the raslila tradition within the context of the vaishnava path of bhakti. The followers of Chaitanya introduced bhakti as a rasa, although in the tradition of the Natyashastra, bhakti is a bhava (an emotional state that is the latent condition for the rasa). They reason that bhakti is an all encompassing rasa and that the other rasas are experiential states within it. The major one of the nine is the shringara rasa or the romantic love often referred to as rasaraja or the King among rasas.<sup>43</sup> As the devotional following of Chaitanya in Bengal considered the madhura bhakti the romantic/erotic love as the most intense for one's relationship with Krishna, they incorporated the shringar rasa of the Sanskrit poetics as its closest approximate rasa.

### Shringar Rasa

The shringar rasa has been the subject of elaborate study by dramaturgs since ancient times, and a bulk of literary material is available on the subject. But these are beyond the scope of this study which is primarily concerned with the vaishnava interpretation of shringar.

A brief account of the shringar rasa and its categories as listed by Rupa Goswami (one of six main disciples of Chaitanya) in his work, Ujjvala Nilamani is given below: Rupa Goswami divides shringar ras into two parts: vipralambha and sambhoga. The former denotes the emotions evoked by the separation of the lovers, and the latter, the emotions felt when in union. These two categories are further divided giving the shringar rasa sixty-four emotional variations, thirty-two in separation and thirty-two in union.<sup>44</sup> The separation is the major dramatic conflict of a performance like the raslila, a peculiar kind of conflict because the separation itself is of the nature of bliss as Jiva Goswami states:

Although love for God is of the nature of bliss yet it is the cause of pain at the time of separation from Him,....the pain of separation is included in the joy of love because it arises from this emotion and because it fosters the joy of future union...<sup>45</sup>

### Rasa and Bhava

The rasa requires the sthayi bhava (the latent condition), to be activated. The sthayi bhava of the bhakti rasa is Krishna-rati (love for Krishna). Thus the bhava has a direct relationship with rasa in the process of the play.<sup>46</sup> The emotional state bhava must have three elements: the excitants (vibhava), the ensuants (anubhava) and the auxiliaries (vyabhichari bhavas) to activate rasa. The vibhavas, or excitants, of Krishna-rati bhava would be the moonlit night, the hypnotizing buzz of the bees, the cooing of the cuckoo, and the romantic

and mysterious dark forest. The anubhavas, or the the actions resulting from these excitants would be the kisses, embraces, the trembling. And the vyabhichari, or auxiliary reactions following, would be langour, embarrassment, laughter, etc. Thus the sthayi bhava is activated leading the the experiential state of rasa.<sup>47</sup> The Bhaktirasamritasindhu by Rupa Goswami advocates twelve rasas encompassed by the bhakti rasa. There are five major ones: shanta (meditative stillness), dasya (attitude of devotional service), sakhya (the feelings of friendship) vatsalya (maternal feeling) and madhuriya (attraction and love between sexes). The seven secondary rasas are: hasya (humour) adbhuta (wonder), vira (valour). karuna (pathos), raudra (anger) bhayanaka (horror) and bibhatsa (disgust).<sup>48</sup>

### Characterization

As the purpose of the play is to unravel the love relationship, and its nature is erotic, the fundamental characterization is of a hero and heroine called nayak (hero) and nayika (heroine).<sup>49</sup> In the context of the raslila, the hero is Krishna and the heroine is Radha. The gopis could be called her counterparts, in the sense that as they too are lovers of Krishna, the hero, but Radha is the nayika. The gopis play a multiple role: they are Krishna's lovers, they aid the love of Krishna and Radha, by making all the arrangements for their secret meetings, and they support Radha when they act as close friends or sakhis. In fact, through the performances of the raslilas in Manipur, the gopis dominate the action. (In the temple of the palace, for instance, all the performers play the part of gopis, since Krishna and Radha are represented by images). The hero-heroine characterization is essentially male-female. The dynamics of the drama lie within its fundamental duality. The dramatic variations

occur as emotional states of love in separation and union which have the sixty four variations mentioned earlier.

### Nayak-Nayika Bheda

Rupa Goswami also categorizes the two major character types of the raslila, the nayak and the nayika (hero and heroine), according to the situations that occur in their relationship. He declares that Radha and Krishna go through so many emotional states in their relationship that each category of the Nayaka- Nayika bhedas (variations of the hero or heroine's moods and therefore character or states) apply to them.<sup>50</sup> There are three types of nayikas and eight major states or situations in love that she confronts. The three types are: mugdha, who is shy and young; inexperienced in love, she is not as yet acquainted with erotic desire and follows the advise of her friends. She weeps when her lover is untrue and her pride is often wounded. Then, there is madhya, shy but passionate and desiring, she is in her prime. She can articulate her thoughts and feelings. She has the capacity to make love until she falls senseless. But when she is angry or hurt she can be quite cruel. The third is pragalbha, very proud of her youth and demonstrative of her affections. She is in complete control of her lover. When she is angry she too can be extremely harsh.<sup>51</sup>

The eight major nayika-bhedas, the variations in the states of love or the situations in love for the heroine are: abhisarika, a nayika who sets out in the dark to search for her lover; bashak-sajja, a nayika who arrives at the tryst at her lover's request and decorates it herself, utkhandita a nayika who becomes anxious as her lover has not arrived at the appointed hour; vipralabdha, a nayika who is hurt and distressed when he does not show up, she sighs unhappily and faints; khandita, a nayika

who is dejected and angry at her lover who eventually arrives in the morning; kalahantarita the nayika who rejects her lover in front of her friends, then repents, she grows quite crazed at her loss when he leaves; proshitabhartrika, is a nayika whose lover is abroad, she pines and longs for him growing thin and listless; swadhinabhartrika, a nayika who is with her lover and is content.<sup>52</sup> These eight nayika-bhedas have eight divisions each resulting in sixty-four variations of nayika-bhedas. Along with the nayika-bhedas, we also have several nayaka-bhedas, the four major ones are: dhiralalita, the hero who is calm, light-hearted, young and easy to control with love; dhirashanta, the hero who is serene, collected, has the capacity to endure, he is considerate and good natured; dhirodatta, a hero who is forgiving, compassionate, strong egoless and indomitable; and, dhiroddhatta, who is restless, egoistic, argumentative, inconstant, impatient, and jealous of other's goodness.<sup>53</sup>

The controversy about the dramatic potential of bhakti may always prevail since the answer lies in the experience of the bhakta or devotional worshipper. The bhakta's experience of bhakti rasa lies in his direct spiritual and esthetic experience during worship through the arts.

The Raslila in the Environment of Manipur

The landscape of Manipur spells out the lyrical imagery of the raslila poetry: the cool breezes, the hypnotizing buzz of the night's little creatures and the full-moon shedding its cool rays of soft, liquid light, as if to soothe the land beaten by the day's hot sun. A hill gird surrounding the central valley of Manipur forms a protective framework for the out-of-doors performance of the raslila (Figure 4). The moon's rays highlight the giant tin roof of the rasmandap (performance arena) to a sparkle, and the earth is cool and refreshing to the devotees who enter the temple grounds barefooted, as is the custom.

There is a popular legend in Manipur that tells of the great desire of Shiva's consort Parvati to see a raslila performance. It is believed that to please her, Shiva searched the world, for a suitable arena and atlast, came upon a lake surrounded by hills. He bore holes into the mountain with his trident, and let the water flow out. The land which remained, became the arena, and is the present Manipur or the land of the jewel; referring to the jewel on the head of the snake god Ananta who attended the raslila. The jewel on his head shone brightly lighting up the raslila performance.

Shaped like an oval bowl, Manipur is made up of a hill gird and a central valley; the valley runs north to south. Lush green patchwork of rice plantations and spires of bamboo-in-groves, revel in the constant cool breezes of Manipur's temperate climate. This landlocked state is situated in the north-eastern corner of India with Burma on its East and Southeast, Nagaland to the North, Cashar district of Assam on the West, and Mizoram on the South and Southwest.<sup>54</sup> (Figure 5)



Figure 4 Landscape of Manipur

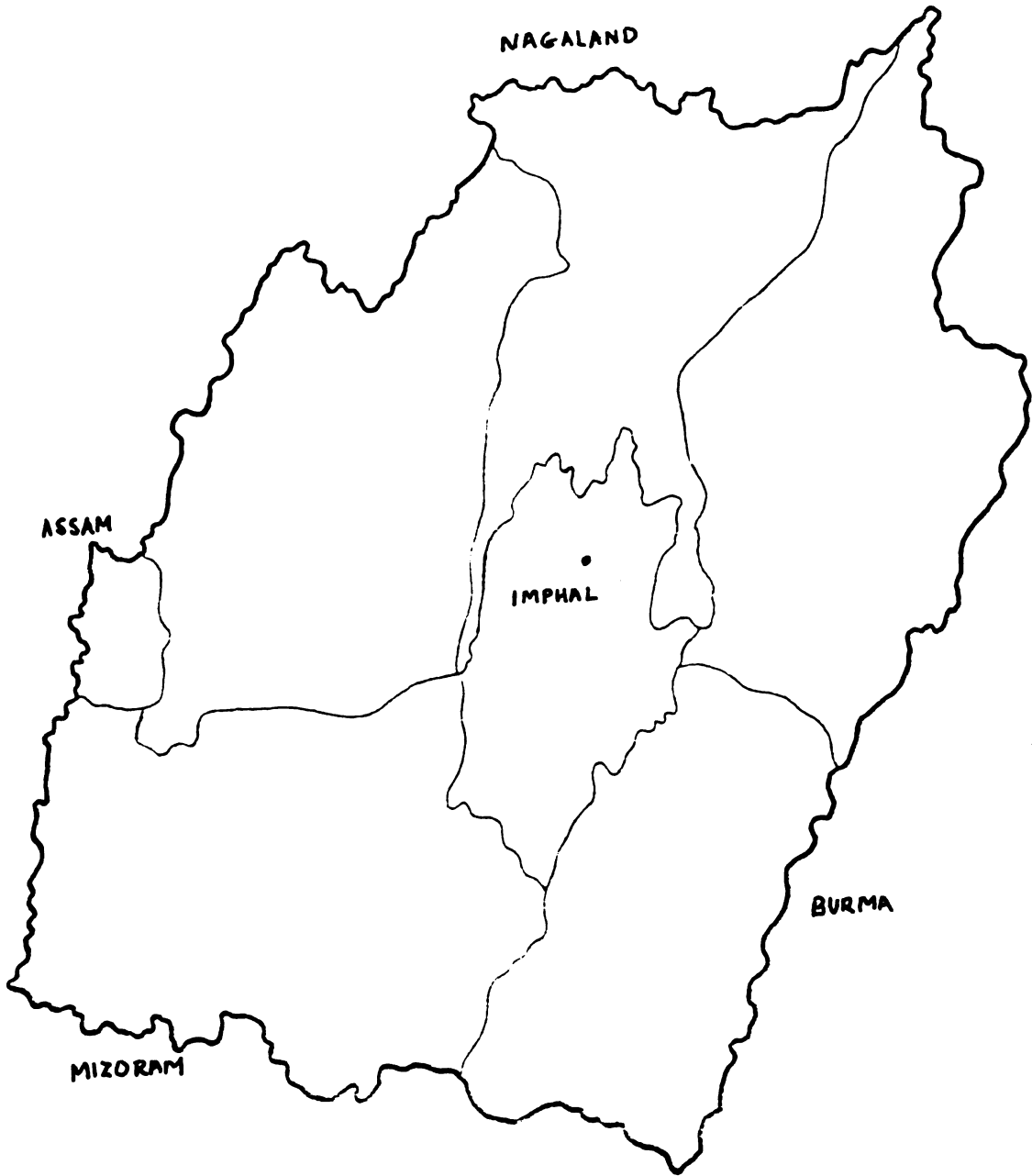


Figure 5 Location of Imphal



### Performing Arts of Manipur

A birds-eye view of performance in Manipur reveals a wide range of forms; from simple communal dancing and singing to organized productions of contemporary indigeneous and western drama. The most rarified classical arts of dance and music co-exist with local, popular dramas.

Performances are held at social events, religious rituals, and festive occasions, in a variety of settings; temple mandaps, sumangs (courtyard), in the open fields and in auditoriums with proscenium stages. Radio plays are extremely popular and add to the variety of performance exposure in Manipur.

The Manipuris actively engaged in performing are usually associated with a performing group. A performing group is called a pala. There are innumerable palas in Manipur today: the nupi palas'(women's groups), the natpala (new sankirtan group), the ariba pala (older sankirtan group) the 'nupa macha sumang lila'(young boys courtyard drama group), the jagoi sabi loisangs (organization of dancers), the pala loisang (organization of sankirtan groups) of the more traditional performance groups and organizations. There are also the more modern dramatic societies and unions and performance repertories that produce contemporary theater. Manipur is undoubtedly one of the more enjoyable places for theater lovers and practitioners.

Manipur has very clearly demarcated neighborhoods called leikeis (Figure 6). The leikei provides its residents occupation, education, and recreation perpetuating community living. As every leikei has its share of talented performers, performance productions in Manipur tend to be localized; participants belong to the same or the neighbouring leikei. The selection of the cast is rather informal; the director



A Typical House in a Leikei

picks a friend who recommends another, they form a mutually acquainted group and you have a production. Relatives, friends and neighbours supply backstage assistance, and on the whole, the final result is quite professional. Some leikeis have earned a distinct reputation for their talent in the performing arts.

The raslila is an exception to these comparatively small local productions. First produced by the King, it was a much grander and larger venture than the usual local performance. Here, the leikeis functioned as resource centers for the court to draw upon. With their specialization in the various crafts, the leikeis supplied the gorgeous costume, jewelry, and the musical instruments for the raslila performance. The tradition established by the Kings of Manipur continues; a sponsor of the raslila has to travel from one leikei to another gathering the materials required for the performance. The father-to-son succession of occupational tradition has sustained this system until today. The difference is that there is no king and court to finance the elaborate requirements, the people of Manipur incur considerable expenditure to preserve their performance tradition.

#### Pre-Vaishnava Traditions of Dance and Music

Of all the forms of performance in Manipur, the arts of dance and music are the most authentic, indigeneous and ancient, and the most direct expression of the spirit of the manipuri people. The form that epitomizes their adherence to these arts is the Lai Haraoba.

Prof. E. Nilkanta Singh says:

Lai Haraoba mirrors the entire culture of the Manipuri people. It reveals the strength and weakness, the beliefs and superstitions and perhaps also the charm and happiness of the Manipuri people. It reflects a people at their intensest.<sup>55</sup>

Lai Haraoba means, joyous celebration of the gods. It is a season of festivity directed and performed by the maibas and maibis (priests and priestesses) of the pre-vaishnava religious institutions of Manipur. They celebrate the ritual with dance and music in which the entire manipuri community participates. The dances depict the story of creation tracing the process of birthing, building of a home and weaving clothing, step by step, indicating each one with hand gestures and body movement. The group or communal dances depict their notions of cosmology and infinity through symbols called paaphals- variations of coiled snake forms created through ground patterns of the dance choreography in a dance called lairen mathek to appease the snake god Pakhangba,<sup>56</sup> (Figure 7).

The Lai Haroaba shows that a fully developed ritual performance existed in Manipur many years before the advent of vaishnavism and its performance forms like the raslila. Naturally, some scholars have tried to prove that the raslila form is a direct outgrowth of the Lai Haraoba but so far the evidence is not entirely convincing. Vaishnavism opened Manipur to exposure to pan-indian influences and the raslila form most definitely shows a co-mixture of almost equal proportion between the manipuri and pan-indian vaishnava cultures.

#### Dance Movement Forms

There are several forms of dance/body movement in Manipur. One of the most ancient is their martial art form known as thang ta (sword and spear). Its body movements form the basis of structures evolved in the dances.

Two major divisions appear in their dance forms, the masculine and feminine. They are distinct and complementary, evolved along with the hero-heroine characterization of the dances' thematic material of romantic



Figure 7 Paaphal (snake forms)

folk legends like the Khamba Thoibi story (parallel to Romeo and Juliet) or the religious and mythical tales of the gods, for example the story of Nompok Ningthou and Panthoibi (a love-relationship between god and goddess parallel to the Krishna and Radha theme. In the raslila this distinction is found in the characters of Krishna and the Gopis; Krishna dances the tandava (masculine) style and lasya (feminine) styles of classical dance). The dance forms share certain basic characteristics founded in ethnological and environmental factors. Some of the most common ones are: the feminine style is extremely soft fluid and graceful, the knees are always held close together, the footsteps are small, the body movements have a gentle undulation created by shifts of balance from one foot to the other the head and arm movements have a figure 8-like circularity.

The figure 8 is the dominant feeling in the movements and also in the choreography of ground patterns based on the coiled snake forms (there are 364 variations of these with the tail end of the snake locked into the mouth), that signify infinity or the inner self or spirit. The figure 8 is perhaps the peculiar aesthetic preference of the cultural tradition of Manipur and features in most of its artistic, ritualistic expression. (The raslila dance technique based on this pattern will be described in detail in chapter three). The key idea of the feminine style is of restraint. An analogy is given in the Anuirol (ancient manipuri manuscript) compares the restrained movements to that of a caged parrot who is tied by a chain and is attempting to move forward. The consistency of the movement or movement quality is described in the same source by the word noiba which means 'to knead'.<sup>57</sup>

The masculine dance style incorporates aerial acrobatics, forceful body movements, springy jumping movements while maintaining the general character of the figure 8 circularity. Both these styles can be observed in the raslila.

#### Musical Traditions

An abundance of folk songs, romantic songs, popular lullabys and classical singing (usually religious), form the musical repertoire of Manipur. Their most basic musical instruments (mainly for accompaniment) are the pena (strings and bells) and the pung (drum). The musical compositions generally employ the pentatonic scale. They use the 'ma' note (the fourth on the western solfege) to express pathos and the 'pa' note (the fifth) when expressing joy.<sup>58</sup> The peculiarities of the singing style lies in the use of voice tremors or kampan for sorrow, oscillation techniques or gamak to show voice control and virtuosity and as ornamentation, and certain typical voice breaks and sharp pitches (slashing like a knife) - there is a popular manipuri singer who uses this technique so well she is called Thangaibi-the one that wields a sword. All the above techniques are utilized in the raslila songs. Although the manipuris sing vaishnava padavalis (bhakti songs) and even use the Bengali melodies, the style is peculiarly Manipuri, resulting in a new musical sound found especially in the sankirtan and raslila and other mandap lilas of Manipur.

#### The Performers of the Raslila

All the performers of the raslila (except accompanying musicians) are women. There are usually about twenty women performers who participate as gopis. Occasionally, in the khulak raslilas, a young boy may play the role of Krishna. Some of the cast of women are professional dancers and

singers (those that perform as a means of earning a living) and others are trained specially to dance for that one occasion of the raslila as it is considered highly auspicious and beneficial to do so. Unlike other parts of India, Manipur had no social taboo against women performers. In fact, the position of women in Manipur has always been considerable higher than in other parts of India. For years Manipuri women have been economically independent, often supporting the family. The market-places for instance, are managed entirely by the women, (Figure 8). And since the basic everyday livelihood is watched over by the woman, the man is relatively free of pressure and therefore able to afford leisure. This explains the existence of such a large number of men involved with the mastery of the performing arts. There are innumerable gurus in Manipur who live entirely dedicated to their art. A guru of the raslila for instance, can afford to live entirely temperamentally, his every physical need cared for by his wife. He can use his time teaching, creating new compositions, performing in the sankirtan, researching, and comparing notes with other gurus. It is not surprising then that Manipur has produced a great number of artist gurus. They can be heard rehearsing in the little lanes of the leikeis. The sound of the pung (drum) and the kartal (cymbals) permeate the environment.

But although the women bear the economic burden and manage their family, most women train in the arts of dance and music. It has been the tradition in Manipur since the most ancient times that women dance and perform the temple rituals, and this tradition is continued in the raslila performance.





Figure 8 Women in the Market

### Royal Sponsorship

The raslila performance of Manipur owes as much of its origins to the court as to the temple of Krishna. The sole person responsible for its creation in Manipur, is Maharaj (king) Bhagyachandra (1759-1798). The Kings of Manipur have traditionally headed the performing arts that they sponsored, as it is stated by Shri Surachand Sharma (a brahmin scholar of Manipur):

In no Hindu Kingdom do we find kings mastering the arts of dance and music and participating in communal festivities as it is in Manipur. Among the Kings who became gurus were Bhagyachandra (1759-1798 AD), Chourjit (1806-1812 AD), Marjit (1812- 1819 AD), Gambhirsingh (1825-1834 AD), Narasingh (1834-1850 AD) Chandrakirti (1850-1886 AD), Surchandra (1886-1890 AD), Churachand (1908-1941 AD), and Bodhachandra (1941-1955 AD)<sup>59</sup>

The performing arts institutions headed by these Kings are called loisangs. In 1776, King Bhagyachandra instituted the Pala Loisang which is associated with Vaishnavite religious ceremonies, and is the only authoritative institution of its kind in Manipur as far as dance and music are concerned. On being enrolled in this institution, gurus and artists received recognition and honor for their work.

### Geneology of Vaishnava Kings

The earliest historical evidence of vaishnavism in Manipur is an image of Vishnu presented to King Kiyamba by the King of Pong (Burma) in 1470. From that time on the image of Vishnu became the insignia of the kings of Manipur, and from the reign of King Khagemba in 1579, the King was treated as an incarnation of Vishnu.<sup>60</sup> The history of vaishnavism in Manipur has two significant periods of development: the first under Charairongba and Garibniwaz of the Ramanandi sect of Vaishnavism, and the second under Bhagyachandra and his descendants who adopted the Gaudiya Vaishnavism.<sup>61</sup>

King Charairongba was the first manipuri king to be formally initiated into vaishnavism. He patronized devotional singing of kirtana, known in Manipur as Pala Ariba (old), or Bangadesh pala, suggesting its association with Bengal).<sup>62</sup>

King Garibniwaz the son and successor of Charairongba was one of the most notorious Vaishnava kings of Manipur. Under the influence of his preceptor, Shantidas Gosai (of Assam), he forcibly suppressed the indigeneous manipuri faiths as well as other Hindu faiths. He banned the use of the manipuri or meithei script and substituted it with the Bengali script; he curtailed Manipuri songs and prayers introducing Bengali songs. His most atrocious deed was the burning of old manipuri manuscripts. He introduced and popularized traditional Hindu literature; the great epics Mahabharata and Ramayana were translated into Manipuri, and there were efforts made towards the study of Sanskrit and Bengali, Brajbali and Maithili (the languages popular during the bhakti movement in India). He instituted various Vaishnava customs including cremation of the dead.<sup>63</sup>

In the second stage, the Gaudiya Vaishnava faith appears under King Jayasimha alias Bhagyachandra.<sup>64</sup> The Gaudiya Vaishnavas are the followers of the great Bhakta (devotional saint) of Bengal, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The outstanding feature of this following is the joint-worship of Krishna and Radha, perpetuated by Chaitanya and his followers. Faubian Bowers who toured Manipur in the fifties remarks: "Manipuri religion apart from the vestigial element of animism represented by the Lai Haraoba belongs to the Chaitanya sect of Vaishnavite Hinduism." He continues to say that, "...it has been the single most powerful influence on Manipuri life"<sup>65</sup>

### Bhagyachandra

The career of King Jayasimha is particularly significant as he is responsible for the creation and institution of the tradition of raslila performances, and he is also responsible for instituting Krishna-Bhakti in Manipur. It is believed that the raslila performance was revealed to the King in a vision. It was at Gobindaji's (Krishna's) request that he installed the dieties of Krishna and Radha in a temple, which he then inaugurated with the first raslila performance.<sup>66</sup> The proof of the King's vision lies in the spectacular creation of the raslila performance. It is clearly a glimpse of divine radiance recreated in all its splendid color and movement. Unlike his predeccesor, King Bhagyachandra was truly benevolent and one with the gentle vaishnava spirit of devotion. The fact that he was especially graced, is revealed in stories about his youth when he was an exiled prince in Assam, in danger of losing his position as heir to Manipur's throne. It is said that Krishna or Govidaji himself came to his aid and through seemingly miraculous feats rescued him from a dangerous threat to his life. In exchange for his assistance, Krishna is said to have instructed the young prince to construct and install an image of Him in Manipur and to inaugurate its worship with a raslila performance.

### The Installation and the First Raslila Performance

According to the Cheitharol Kumbaba the royal chronicle of Manipur, the image of Shri Gobindaji was completed on Friday the 12th of the month of Hiyengei (October or November) in the auspicious hour of Mahendra of the year 1698 of the Saka era (1776 AD.) It was carved out of the jackfruit tree and sculpted by a Manipuri artist Sapam Lakshman Singh.<sup>67</sup>

The installation of this image was held in the specially designed rasmandal (performance arena) at Langthabal on the 11th day of the month of Hiyengei of 1779. The ceremony lasted for five days. This ceremony marks the initiation of the raslila performance tradition that is presented today.<sup>68</sup> At this performance, the King's daughter Bimbavati Manjari played the role of Radha. She was so overcome with love for Krishna, that after the performance, she dedicated her life to His service.<sup>69</sup> The image of Radha which resides in the Shri Shri Govindaji Temple of Imphal, is said to have been inspired by her face.

Since this initiating performance, the royal family has always taken the most active role in the palace productions of the raslila. The queens especially influenced its design aspects and introduced changes whenever necessary, setting the trend for other performances. The installation of the image of Gobindaji in a temple marks a turning point in the history of Manipur. Jayadeva instituted Vaishnavism as the official religion of the state and assumed the title of Bhagyachandra Maharaj. He was a remarkable statesman and devotee of Krishna. He was a talented poet, musician and dancer. He heads the geneology of gurus of the raslila tradition of the Palace temple, Shri Shri Govindaji.

#### Govindajigi and Khulakgi Ras

The initiating performances of the Shri Sri Govindaji Palace Temple in Imphal, the capital of Manipur, are commonly referred to as 'Gobindajigi ras' by the people while the performances in other temples in Imphal and in the villages are called khulakgi (those of the village). The general rule is that the khulakgi raslila may not precede the Govindajigi raslilas.

In Imphal two temples of Govindaji that open the performance season of a particular raslila are the Shri Shri Govindaji Temple (Figure 9)



Figure 9 Shri Shri Govindaji Temple

the Vijay Govindaji Temple in Sagolband. But the Vijay Govindaji Temple falls under the khulakgi category. The palace temple performances are therefore distinct from all other raslila presentations whether in the Vijay Govindaji Temple or in others in the villages. All performances outside the Palace Temple are of the khulakgi category. The major difference between the two categories is that in the palace or Govindajigi raslila, the roles of Krishna and Radha are represented by the dieties of the temple and not by actors, while in the khulak performances they are played by child actors. The other difference is that as the Palace raslila represents the tradition initiated by the first raslila at the time of Bhagyachandra, and its major concern is to uphold that tradition, the presentation of the raslila is strictly in accordance with it. While the khulak raslilas have lesser constraints. The rasdharis, or directors, of the raslila of the khulak category have a freer hand in choreography and direction. The decorative arrangements of the khulak rasmandap, or performance arena, is usually more elaborate and less austere and often certain liberties are taken with the costuming, musical accompaniment and overall structure of the traditional play.

The mark of court influence is still very apparent in the raslila performance tradition of Manipur, due to the separate category of the palace production, that is still maintained despite the fact that since India's independence in 1947 and since Manipur's official alliance with the democratic form of government there has been no ruling feudal head or King at the palace. Nevertheless, manipuri ex-royalty are still recognized socially and given due respect. For instance in the raslila performance, special seating on the right hand side of the dieties is still reserved for the King and the royal family.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS OF THE RASLILA

Chapter three focuses on each element of the raslila performance from training methods to costume design. The performance elements are introduced by their local Manipuri name and are documented in order of their importance to the tradition. They are: Ras Kram (prescribed sequence of events), Rasdhari (the man who controls the performance), Ras Mandap (performance arena in a temple), Jagoi (dance), Isei (song and/or music), Potloi (the items used for costuming), and they will be documented in the order they have been stated.

#### Ras Kram

##### The Traditional Score of the Raslila Performance

Kram (or the prescribed order of events) is the backbone of the raslila performance structure. Each performance follows a traditional score. The term kram is a Sanskrit for any predetermined order of events. It is a fundamental concept in India, suggesting the idea of predestined events that take place in one's lifetime.

This section on kram documents the overall sequence of a traditional raslila performance, giving a brief analysis of the structure. It provides a listing of the order of events of the four raslilas observed with lyrics of Vasantaras.

Each raslila performance has two sets of kram: the first is that of the sankirtan (an all-male percussion prelude to the performance, and the second is that of the raslila itself. Both have five-part structures, beginning with invocations and ending in closing prayers.

Further, each raslila has its own distinct kram. There is a fundamental difference between the kram of a Govindajigi raslila and the khulakgi raslila. The krams of the Govindaji raslila (those performed at the palace temple) are most sacred and therefore inviolable. But those of khulak may be creatively altered by a renowned master (guru). In such a case, when a kram is created by a guru, it is transmitted to his disciple lineage, in his name, and also becomes a traditional score, but it is a tradition of a particular guru's lineage. Thus while the khulak raslila uses the kram of a particular guru, the kram of the Govindajigi raslila is the original kram created for its first production. The kram has proved to be an excellent system for the preservation of raslila performance tradition. The ras krams of the palace temple (Govindaji), for instance, are believed to have remained relatively unchanged since they were first created in 1779.

#### The Overall Sequence of a Kram

The raslila is a performance event and it is also a religious celebration. It is produced for the sole purpose of revealing the awe-inspiring vision of the legendary cosmic dance of Krishna, Radha and the Gopis.

As the sankirtan (percussion prelude) comes to an end, the members of the raslila orchestra enter the mandap, pay their obeisances to the dieties and the distinguished members in the audience, take their positions in the orchestra corner and play the musical invocations. The dancers enter after this overture and perform their prayers and invocations through dancing and singing. Then the circle or mandala is formed by the gopis around Radha and Krishna. A series of solo dances are performed introducing the leading characters of the performance. This may



be followed by the enacting of a dramatic episode and then with the closing rites performed with dance and music, the performance ends. This entire sequence of the sankirtan prelude and raslila lasts from dusk to dawn.

#### An Analysis of the Sequence

An examination of the kram of a raslila roughly indicates a basic five-part structure.

First part: invocations, entrances and prayers.

Second part: preparation of rasmandala by Gopis

Third part: introductory dances by the lead characters

Fourth part: dramatic episode

Fifth part: closing rites

The kram of Vasanta ras has a complete five-part structure whereas in the Maharas, the dramatic episode dominates and all the other parts are absorbed by it. The Kunjaras on the other hand has no dramatic episode and since it is also an autumn raslila, on the fullmoon night preceding the Maharas, it is often considered as a prelude to the dramatic episode of the Maharas. The Nityaras has five parts but there is no real dramatic episode, it is more an underlying theme of competitions and games between Krishna and the gopis.

Thus the Vasantaras of the Gobindaji observed April 1982 and in 1984 has been selected for detailed review. The Vasantaras of the Shri Shri Govindaji Temple of the palace was selected rather than that of the khulak Vasantaras, as it is considered to be more traditional and auspicious. (The kram of the khulak Vasantaras is provided to show a comparison between the two in the Appendix).



### Sankirtan

Each raslila performance in both the palace and the khulak is preceded by a sankirtan a group chant or invocation. It may be described as a percussion prelude to the raslila. It invokes Chaitanya the guru who is believed to lead the devoted to Krishna (in the Indian tradition, the guru is like a channel by whose grace one's goals may be achieved). Chaitanya's desire to see the raslila is acknowledged and then, the preparation of the particular raslila of the day is described to him in the singing. This description serves as a prelude to the raslila. The sankirtan is performed by an all-male group who sing and dance and play on large cymbals called kartal. Directly inherited from the Chaitanya tradition in Bengal, there are two major types of sankirtan in Manipur, the Ariba pala and the Natpala. The Ariba pala is the older form belonging to the pre-Chaitanya vaishnavism in Manipur and probably came to Manipur from Assam. The Natpala sankirtan was developed during Maharaja Bhagyachandra's time and is the prevailing form in Manipur today.

Sankirtan is Manipur's most significant performance ritual. Besides consecrating the raslila performance, it acts as a yagna or rite at every vaishnava wedding and funeral in Manipur. An entire study can be devoted to the subject which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

As a prelude to the raslila the natpala performs its traditional score or kram of raga, sanchar, gurughat, tintal, rajmel, tanchep, menkup, and chali. The raga is played on the drums by two players who stand on the left and right side of the temple in the mandap. It is a beautiful composition of drum syllables free of beat measurement. It pervades the atmosphere with its auspicious sound pattern accompanied by the conch. With the sanchar, the chanting of the name of the dieties begins

in a verse describing their beauty. The gurughat is an invocation to Chaitanya, a very significant and auspicious part of the kram. The next portion from the tala tintal to chali are variations of rhythms danced and sung while playing on either drum or cymbal.

#### Chalom Dance Form

The dance form used in the sankirtan is known as chalom. Since it is an all male performance it has a vigorous tandava form but distinct from krishna tandava. The movements have developed in accordance to the body positions required for playing the drums and cymbals (Figure 10). The movement used in kartal cholom, the dance with the cymbals, (Figure 11) may have been drawn from the ancient martial art form of Manipur, the two cymbals replacing the two swords, usually manipulated by the hands some of the wrist movements are identical. Both pung cholom (dancing while playing on the drum) and kartal cholom are exciting and energetic dance forms, and very effective when danced by a group of some forty-six performers (the number prescribed in texts but may vary in practice).

As the sankirtan ends the raslila orchestra members enter the arena and begin their obeisances in the four directions and to Krishna and Radha in the center.

#### The Vasantararas of the Gobindaji Temple of the Palace

The Story:

Krishna and the Gopis gather in Vrindavan to celebrate the spring festival of Holi (a festival of color using colored powder and water spray).

Krishna at his mischeivous best teases the gopis picking on his favorite one Radha, and spraying her with color. The gopis rush to her defense and turn full force on Krishna overpowering him momentarily until he frees himself and sprays them all again. And so the playing continues.

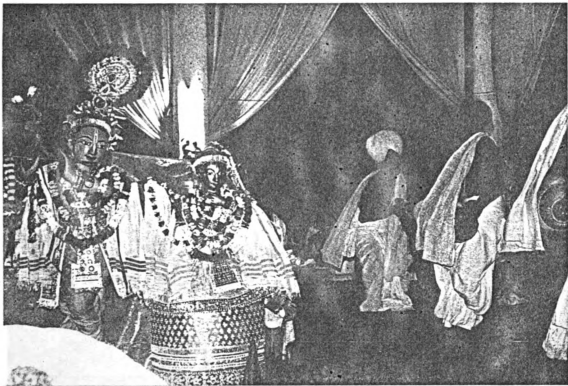


Figure 10 Pung Cholom in Sankirtan



Figure 10 Pung Cholom in Sankirtan (cont'd)



Figure 11 Kartal Cholom



Figure 11 Kartal Cholom (cont'd)

In his enjoyment Krishna who is known for his flirtatious playful nature, singles out Chandrabali and runs off with her. Radha realizing what he has done grows extremely angry and to demonstrate her feelings she drops her blue veil a symbol of their love and leaves the rasmandal. Tiring of his dalliance with Chandrabali, Krishna returns only to find her blue veil. Alarmed and remorseful, he sets out in search of her.

He finds her by herself in a remote area of the forest. She is consumed with anger and refuses to have anything to do with Him. But Krishna stays and pleads for forgiveness, and after lengthy self-deploration, throws himself at her feet, a gesture of total surrender. Touched by His remorse, Radha overcomes her anger and forgives Him.

#### Sources of the Story

The story of the Vasanta ras is derived from two major sources, the Gita Govinda of Jayadeva and the Padakalpatataru of Vaisnava Das. While the gurus of Manipur maintained the basic theme and structure found in these sources, they also introduced variations. The kram or sequence of the story given in the Padakalpataru is as follows:

Gaurchandrika: an exposition of the Vasanta ras by the natpala, (a system introduced by Narrotam Goswami) by which Chaitanya's experience of the story is related.

Radha Abhisar: the arrival of Radha and the gopis into the rasmandal (performance arena).

Seven Songs of Vasanta: songs describing the season of spring.

Maan (hurt pride) Radha feels the pain and anger of rejection due to Krishna's neglecting her.

### Krishna's plea for forgiveness

Maan Bhang: Breaking through the pride and reaching reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> In the Gita Govinda, the maan section of the play is the central plot.

Krishna is described in dalliance with the gopis giving each one special attention and neglecting Radha. Radha leaves the rasmandal in anger.

The gurus in Manipur seem to have combined these stories and introduced the character of Chandrabali (who Krishna runs off with) to heighten the love conflict between Krishna and Radha. They also added the Krishna Abhisar (Krishna's entry) Makok Chingbi Jagoi (dance by the leading gopi) Abhirkhel (the festival of color) Bansi Haran (an episode where Radha steals Krishna's flute) Krishna Nartan and Radha Nartan (solos by the hero and heroine).

The Manipuri gurus entrusted with the safeguarding of the traditional krams generally listed the sequence of the krams according to titles by which each episode is commonly recognized. A comparison between the Govindajigi<sup>2</sup> and the khulakgi vasantaras<sup>3</sup> show that in the Khulakgi kram, the plot is acted out in greater detail than in Govindajigi kram where it is sung by the sutras in the orchestra leaving the audience to imagine the action. In the khulak ras the Krishna and Radha solos are danced by the characters while in the Govindaji kram the characters are described, once again allowing the audience to imagine the beauty of their dance. But the overall structures of the krams are the same.

### Maharas

#### The Story:

On the fullmoon night of autumn, Krishna meandered through the forest Brindavan playing on his flute. The cool winds carried the sweet melodic strains across the river Jamuna to Gokul the dwelling





place of the Gopis. The village filled with the sound of Krishna's flute. The gopis who were winding up their day's chores grew distracted hearing the music, and rushed out of their homes to find its player.

Very soon Brindavan was astir with half-crazed milkmaids, their faces radiant with a glow of expectancy. They wandered about until they found the source of the music. Krishna stood leaning casually against a tree playing on His flute, as if unaware of the disturbance He had caused in Gokul. When He saw the gopis gather around him He stopped playing and stared at them with a look of shocked disbelief and disapproval. With feigned anger He reproached them for their unnatural and scandalous behaviour. "Had they left their children unattended? How ungainly to be wandering in a dark Brindavan with hair all dishevelled, clothing in wild disarray! He continued to admonish their foolish abandon and then turned away. The gopis were mortified, but the thought of leaving Krishna now that they had found Him, was even more terrible. They begged him to show compassion for their vulnerability, to let them stay awhile. They began singing His praises, declaring their love and utmost devotion to Him. Having heard what He wished, Krishna relented and they began to dance and sing together as usual.

The gopis were overcome with joy, but with the joy came a sense of pride and even righteousness. They were so fortunate to be dancing with Krishna, they thought, growing confident and full of self-importance. They were so busy congratulating themselves that they did not notice Krishna leave the rasmandala with His favorite gopi Radha. When at last it dawned on them that He was no longer there, they stood still in alarm, and in great anguish set forth in search of Him. On the way they reminisced about him to keep their spirits up. Their longing for Krishna

grew as they recollected precious details about him. They were now so desperate that they began asking every tree and bird, etc. on the way if he had been seen. Meanwhile Krishna and Radha made their way together walking through the forest. Soon Radha began to complain of fatigue. Like the rest of the gopis she too grew complacent. Once again Krishna disappeared and Radha found herself alone in the dark forest. The same forest she had found alluring and beautiful now frightened her. She searched desperately for Krishna and when she could not find Him she fainted and fell to the ground. The gopis found her lying on the ground. They rushed over to her and revived her by shouting the name of Krishna in her ear. Together they bewailed their loss. They were so overcome with grief that they decided to drown themselves in the river Jamuna. As they were about to carry out their desperate resolve, Krishna, convinced once again of their love, reappeared. And through His maya (power of illusion) He appeared in myriad forms. They danced in unison and harmony once more, each Gopi was dancing with her Krishna in the climatic end of the Maharas.

Reunited they returned to the rasmandala where the gopis shower their love and offerings upon them. After prayers and worship through tender service of their beloved Krishna and Radha, the gopis return home. The story of the Maharas is based entirely on the Bhagavat Purana's Raspanchadhaya (five chapters devoted to the raslila. It is in the tenth section of this raspanchadhaya. The lyrics of this raslila are therefore almost entirely in the original Sanskrit form. (See Appendix for kram listings of Maharas<sup>4</sup> Kunjaras<sup>5</sup> and Nityaras<sup>6</sup>).

## Rasdhari

### Guru and Director of the Raslila

#### Introduction

Rasdhari can be translated to mean 'the one who holds the strings', ie. the one who is in charge of the production. He is the guru, the teacher. He is the one who transmits the raslila tradition to his pupils of the next generation. He is expected to safeguard the tradition and must therefore train in every aspect of the raslila; from technique to philosophy.

The major purpose of this chapter is to describe the training process of the rasdhari, as well as his role as the rasguru or teacher of the ras techniques and the director of the raslila production.

#### Training Process of the Rasdhari

The rasdhari's training process is extremely rigorous beginning in early childhood. He must learn to play the drum(pung), to dance and to sing. He also must acquire some knowledge of the languages of the raslila lyrics which are in Sanskrit and old Bengali, and study all the myths and legends surrounding the life of Lord Krishna. But above all, for a real understanding of his art, he must learn to practice bhakti or devotion to Krishna.

The acting techniques of dance and music are stylized and requiring several years of training. The following table lists the performance roles and the role-related accomplishments required of the participants of the raslila. From this table it is apparent that while the other participants may receive specialized training in either dance, instrumental or vocal music, the rasdhari must train in all three.

Table 1

<u>ROLE</u>	<u>ACCOMPLISHMENT</u>
Accompanist	Instrument
Sutradhari	Sing
Gopis/Krishna	Dance
Sutra Gopi	Dance + Sing
Rasdhari	Dance + Sing + Instrument

The rasdhari trains to teach as well as direct/choreograph. He teaches the dance and singing for which he plays the pung (drum) in performance. The drum beat is the pulse of the performance action, it is most essential for him, therefore, to be a highly proficient drummer, although he may not necessarily be a good performer in dance and music (though most rasdharis grow up performing both).

#### Training Process

##### Early Years

An invaluable precondition for training in the raslila performance techniques (also for other mandap-lilas) is that the training should begin in early childhood. The age of five or six is considered ideal as a child has the perfect beginner's mind required for the traditional method of training, where the guru has complete control over his disciple and the disciple has full faith in his guru. A young mind is open, often quick to imitate, and if the training begins early, there is time enough to imbibe the essence of the art. It is common practise in Manipur for parents to send their children to train in the performing arts; for some, it is even a matter of following an established family tradition in performing. There are ample opportunities for training. Every neighbourhood or leikei in the Manipuri towns and villages has performance talent and at least one

resident Guru or Oja as he is called. Financial disability on the students' part is not a deterrent as most gurus or ojas accept payment in kind or in personal service to them. More ambitious parents are selective in the choice of gurus for their child and are more concerned about finding the right teacher rather than the convenience of the location, (Figure 12).

The Manipuris are generally aware of the guru lineage. Gurus gain repute in the community through performances that they conduct or perform in; their special talents, as well as their idiosyncracies, are well-known. Once the teacher has been selected the student must be totally committed to his training, which often involves living with the guru.

#### Guru Boriba the Rite of Initiation

An auspicious day (in terms of astrology) is selected for a ceremonial commencement of the training for the raslila. The initiation (boriba) is arranged by the family of the trainee. It is a rite which establishes the bonding between the guru and the disciple. The ceremony is simple but of deep significance.

It is held in the mandap selected for the training and rehearsals usually in the disciple's leikei or neighborhood. The guru takes his place on a mat on the ground and the student symbolizing complete surrender to the guru and makes an offering of some cash and clothing. The guru gives his blessings in the name of Gobindaji (Krishna) and announces that a disciple should prepare to work hard and take proper instruction. After this ceremony, there is a token lesson, symbolizing the commencement of the training. The guru stands and begins the dance and the disciple follows, imitating closely, (Figure 13). He recites the drum syllables and dances the first portion of the chali mapi a basic dance composition



Figure 12 Student Asseble at Teacher's Home



Figure 13 Teaching Through Close Imitation



on a eight beat rhythm pattern. The trainee watches closely and imitates what he/she can. Achaoba bhangi or chali mapi are the initial dances taught in dance training. Raga achaoba is the initial drum composition taught in pung training and the raga alap is the initial singing taught. The ceremony is the same for all three techniques. A student may begin training in any one of the three. In general, young boys are taught to play of the drum (pung) and perhaps some dance, young girls on the other hand are first taught dancing and occasionally complement the dance training with some pung playing and singing. The training of both girls and boys in singing is usually left to a later stage.

#### Guru-Disciple Relationship

The homage to the guru is carried beyond the ceremonial message of the boriba into day-to-day reality. The total surrender of a student to his guru is idealized by the ancient system of learning which believes that true knowledge may be attained only by removing the obstacle of the individual ego. The discipline, harsh treatment and temperamental demands of the teacher are aimed towards the purpose of training the student to transcend the individual ego. The tradition teaches an attitude of devotional service towards the guru. The disciple takes care of his teacher like a family member doing the domestic chores, such as cooking, cleaning and washing for his guru—a very essential part of the training.

The right attitude for learning is first cultivated through behaviour control on a day to day basis in and out of class (as the student often lives with the guru). Complete humility is the fundamental requirement. The performance techniques of the raslila are totally dependant on this attitude, as no self-absorbed egotism can achieve the 'grace' and



soft pliability of the Manipuri dance form or the emotion filled drama of its music.

### Training Methods

Training of the performance techniques may be compared to training in the crafts or domestic skills. For instance, a young girl learns to cook watching her mother. She knows something of the technique almost unconsciously just by watching everyday, or by assisting her mother. Eventually, when she is taught in a formal setting, the learning comes easily. In the training of most Asian performance techniques when the major method of training is stated as imitation, it involves assimilation through familiarity with the technique.

The absorption occurs merely by being present in the environment over a period of time. A child in Manipur is so accustomed to the sounds of the drum and its rhythms through watching her/his family members participate in dance and music performance, that inspite of being only five or six when the formal training begins, the student is ready to follow the movements of his teacher most naturally with almost no trace of awkwardness, and if particularly talented, he/she is very soon the embodiment of miniature perfection. It is therefore possible for this young trainee to learn the entire repertoire of an all-night performance of the raslila and perform it with remarkable grace, style and confidence.

The major elements of the training process are the use of imitation, learning by rote through repeating the same thing over and over, not only memorizing mentally but in sense-motor memory. The goal is to imbibe not memorize.

The teaching method is simple and direct. The rasdhari does not wait for the student to develop a clear mental image of the movement

before she attempts it, rather he physically adjusts the form on the dancers body by taking hold of the arms or head and placing them in the correct position--putting the movement into the dancers body, or fixing the body shape to suit the dance shape.

All learning is through direct experience of doing. There is no separation of concept from the action. Also, it is important to learn a phrase of dance or music in the 'wholeness' or entirety of its composition, so that it is learnt within context of its rhythmic, expressive, and thematic elements and therefore, gurus do not use a step by step analytic process.

The entire repertoire of songs and dances of the raslila are learned. Special attention is paid to learning the five bhangis (traditional dance sequences which form an alphabet of body movements in both masculine and feminine styles). These bhangis are treasured and considered most auspicious as they depict the creation of the image of Krishna and also the offering of one's soul to Him. Compilations of dance compositions according to rhythm are also taught as portions of these can be used in choreography.

But learning to play the various rhythms compositions on the drum is probably the most important part of the rasdhari's training. Starting with a most difficult rhythmic composition, the Raga Achouba the trainee must learn to play the most intricate pieces for long hours at a time to prepare for the all-night performances in which the rasdhari plays continually.

#### The Latter Phase of Training

In the early phase, the student concentrates on techniques of drumming, dancing and singing, the essential techniques for a rasdhari.

Once the young trainee has a grasp of these techniques, and is performing them proficiently, his guru encourages him to accompany him to performance rehearsals and performances as his assistant. As the roles of Krishna and Radha in the raslila are always played by children, (the goshtha lila is cast entirely with children) young performers have tremendous scope for displaying their talents at a very early age.

Performance experience is thus quite common among the trainees. But the training of the rasdhari begins only when the student begins to assist his guru like an apprentice at the various mandap-lila productions. He is usually in his late teens or early twenties when he achieves proficiency in drumming, a skill which allows him to participate in the performance accompanying his teacher as second drummer in the orchestra.

The student's debut as rasdhari is quite informal; it often happens when he is least expecting it. For example, if his aging teacher is unwell and cannot conduct rehearsals or has too many commitments, he may hand a raslila production to his student as Oja Bidhu (a rasdhari) recalls:

One day my oja came to my house and urged me to take over one of his commitments to produce a raslila. He said his other commitments conflicted with this as they were too far apart in distance. He did not want to lose face with the sponsors, so he asked me to begin the rehearsals. When I pleaded that I did not know all the dances and songs well enough to teach them, he said he would come and help me out as often as possible, but he never did.<sup>7</sup>

The rasdhari's career is established when he can earn his living on commissions of raslila productions. He may be in his late twenties or early thirties when his career begins and he usually continues his work until he is physically able sometimes to the age of seventy or eighty. He usually directs and choreographs according to his teacher's methods ras krams (prescribed scores), but as he matures and is acknowledged

as a guru himself, he can make the innovations he chooses within the framework of tradition.

#### The Rasdhari as Rasguru

The rasdhari's work as rasguru (teacher of the raslila) begins when he is commissioned to produce a raslila either by a temple with which he is associated or by the sponsor (usually the family of the lead performers) who wishes to dedicate a performance to Govindaji (Krishna). A mandap is selected within the leikei or neighbourhood, as the rehearsal space. The rasguru or rasdhari and cast members gather at an appointed time. They perform the rite of investiture or barton as described earlier, in the training process of the rasdhari. But now, he, is the guru to whom the cast members (his students) offer their obeisance and gifts of clothing, or cash offered on a betel leaf. After the brief ceremony, the rasdhari rises and begins the training or rehearsals with the achaoba bhangi (a significant portion of the raslila). The cast members form a circle behind him, and imitate his movements. After the symbolic commencement, the actual training and rehearsals begin. The rasdhari is often accompanied by an assistant who either plays the drum or sings the lyrics, or helps coach the dancers at the rehearsals, (Figure 14). The rasdhari's main task is to teach his cast the dance score and its choreography.

The performers range from professionals or well trained amateurs to complete novices. Their ages vary from older women in their forties or fifties to children of five and six. It is not an easy task to train such an unequal group to perform uniformly. But he has a few advantages: all the performers are familiar with the dance music through exposure to them since childhood. The choreography used in the raslila is relatively





Figure 14 Assistant to the Guru Leads at Rehearsals



simple where the few members of the group who are already well-trained and may lead the rest.

Rehearsals are held daily in the mandap for about two months before the performance. During this time the rasdhari sets the choreography, trains the singers, and dancers. As the performance date draws near, the final rehearsals are held at the temple performance site with the orchestra.

The grand rehearsal on the day before the performance is marked with a ritual called barton haoba. The rasdhari conducts this ritual assisted by the brahmin priest of the temple (Figure 15) Barton Haoba Ceremony

The five or six year old child actors playing the roles of Krishna and Radha stand, taking the iconographic poses of the deities they represent: Krishna holds the flute playing gesture, and Radha, assumes a gesture of self-dedication. The other members of the cast kneel in a semi-circular formation behind them and bow their heads in prayer. Once this serene and auspicious aura is established, aided by the incense and chanting by the priest, the rasdhari speaks to the 'deified' children. His voice breaks with emotion as he looks at them with affection. He reveals to them that from that moment on, until the end of the raslila, they are the immortal Krishna and Radha. He recounts the entire period of their relationship as teacher and student, mentioning the occasions when he was harsh to them so that they may learn. He apologizes profusely. Overcome by the presence of Krishna and Radha (that he has helped create) he breaks down and weeps, prostrating himself in full obeisance touching their little feet in reverence, begging their forgiveness and blessing. All who are present (the performers and their family members) bow in deep respect to their teacher and to Krishna and Radha (the child actors).



Figure 15 Rasdhari and Arampham (stage manager) in a Ritual

(Figure 16). The rasdhari then collects himself and requests their presence at the performance.

He informs them (Krishna and Radha) when and where to come hoping that all the arrangements will be to their satisfaction. This announcement, which also serves the practical purpose of informing the cast members and their families when to arrive, marks the end of the ceremony and the evening turns into a celebration with a feast of prasada or sweets and other items which have been offered to the gods and thus purified. After this meal, the cast members fast until the end of the performance the next day.

#### Rasdhari as Director

The rasdhari's role as director involves choreography, leading the orchestra with the drum and coordinating the production management.

The rasdhari leads the orchestra with his drumming. He decides when to change from one composition to another as he is the one who watches the performers closely coordinating his drumming with them. He gives all the cues and prompts the younger performers who may miss their cues from his seat in the orchestra. His direction helps the singers and instrumentalists pick up their cues in time, maintaining a cohesive performance. As a choreographer/director, his main function is to produce the performance in accordance with its traditional score. In the khulak performances, he may add new dances or introduce variations in the staging. The ground patterns are usually simple, the gopis circle around Krishna and Radha, and if the roles of Krishna and Radha are played by child-actors (in khulak), they dance with each other in the center. The major variations are possible in the abhisars or entrances of Krishna Radha and the Gopis symbolizing the journey to the tryst. The Mapop



Figure 15 Raslila Performers in a Ritual

jagoi dance composition performed by the lead gopi is not a traditional item and usually has to be choreographed afresh for each performance.

Finally, as the rasdhari is in touch with all the performers and their families on a regular basis through the rehearsals, as well as with the temple authorities, he often functions as coordinator and communicates management details to sponsors (usually family of the lead characters) or makes the financial transactions between sponsors and the temple.

### Ras Mandap or Performance Arena

The most idyllic setting for the raslila performance is the ambience of the open air in a cool, pastoral environ. It is believed that the early performances in Manipur were presented out-of-doors in the moonlight, (as performances were always scheduled on full moon nights), amongst trees and plants grown in a space designed for the circumfluent choreography of the performance.

At present, all raslila performances are presented in mandaps, (pavilions housing an arena) built specifically for temple performances. The mandap consists of a giant roof propped up by a series of tall posts, creating an enclosure covered at the top but open at the sides. (Figure 17) Innumerable mandaps exist in Manipur at temple sites, the simple ones are made of straw roofs and bamboo posts and mud floors, while others are made of corrugated metal roof, wooden pillars and concrete floors.

#### Shri Shri Govindaji Rasmandap

The largest and most important mandap in Manipur is the Shri Shri Gobindaji Temple Mandap at Imphal the capital city of Manipur. The first raslila of every performance season is staged here as it considered to be the most auspicious performance site.

A floor plan of this performance site is illustrated in (Figure 18). The Area A, shows the main temple building, that houses the images of the gods. It is built independant of the Ras Mandop, facing eastward to receive the first light of the morning. Immediately in front is a chequered tile courtyard, where the devotees gather to pray. The area around the temple is a circumambulatory path where the devotees walk as part of the prayer ritual.

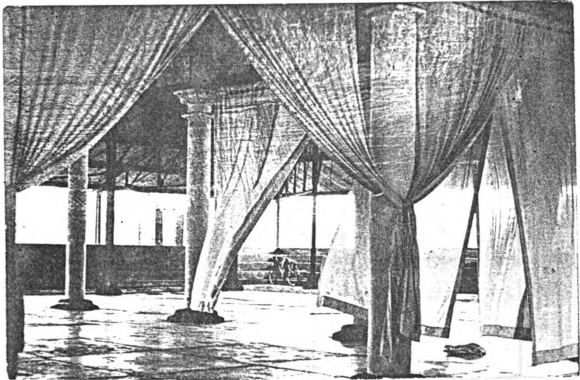


Figure 17 Rasmandap of Shri Shri Govindaji

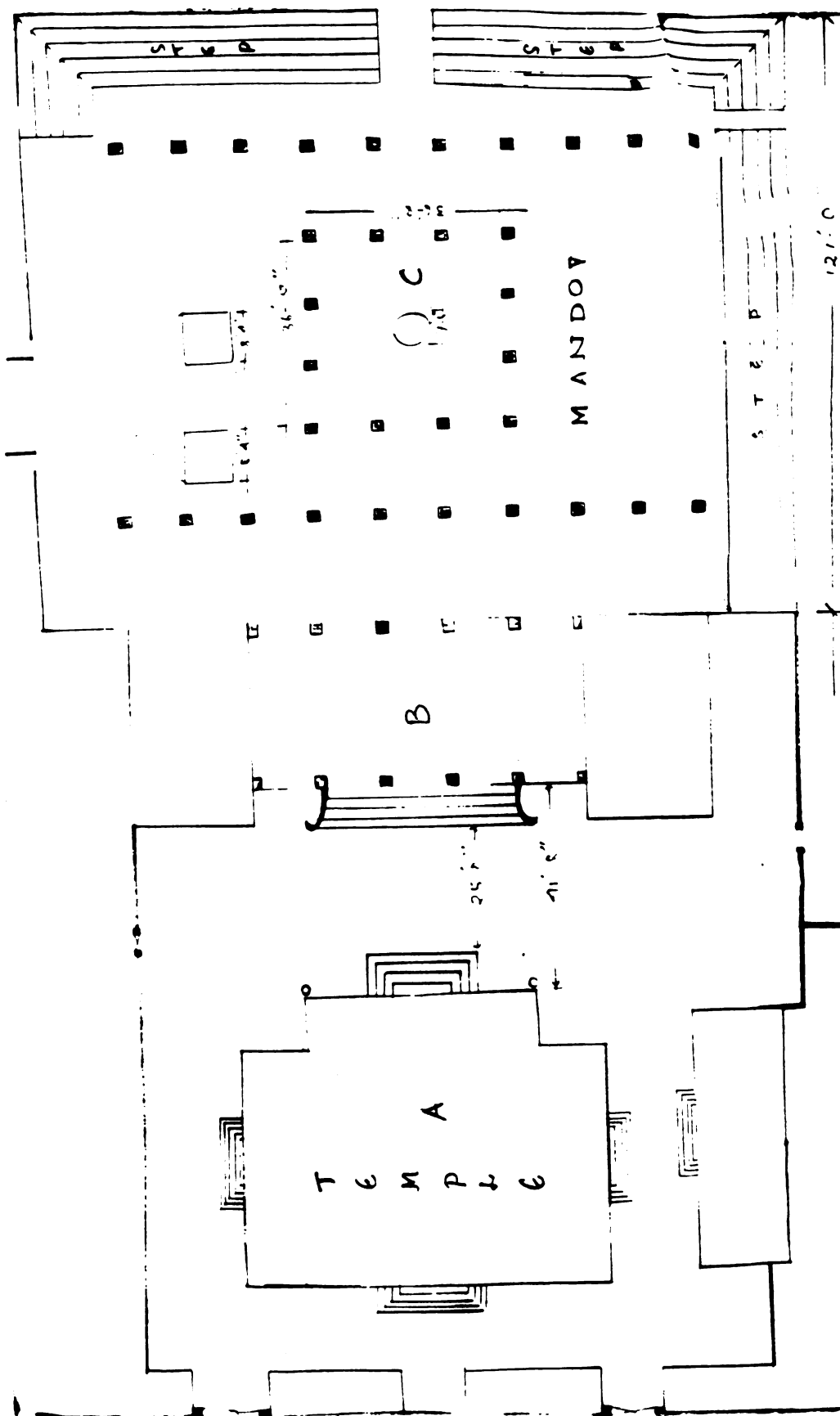


Figure 18 Floor Plan of the Rasmandap



Area B is a raised platform at level with the floor of the mandap and functions as its extension. Devotees who have travelled far and wish to spend some time at the temple in prayer, or rest settle down here. It also serves as a backstage area. Elderly ladies squat comfortably on the floor and weave the flower garlands for the raslila, early in the morning. In the evening the performers arrive and set up in this area which is transformed into a dressing room.

Area C is the Ras Mandap. Its roof is constructed with corrugated sheet metal and supported with solid iron posts. It has a concrete flooring with a smooth surface.

#### The Ras Mandap

The center most area of the rasmandap has a rotating disc dias meant for the images of the temple deities of Krishna and Radha. The area immediately surrounding this is the acting area which forms another circle, demarcated by potted plants placed at intervals. Twelve pillars are built around the acting area to form a square around the circle. There are four entrances into the circle from the square between two center pillars on each of the four sides. The audience is seated outside the pillared square on all four sides re-enforcing the square around the circular acting area. Straw mats called phaks are laid out on all four sides for the audience to sit on.

#### The Center of the Acting Area

The area of most condensed focus in the Govindajigi raslila is the dias that supports the images of the deities of Krishna and Radha. It measures about 8 ft.in diameter and resembles a wheel, and is therefore, called bhadra chakra (lotus wheel), Brahma chakra, (Brahma the creator's

wheel), or Kama chakra (the wheel of love). (Figure 19) This chakra or wheel dias rotates clockwise.

#### The Acting Area

The area around the central dias is the acting area. It is demarcated in a very simple manner with potted plants. In the past it used to be demarcated more clearly, with a roll of white guaze-like material stretched around bamboo stumps; but this method has been discontinued. A ceiling made of straw covers the acting area. Decorative lotus motives are attached to it, spaced geometrically. A light bulb hangs from the center of each lotus. From the central point of the dias the performance area measures about 16 ft.in radius. The gopis generally perform on its outer edge in a circle around the images of Krishna and Radha in a choreographic pattern termed rasmandali. The term rasmandali also denotes the acting area.

The performance hall called the rasmandap consists of two sections divided by the pillared square. The performance takes place inside while the audience is seated on the outside. There are twelve pillars built to form a square around the circular acting area. (Figure 20) The audience seating follows the line of the pillars and the performance is therefore, viewed from all four sides. The pillars are white in color and white curtains are draped from them on the day of the performance.

The square of the pillared area measures 36ft and 8ins by 36ft and 8ins. The entire mandap area measures 150ft x 121ft (150 N-S and 121ft E-W) The North and South ends have additional room for some food stalls on the south side and the operation of scenic devices on the north side. The outer edge is lined with steps. Elderly ladies set up their food stalls along these steps, selling sweets, fruit and other snacks.



Figure 19 Central dias of the Rasmandap

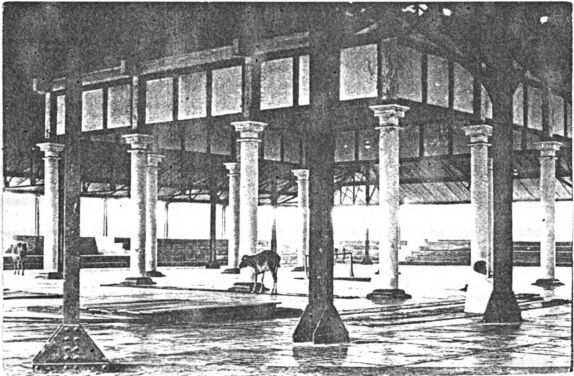


Figure 20 Pillared Hall of the Rasmandap

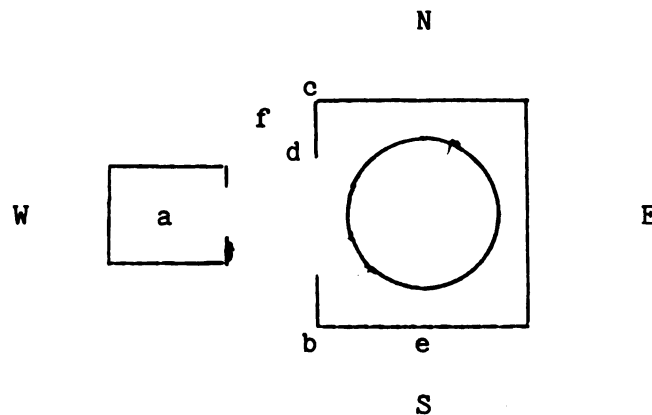
### Cardinal Directions

An important element in the use of space is the significance of direction in relation to the dieties in the center. Each side of the pillared hall represents each of the four cardinal directions North, South, East and West. The tradition holds that facing east is auspicious and therefore the images of Krishna and Radha are placed facing east. The Temple where the dieties reside is built facing east. As the images of the gods are carried out of the temple into the mandap for the performance, the most convenient direction for the mandap lies to the east of the temple. Thus the images can be transported from the temple to the mandap's center through its west gate maintaining the eastward facing of the dieties. The corners of the Southwest side and the Northwest side are also important as these are the seats of the mandap mapu (presiding member) (SW) and the rasdhari and his orchestra (NW). The mandap mapu recites the shloka which signals the commencement of the raslila and the rasdhari gives all the other cues throughout the performance.

Entrance Gates: According to a line in the Achoaba Bhangi lyrics "nana panchadvara..."(each of the five doors) the mandap should have five doors. Four of these are located each of the four sides of the mandap and the fifth is considered to be overhead. In the Govindaji Temple the gate on the west side is most important as that is where the images enter the arena and also where the gopis make their entrance. Here, the gate across on the east side is used mainly for the audience members to reach into to offer their gifts the temple and pay their respects to the images. The gate on the south side is used only by the stage manager or arampham and the one on the northside is used by the scene operator or the karigar.

## Seating

On the south side of the image we have the most distinguished members of the audience as it is the right hand of Krishna and Radha. This position is occupied by the mandap mapu or President of the occasion and the King, his nobles and the priests of the high order of the Brahmo Samaj. To the left of the deities, the queen and other women are seated behind the Rasdhari and the orchestra. Other audience members are seated facing the images on the east side. The following is a detailed seating map of the raslila audience:



- a. To the west facing east is the temple that houses the deities, Krishna and Radha.
- b. In the southwest corner facing the east sits the Mandap Mapu (presiding Brahmin)
- c. In the northwest corner facing the south sit the flute player, the sutradharis and the esraj player.
- d. In the northwest corner facing the east are the moibung (conch) and pung (drum) players.
- e. On the south side at the center facing the north, a red mat is spread for the King and members of his family. The brahmins of the highest order sit on either side of him and dance and music gurus sit behind them.
- f. The queen sits behind the drummer in the northwest. Behind her sit other queens or female members or the royal family and behind them women members of the audience.<sup>8</sup>

The seating arrangement in the rasmandap is formal, based on the social hierarchy established during the monarchy of Kings.

### Ras Jagoi, the Dance

In Manipur, the raslila is popularly known as jagoi ras. Jagoi or chagoi means a circle dance and so jagoi ras is translated to mean a circle dance.<sup>9</sup> Therefore the raslila is often referred to as a dance-drama. In legends about Krishna, it is described as the cosmic dance of Krishna and the Gopis. Also, as Manipur is particularly renowned for her dance and music traditions it is not surprising that they are the major acting techniques of the Manipuri raslila. The raslila dance or jagoi is especially suited for the expression of bhakti; the body movements of the dancers delineate the liquid flow of devotional love.

Form, expression and choreography of the raslila dance are presented in this section. An introduction to dance as a performance element of the raslila is followed by a description and analysis of the form (implying both style and technique) with reference to its literary sources. The expressive capacity of the dance as an acting technique is examined next, referring to bhakti its essential emotional content. Finally the choreography is described according to the repertoire of each ras kram or traditional action score.

#### The Dance Form

##### Hidden Motifs of the Form

A study of the indigeneous Manipuri art forms shows a marked preference of the figure-8 motif. This motif is represented in their worship of the god Pakhamba, who is represented in 364 form variations of coiled snake forms called paaphals.<sup>10</sup> The figure-8 is a dynamic symbol reflecting continual flow without emphasis at any one point (Figure 21) It represents the beliefs of the Manipuri people in the infinity of time and immortality of the soul. The continuity of the figure-8 line



Figure 21 Figure-8 of a Snake



is maintained in the traditional dance movements and in the ground patterns of the ritual dances. The figure-8 also suggests movement in oppositions meeting at the center, as noted in the basic hand movements of their traditional ritual dances. The characteristics of the figure 8 described above is perhaps the fundamental aesthetic psyche of the Manipuri people.

Since the absorption of Vaishnavism in Manipur, another motif has come into play, a motif that has its origins in the vedic past of the Hindus. The highest Hindu religious and philosophic belief of a single cosmic principle unifying all creation or all that exists is expressed in the motif of the mandala a circle with a center. The center marks the beginning, the infinity, the constant and circular motion is the manifestation of the center. This motif was in all probability introduced with the vaishnava religion through its temple worship and ritual structures, and through the introduction of music and dance traditions rooted in ancient India.

The dance technique of the raslila employs both motifs, the figure-8 of indigenous Manipuri aesthetic and the mandala of ancient sanskritic tradition. In the raslila they have been amazingly coordinated to form one composite dance form. The raslila dance form follows the classical tenets and structures of the Hindu tradition and yet expresses the peculiarly indigenous quality of body movement in Manipur. It follows the time and space structures of the mandala motif with its emphatic center and yet maintains the fluidity, opposition and wave-like quality of the figure-8 motif. To be more specific, one phrase of movement stretches from one point in the time cycle of the musical time measure to the beginning of the next, emphasizing the mandala motif. At the same time, while maintaining this cyclic tala structure, it executes the figure-8 patterns

coloring the space within the time frame with the peculiarly Manipuri grace. The raslila dance form achieves a beautiful blend between the two cultural motifs and this blend is the essential aesthetic character of the raslila performance.

#### Analysis of Form According to Motif

To show how the figure-8 or serpent motif appears repeated in the body movements of the dancer, a breakdown of the dance into body parts is given below showing the figure-8 movement pattern of each one.

Starting with the basic posture and then to each body part as follows:

#### Basic Posture - A profile of a dancers

body posture when she stands still in the dance resembles one longitudinal side of the figure-8 as illustrated. The figure is relaxed the knees and head bend gently showing a gracious and devotional attitude.

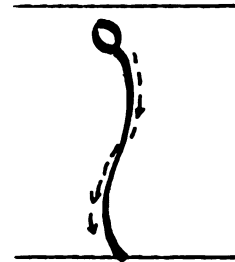


Figure 22 Figure 8 Pattern in Dance

The Head and Neck - Every movement of the head and the neck traces the figure-8, whether side to side or down to up as illustrated in Figure.



Figure 22 (cont'd)

The Torso - The movement of the torso is directly connected to the source or center of the dance movement, the navel. The torso stretches out of the center point first on one side then the other making the body sway from side to side, sinking back into the center each time. The action of this movement feels like the figure-8.

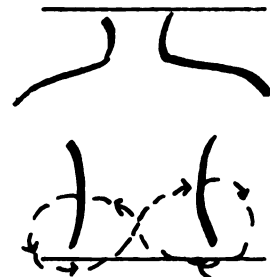


Figure 22 (cont'd)

The Arms Using the center line of the torso as reference the arms create loops at various angles from the center point together or alternating, each arm creating one loop of the figure-8 as illustrated.

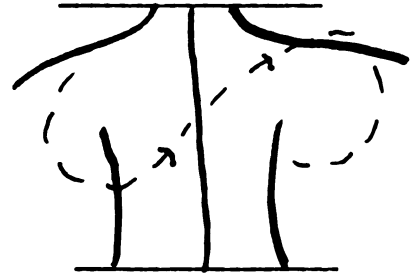


Figure 22 (cont'd)

The Hands and Fingers - Using the wrist as its fulcrum, each hand continually makes a swishing figure-8. The fingers twirl open and close once again tracing a figure 8 as illustrated. As the eyes follow the hands they move in a figure-8.

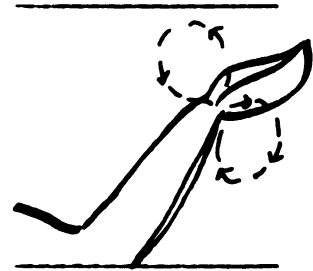


Figure 22 (cont'd)

The mandala motif or the circle and centre form is most apparent in the time structure of the dance or tala (time measure). The entire dance sequence of the raslila is set to music. The music is composed on a system of beats or time measure called tala. Dance movement phrases correspond to time phrases. The tala development is cyclic. Its structure is based on the idea of the circle in motion from its center, like a wheel. Thus the structure of the dance also follows the use of the mandala motif. The following is an example of a simple basic movement phrase, a paring or basic phrase or tala tanchep a time measure of four beats:

+    o

A single cycle is the counts: 1 2 3 4 1 (this final one is the end of the first cycle and the beginning of the second) The + sign marks the emphasis and the o sign the de-emphasis. A simple movement pattern of the feet on this measure goes as follows:

1	2	3	4	1
right foot strikes ground	right foot rests	right foot strikes ground	right foot rests	left strikes ground

The balance of the body shifts accordingly. On 1 the knees bend and the body dips on 3 it straightens out.

The general rule is that when the dance composition is time-bound, or built on a system of beats, the movements take their cue from the beats. The rhythm cycle of tala forms the structure of the dance choreography and defines its positions in time. The overall structure of the dance choreography is based on the the mandala structure, and is even known as the rasmandala. Within this structure the figure-8 is often utilized in the ground patterns of the dancers (particularly in the khulak raslila where Krishna and Radha dance within the circle).

#### Description of Form According to Character

The two character types male (Krishna) and female (Gopis) are depicted by two appropriate dance styles known in Manipur as nupa jagoi (male dance) and nupi jagoi (female dance) or in the Sanskrit texts as tandava (masculine) and lasya (feminine).<sup>11</sup> The tandava is specially crafted to suit the character of Krishna and is therefore described as krishna tandava to differentiate it from shiva tandava of the Indian dance tradition depicting the God Shiva (mainly in southern India). Krishna tandava as used in the raslila has very spritely and joyful dance movements. It involves small quick movements, light springy jumps, fast footwork, spinning at a dizzy speed and some acrobatic movements. But the overall effect of the form is that of grace and delicacy suitable to the romantic and youthful character of Krishna.

The lasya style danced by the gopis and Radha contrasts and yet compliments the tandava form. It is the softer aspect of its virile counterpart and appears to be very simple using minimal movement. Even so, the lasya dance movement requires extreme control and balance. The climactic moments are portrayed by the slightest quiver of the torso or a subtle flick of the wrist and hand. Each step taken is heavy with restraint. Only the arms have considerable freedom. They gesticulate forming gentle and delicate circular movements with their hands and fingers to a slow, graceful rhythm.

Krishna's character is playful, joyous and blissful as is expressed by the tandava form; the heavy, restrained movements of the lasya style are suitable for the gopis' deep longing for Krishna, expressed continually in the dance.

#### Dance Technique

The basic characteristics are grace, circularity, subtle rhythm and continual undulating motion. The continual undulating movement is called ipom which is created by shifting the body weight from one foot to another - right toe to heel to left toe to heel.

Another basic movement or stance is lowering the body by bending slightly and delicately at the knees. The knees are always held together. This position is known as phainamba. The ipom and the phainamba together provide the undulating motion of the dancer. The dancer rises and then lowers herself with these movements to the beat very gently and slowly.

Spinning is another very basic and frequently used movement. It is called araibi in Manipuri and brahmari in Sanskrit. There are various kinds of araibis; fast, slow and half turns. Throughout the feet are

placed close together. Each step taken whether forward back or to the side is very small.

### Textual Sources

The major manuscripts consisting of dance technique categorization are: Laithak Leikha Jagoi and Anuirol (in Manipuri), Govinda Sangeeta Lila Vilasa, Shri Krishnarasasangeetasara, Sangeeta Damodar and Sangeetasarasangraha (in Sanskrit). Of these the Govindasangeeta Lilavilasa which is ascribed to the authorship of King Bhagyachandra, is the most elaborate, with detailed information on the raslila dance form (used also for the other mandap-lilas).<sup>12</sup>

The manuscript divides the dance form into its two major types, the tandava and lasya. It further categorizes these; the tandava into three aspects: and the lasya into two major aspects. According to scholars who have attempted to correlate the text with the existing performance tradition, the tandava aspect of gunthanam is the Krishna tandava, the masculine counter part of the lasya, the chalanam aspect a rigorous male form is correlated to sankirtan's drum and cymbal dancing, and the prasaranam, freer, spontaneous, throwing movements are exaggerated and stretched to the limit to the thangta (martial arts).

The lasya aspects are: simitanga, lyrical and restrained movements stressing the importance of poise and balance and sphuritangam, where the movements are freer more intricate and at a faster tempo.<sup>13</sup>

An extremely minute and comprehensive analysis of the body movements in its parts is given in this manuscript's shlokas (verses).

Shlok numbers 236 to 238 listed 16 variations of head movements giving each a name. Shloka numbers 405-408 consists of more than 11 hand movements while the continuing verses, numbers 409-411 list the spontaneous expressions

created by these hand movements. Shloka 446 gives seven kinds of torso movements. Shloka 455, 6 movements of its sides, and seven movements of the waist. Shloka 471 gives the 5 basic feet positions, 479 12 neck movements, 491, eight shoulder movements, 499,32 arm movements, 544, 7 wrist movements, 14 knees uses, 468, 13 eye movements and 624 an enormous variety of poses.<sup>14</sup>

This analysis is available but not necessarily used consciously in Manipur while composing or dancing. Most are aware of the general technique of basic posture, how much to bend, to move gracefully with small steps, to raise the hands only as far as the eye level and not lower than the hip line. The arms are always held at a 45 degree angle from the body, and the knees always kept close together.

#### Dance Expression

The Gopis and Radha's dance in the the lasya style conveys devotional love for Krishna. It expresses the joy of union with him and the pain of separation from Him. Krishna's dance epitomizes his joyful spirit and his blissful state. It displays his most attractive qualities, as well as his skill in rhythm and movement in the tandava style.

In general, the dance of the raslila is crafted to suit the theme of devotional love. The flow of emotion is delineated in the liquid circular motion of the dancers. It reverberates in echoes of movement as each gopi creates a ripple in space. Movements are delicate, set to precise rhythm but carried out in one unending motion, one arm picking up the thread of motion where the other left off. The arms are held comfortably in natural positions never out-stretched to an extreme. Circularity of movement is constantly maintained to ensure its flow.

The expression style is subtle and graceful with a fine sensitivity to rhythm and flow. The body assumes very 'natural' stances never exaggerating or forcing itself beyond its natural form. Its main forte is expression entirely through body movement without emphasis on any one part. Deliberate gestures are used occasionally but without interrupting the continual flow of movement.

The face, an area of vivid expression in most forms of acting, is held in a mask-like stillness, only when the performer sings natural expressions of joy and sorrow appear. (Figure 23)

#### Mudras or hand gestures

In the Govinda Sangeeta Lila Vilas there are 26 single hand gestures and 12 double hand gestures.<sup>15</sup> Many of these correspond with other ancient sources on gesture in India and follow the same principle. But although the sources correspond, there is a different emphasis in the treatment of gesture in Manipur and in other Indian styles. The southern Indian styles have an extremely elaborate vocabulary of gestures and one phrase of movement is often explained entirely through hand gesture. In Manipur the entire body is at work expressing the feeling or mood of the song rather than translating its meaning through gesture. While expressing the mood, the hand gestures may suggest the meaning with simple graphic indication.

#### Composition Analysis

Dance composition analysis follows the tala very closely. Most dance movements are choreographed within the sound and rhythm structure of the tala or time measure. An analysis of Chali, a very basic yet significant composition that recurs throughout the raslila and is the first composition taught in dance training illustrates as follows: Chali is a dance





Figure 23 Gopi Sutra Singing to Radha

as well as a tala of an 8 beat rhythm structure. Traditional compositions in both lasya and tandava styles exist.

There are five basic parts in the lasya and three in the tandava. Just as every tala has innumerable parings or alankars (rhythmic variations), the dance, too, is made up of a variety of parings or alankars. These are linked together by a traditional kram or sequence. The first five parings of the lasya chali are very old and traditional, and every guru adheres to their use in teaching and composing. But beyond these, gurus have created innumerable parings, known by their names, and each guru is free to utilize these, linking them into order or a kram according to his own judgement, to pass on to his disciples.

The first five parings of the lasya chali known as chali mapi is most traditional and has remained unchanged for years. It consists of a paring (refrain) akhuba joining phrase, arabi (spinning), pothabi (small rhythmic compositions). All the bhangis and the nartans end with a chali mapi.

#### Raslila Dance Repertoire According to Kram

In the five part kram sequence of the raslila there are numerous dance compositions. The first composition is the abhisar or the journey of Krishna and gopis to the site appointed for their play. In the performance it is the entry into the rasmandap.

#### Krishna Abhisar

This dance composition shows Krishna going to Brindavan. This is only dance in the khulak performances, as in the palace temple, Krishna is represented in an image form, the sutra sings the song about Krishna's abhisar or journey and the audience has to use its imagination. But in the khulak performances, Krishna is played by a young girl or boy. In the Nityaras performance of May 18, 1981 the young girl playing Krishna

entered the rasmandop from the south side and dances his way to the north side (the place of the tryst). He covers the distance during the dance. The choreography of a snake-like figure eight meandering shows his progression towards the tryst. The dance composition has all the elements of song, tala, and expression and is often performed as an independent piece on stage. Krishna dances gracefully and advances gradually forward making a figure 8 ground pattern. His feet taking small swift steps forward and his arms outstretching in front of him in the direction he is going give an illusion of speed, that he is travelling swiftly to reach the destination where he can play with the gopis. At the end of this dance he arrives at the tryst, makes himself comfortable against a tree and plays a special melody on his flute a special tune calling the gopis to him. (Figure 24).

#### Radha and Gopi Abhisar

In the khulak raslilas Radha and the Gopis enter the rasmandala together as they set out to find Krishna. In the palace temple where Radha is only represented, the Gopis enter in the Gopi Abhisar and Radha's abhisar is sung. This dance brings all the participants into the rasmandap. (Figure 25). They form two lines with Radha or the Makochingbi (lead Gopi in between and in front. They enter from the west side gate and start moving along the circle anti-clockwise.

As soon as they face Krishna and the dance ends, they begin a prarthana or prayer which they sing. The Gopi and Radha Abhisars are also complete compositions with all the elements of song, tala, alankars and expression. The song describes their beauty and their eagerness to meet Krishna. Their movements express their eagerness and their joy at the thought of seeing him.



Figure 24 Krishna Arrives at the Tryst



Figure 25 Gopis' Prayer to Krishna

Mapop Jagoi

A dance by the main gopi offering herself to Krishna in prayer. This appears to be a spurious addition to the tradition, (Figure 26). This is a special dance for the Makok Chingbi, the lead gopi, whose family usually sponsors the production. The dance is usually pure dance movements expressing devotion accompanied by a clarinet which has recently been introduced.

Mandali Sajjan

Krishna and the Gopis come to an agreement and decide to decorate the area making a mandali for their play. The gopis form a circle around Krishna and Radha and the dancing begins.

Achaoba Bhangi Pareng

It is the most auspicious dance of the raslila. The audience is expected to observe complete stillness and concentration. Nobody must leave their seats for this long and solemn dance composition. The word bhangi is explained as body flexion or attitude. Each one is called a bhangavali. When the body movements flow from one bhangavali to another according to a prescribed time measure and rhythm, it is called a gatibhanga. A bhangi pareng is a traditional dance composition incorporating the variations of the body movements representing the fundamental principles of the dance form. Achaoba means the 'lengthy' or 'large' one of the five bhangi parengs of the mandap lilas. Only three, the lasya bhangis are used in the raslilas, they are the achaoba, brindavan and khurumba bhangi parengs. According to some opinions in Manipur, achaoba bhangi delineates the beauty of Krishna's form, while some believe it signifies the union of Krishna and Radha. Brindavan

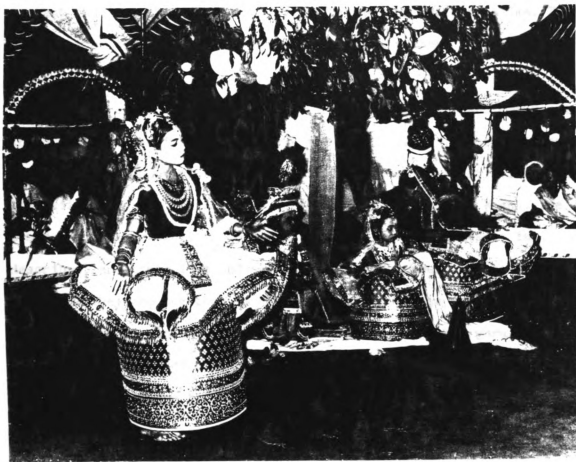


Figure 26 Leading Gopi's Solo

bhangi is a vivid description of Brindavan, khurumba pareng is a prayer to the union of Krishna and Radha or to the (jugal rup).

The bhangis are danced in the formation of the mandala or circle by all the gopis. The gestures and movements quite clearly indicate their devotional love for Krishna. The dance has a deep ritual and spiritual content and is therefore revered by performers and audience alike. These compositions consists of expression of rhythm and song.

#### Krishna Nartan, Radha Nartan and Jugal Nartan

These are solo and duet compositions danced by the hero and heroin, Krishna and Radha first individually and then together. The whole purpose of these while relevant to the play and its character relationships is for the audience to enjoy and admire the beauty of Krishna and Radha. The songs are usually singing their praises, their physical beauty is described, and their love and dedication to each other is recalled. How beautiful they are together is very important to these devotees. Their joy lies with the union of Krishna and Radha. Also, their guru or saint Chaitanya is conceived of the jugal rup or the dual form of Krishna and Radha, he personifies their union. (Figure 27)

#### Dances Conveying the Dramatic Episode

In the Vasanta ras these are the phagu khel dances or the color play dances by Krishna and the gopis, who play and tease each other. Most of the dramatic sequences are sung. The Closing Rites Khurumba pareng is a beautiful composition suggesting the final devotional offering of the self to God. This is followed by the prayer rituals of pushpanjali and aarati.



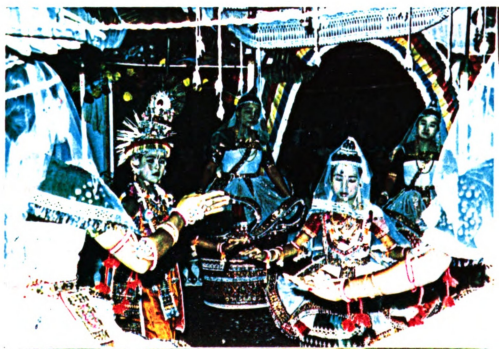


Figure 27 Krishna and Radha Together (Jugal Rup)

Ras IseiMusic of the Raslila

## Introduction

Music is the strength of the Manipuri raslila. Powerful voices loaded with emotion soar, drums sound delightfully as they sculpt the music into rhythmic images ornamented by the regular ringing of the bell-metal cymbals. The delicate sound of the bamboo flute sweetens the melody, liquifying the musical extravaganza.

The songs sung in the raslila, are the padavalis (bhakti poems), which are euphoric depictions of the beauty of Krishna and Radha. They are written in old Bengali, Brajbhasa and Maithili, but sung in a distinctly Manipuri style.

The orchestra consists of two lead female vocalists with two assistant singers, two drummers, one leading another to follow, one flutist, one conch player and one string instrumentalist (although there may occasionally be more than one of these). The cymbals are played by the singers, who are indispensable to the raslila performance. The lead singers are called sutradharis, and their role is to narrate and describe the action, to invoke the gods, and sometimes hold dialogue with the characters, (Figure 28). The rasdhari is the lead drummer and he conducts the performance with his playing. This is possible as the entire action of the play is set to the time measurement defined by the drum.

The conch playing establishes an auspicious mood. It is also used to heighten a climatic moment. The flute is directly associated with the main character of the drama, Krishna the romantic hero whose magnetic flute playing attracts the maidens of Braj, the gopis. The singing is



Figure 28 Singing with the Sutradhari



Figure 28 Singing with the Sutradhari (cont'd)



Figure 28 Singing with the Sutradhari (cont'd)

performed by the gopis in chorus or solo or duets or in antiphony with the sutradhari (lead singers in the orchestra).

The aim of the Raslila performance is to evoke Bhakti ras (experiential state of devotional love evoked by art). The melodies, lyrics, ragas, rhythm patterns all serve this purpose. Their effect on the audience confirms their purpose, as it is not unusual to see men and women moved to tears by the singing. The music is one of the most essential dramatic mediums of the raslila.

The major purpose of this section is to examine the performance element of music in the raslila. The music described as Nata music in Manipur will be examined in three categories, song and rhythm and instruments. In song, the singing style and composition are examined, followed by brief background on the lyrics sung. The section on rhythm, describes its main instrument the pung or drum, giving a detailed analysis of tala or time/rhythm measurement. In the instrumental, each instrument other than the drum is assessed for its role in the performance, with an illustrated description of its construction.

### Song

The play is revealed mainly through the lyrics of songs sung by the suradharis and the Gopis. Most performers of the Manipuri raslila are therefore trained to sing as well as dance. The sutradharis and some of the gopis who do the major part of the singing are professional singers.

The raslila performance involves singing in chorus, singing solos, duets, in dialogue or antiphony. Sometimes the sutradharis sing from the orchestra and the gopis echo the lines in alteration, enacting the meaning of the lyrics, with dance movement and gesture. Manipuri music does not have a traditional notation system. Songs are learned by singing along

with a lead singer, which is a method of training as well as performance. Once they are learned a singer may improvise with musical variations in the delivery of the song, according to her own sense of aesthetics and histrionics.

A musicological analysis of the singing is not available in written form. Although attempts are being made, it is very difficult to notate the highly individualistic singing style.

### Singing style

The songs sung and the lyrics are predominantly of the vaishnava tradition of Bengal and Orissa, but the singing style of the raslila is peculiarly indigenous to Manipur. Manipur has an age-old tradition of music, particularly singing. The following are some of the kinds of music found in Manipur:

Khulang isei (romantic dialogue between lovers). The style used here is of oscillating between the sa (first note) and re (second note).

Lairol - a duet-musical structure like the laiharaoba.

Thabal chongba - group singing (choral style)

Loungak isei - protecting paddy from birds and insects with a clapping sound and voice oscillation.

Louta isei - cultivation - rhythmic digging (sets musical rhythm) sharp voice break techniques and the use of a variety of pitches.<sup>16</sup>

The nat music of the raslila is probably the combination of the Bengali kirtan and Khulang isei. An entire study requiring a musicologist's attention may be devoted to the nat music style and is beyond the scope of this work.

In early music of the Manipuris, songs were composed in different kinds of melodic forms according to the theme of the lyrics. Mood or emotion dictated the choice of different permutations and combinations of svaras (musical notes).

The seven kinds of musical forms that emerged are :

Hepli Pabot depicts bravery

Hepli Thangei depicts beauty and tenderness

Sikaplon depicts pathos

Leimarol Sherol depicts gaiety and joy

Kalen Shengai depicts the pangs of separation

Panthoibi Sheirol depicts an invocation to god for a boon.

Jaat Sheishak depicts gaiety<sup>17</sup>

There are three main components of the singing style: the use of wailing or kranda, the use of voice tremors or kampan, and the use of oscillation and voice breaks or gamak. These create the dramatic moments of the play.<sup>18</sup> Though most Manipuri singers of the raslila are aware of the North Indian musical notes like Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa, and utilize these notes in their singing, they are not often recognizable to an untrained ear, due to the peculiar style of sliding the note.

### Song Structure

The structure of the compositions of the Raslila songs may be found in the ancient Indian music texts, the most significant of which is the Narad Panchamsar Sanghita. The Raga, shloka etc. forms of musical compositions have been defined in the work.

The ancient texts of Indian music categorize six elements used in musical compositions. They are: pada or verse, pata or drum syllables spoken, tenaka or auspicious syllables sung, svara or musical notes sung or signature of the poet or a dedication at the end of the poem and tala or time measure.<sup>19</sup> Each of these elements are also found in the nata music of the raslila.



## Lyrics

The raslila's plot, its visual imagery, and the emotional content are all conveyed by the lyrics of the raslila. The words of the songs make the script of the play.

The lyrics of the raslila performance are selected or composed by the gurus of Manipur. But their roots lie in the vaisnava poetry of Bengal and Orissa. In fact, verses are often randomly lifted or altered from the original vaishnava poems to suit the context of a particular composition by a guru. For instance, an original song of Vasantaras written by Gyandas viz., 'Madhura Jamini Kama Kamini', is suitably changed by gurus to 'Sharada Jamini Baraja Kamini' for its use in Kunja Ras, of Sharad the autumn season.<sup>20</sup> It was probably lifted in this fashion to retain the metrical structure of the verse. The structure of these lyrics is that of the Bengali pada.

The pada is a one-strophied lyrical song of no fixed length, but tending toward relative shortness. In about 10-20 lines it offers an accomplished poetic miniature inspired by the Krishna-Radha legend or, in far smaller number of cases, the deified personality of Chaitanya. It is usually conceived in couplets, most frequently in the payar or tripadi metre and always rhymed, with frequent use of the refrain technique; the last couplet mostly contains the so-called bhanita or colophon with the name of the author and his personal "comment".<sup>21</sup>

Since the pada was always meant to be sung the meters used were particularly conducive to melody. Many poetic euphonic qualities were introduced especially the alliteration. The poet usually selected a 'situation' from the vast repertory of Krishna-Radha legend and wrote it into the structure of a song known as padavali. Many of these songs were then sung in sessions known as padavali kirtan.

Kirtan may be characterized as a gathering of Vaishnavas in order to sing songs of devotion to Krishna and thus to express their religious

attitude. The term kirtan means 'song in praise' and in Bengal these songs were known as padavali kirtana.

Thousands of padas were composed between the 15th and the 19th centuries in Bengal and Orissa and the other regions in the area affected by the bhakti movement. They were connected with Krishna's birth (janmalila-a play on his divine birth), his childhood and especially his love affair with Radha. Anthologies were formulated consisting of a collection of padavalis. In Manipur, Shri Surachand Sharma (authority on vaishnava culture of Manipur) has catalogued all the compositions of padavali songs found in Manipur that were used by the gurus in the raslila, sankirtan and other mandap lilas, in volumes titled Meitei Jagoi. They are an excellent source for vaishnava padavali sangeet as used in the raslila performances of Manipur.

The most prominent and influential vaisnava poets were Chandidas, Vidyapati and Jayadeva (pre-Chaitanya era) and Gyandas Uddhavadas and Narrotamdas (of the post-Chaitanya era). They used old Bengali, Sanskrit, Brajbuli and Maithili languages; the latter two were especially applicable to the emotions of the bhakti faith. The sound quality of these languages are aesthically suited to the imagery of the lyrics.

Although this poetry has been treated categorically by Rupa Goswami who worked hard to codify its laws, it is quite apparent that the masses of vaishnavas who enjoyed the padas had no practical knowledge of Rupa Goswami's rules and prescriptions. "As the bulk of the padas preserved until today shows most clearly, it was not the formal perfection which was appreciated in the first place, but the emotional intensity and the ability of the poet to express the listener's devotion and love of their God."<sup>22</sup>

This is most true of the raslila audience in Manipur today . Many do not follow the language at all but enjoy the melody till they are moved to tears. There are attempts being made to translate the poetry into the Manipuri language, but connoisseurs firmly believe in the sound quality of the older vaishnava languages as most appropriate for the raslila.

### Rhythm

(Pung Isei or Music of the Drum)

The pung is often described as the soul of Manipuri dance and music. This is because it articulates the rhythm patterns that define the entire performance action. Played by the director of the ras the rasdhari himself. It is the most significant of all the raslila musical instruments.

The pung (a type of drum but the word means time) is a cylindrical drum which may be played on two sides with the two hands placed on each side. The hands are placed on either side touching the leather bound rims with two thirds of the fingers as in (Figure 29). The pung players of the raslila are seated on the ground with their instrument held in front.

To play this instrument, the right hand must develop greater agility as the right side of the drum produces many more syllables than the left. The fingers are used to produce these syllables as shown in (Figure 30). The right side is called maru and produces the following sounds:

tat (closed sound) played with four fingers  
tang (open sound) played with four fingers  
ten (open sound) played with index finger  
ta (closed sound) played with three finger—other than index  
tat (half beat sound) with index and tip of third finger



Figure 29 Position of Fingers on the Drum



Figure 30 Both Hands on One Side (Maru Manau Hanba)

The left side called manau produces the following sounds:

Khrit (closed) played with all four fingers.

Ghin (open) played with all four fingers.

Both hands together produce the following sounds:

Khrang (left closed right open) all four fingers.

Ghrang (left open right open) all four fingers

Khrat (left and right closed) all four fingers

Dhen (left open right open) left all four, right index

Then (left closed right open) left all four right index

Khrakhara(left and right closed) in quick alternation

Ghraghara(left and right open) in quick alternation.

These individual sounds are combined to form the most intricate rhythmic phrases usually structured by the system of tala or time measure.

#### The System of Tala or Time Measure

Music and the dance are controlled by a system of beats called Tala. This system may be found recorded since the ancient times in the sangeet shastras (ancient works on the systems of music). Many noted works related to the Sangeet Shastras and approved by orthodox vaishnava principles of Manipur are available for a detailed study of the tala system. Some of these literary sources are the Govinda Sangeet Lila Vilas, Krishnarasa Sangita Sangraha, Talarnav, Mrdang Vyavastha. The music masters of Manipur skilled in creating original rhythm variations, developed an indigenous system of tala based on their study of these ancient texts. The essential element of tala is laya or tempo. It is believed to be expressive of cosmic motion. This forms the basic rationale for the tala system; as an accomplished drum player of Manipur believes:

All objects in the universe move according to a system of rhythm. Even the heavenly bodies are bound by this principle. When there is a dislocation in this system universal catastrophe may follow. In music this concept of rhythm is the most vital element...<sup>23</sup>

According to ancient Manipuri manuscripts like Leithak Leikharol and Pudil, the measure of time to mark the stages of a day was known as pung.

Derived from that, the instrument used to mark the time in dance and music was also known as the pung. The first pung or drum of Manipur that may be traced through literary evidence in the ancient manuscripts, was made of the wood of a wang tree in the 1st century AD during the reign of the King Khoyom Tompok.<sup>24</sup> This indicates that long before the advent of vaishnavism along with the cultural influence from western India, Manipur had her own tradition of music. The drum syllables and rhythm patterns developed for the raslila have little in common with Manipur's indigeneous tradition. For example, drum syllables used in the Ikouba, preliminary portion of the Lai Haraoba are:

Teng Teng Teng Deng Teng

Deng Deng Chong Chong Chong

While the basic tala of eight beats of chali in the raslila sound:

Dhin Ten S Ta/ Khit Ta Dhen Ta/

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

The sound patterns are completely different, even alien to one another. Therefore, although drum used for Lai Haraoba is of Manipur's ancient heritage, it does not seem to have evolved into the pung or the tala system (the drum and rhythmic system of the raslila). The word chali is common to the Indian forms of dance and music as are the names of various other talas of Manipur. It is more likely, therefore, that the tala system used in the raslila resembles that of other regions of India.

#### Components of the Tala

Tala compositions ranging from a four beat measure to sixty-eight beat measures still exist in Manipur. Each beat is measured by a varnakala or an indicator sign. Each varnakal is equal in time to one beat of the human pulse (mihun changba), or as otherwise described, the

time it takes to pierce lotus petals with a needle.<sup>25</sup> Combinations and permutations of beats create the various talas. For instance, tala tanchep of four beats, menkup of six beats, and teental macha of seven beats.

Sets of beat measures are called angas. The system used in Manipur considers eight different sets. To keep track of the tala during progression the Kriya is used. This is the grasping and the releasing of moments prescribed in the rhythm composition determining its stresses and unstresses. The stress or emphasis is indicated by a tantha or clapping of the hands, while the unstress is marked with a flick of the hand in the opposite direction of the clap. This is called the haidokpa or khali. For example in tala menkup, the stress is on the first beat and the unstress on the fourth beat. The division here is equal for instance:

+        o

Dhin ten /ta ghin dhe/  
1 2 3 4 5

+ = stress, o = unstress

Unlike the North Indian system, the divisions here are marked according to the stresses or tantha. The ancient texts give minute divisions of beats or time in Manipur the divisions used range from Anudrut or one to Kakapad or 16 as described below. The following is a table listing the elements of Tala:



Table 2

<u>Anga</u>	<u>Matra</u>	<u>Sign</u>	<u>Kriya</u>
Anudrut	1	U	Clap Hands
Drut	2	0	Clap on first beat
Drutaviram	3	0	Clap on first beat, close fist on the second and open on third.
Laghu	4	/	Clap on first beat, release on third.
Laghuviram	5	/	Clap on first, fist second, open on third.
Guru	8	S	Clap on first, flick right on second, toward self on fifth, drop palm forward on the seventh.
Pluta	12	S	Clap on first, flick to right on fifth, towards self on ninth, forward on eleventh.
Kakapad	16	x	no prescribed hand movement <sup>26</sup>

### Character of Tala

A major characteristic of the tala system of the raslila is its cyclic nature (appropriate for its expression of cosmic motion). For instance, a simple four beat rhythm would go:- 1 2 3 4 1. The special feature here is the return to '1' after the four beats. And this is consistent in all the beat measures ranging from four beats to sixty-eight beats, signifying the importance of the concept of 'continuous return'. When a single tala is used it is called shalag and when two or more talas are combined the composition is called a pheratal.<sup>27</sup>

Another important characteristic of tala is the aspect of laya or the velocity of the time articulated by the rhythm. Laya is also explained in terms of its cosmic nature. Manipuri musicians believe that the stars, the sun, the moon and the planets maintain their own individual laya. When that laya is snapped, destruction occurs. The tala gives the laya a definite form. The basic divisions of laya range from slow (atthapa) to medium (mayay), to fast (athuba) with the relevant intermediate speeds. In Manipur the use of laya is less structured than in the North Indian music

where the progression from slow to fast is linear. The laya in Manipur is 'felt' more, one could say; it is internalized and, therefore, more individual. Its climatic moments lie more in the contrast from very fast breaking into very slow rather than from slow to fast as in a more linear development.

The third major characteristic of the tala system of the Manipuri raslila lies in the juxtaposition of the two types of compositions the nibaddha and the anibaddha. Nibaddha compositions are based on fixed talas or time measures, while the anibaddha composition are not bound by any beat measure.<sup>28</sup> Both types have a distinct quality and are used appropriately in the raslila. For instance, the opening invocatory vocal song, the raga, is slow, solemn, meant for centering and concentration. The singer immerses herself in the melody and sings freely according to her inspiration. This portion of the singing is therefore left anibaddha or free of the frame-work of beat measure (the raga of the raslila can be compared to the alap of North Indian classical music). These anibaddha portions require high sensitivity to rhythm as there is no supportive beat structure. But the large part of the raslila music is nibaddha or bound by the beat structure.

#### Elements of a Tala Composition

Paring : This is a basic rhythmic phrase of a Tala. Like the return of the beat pattern to its first beat, the paring is the first phrase to which the tala composition returns after its variations. It ensures the cyclic repetitive design of the Tal composition. It is like the 'theka' (refrain) of North Indian music. It is usually in medium laya, somber in quality and functions as a linking phrase for the tala composition.

Alankar Punglöl: These are variations of rhythmic patterns on one tala or beat measure. In North Indian music these are the todas. The variation lies in the composition of drum syllables (punglöl) in laya, and in beat fractions. Mastering

these intricate compositions requires years of practise and considerable virtuosity, and the gurus who create them are rhythm wizards.

The Pareng : This is a combination of two or more alankar punglols. They are usually grouped together by their composers. Parengs are often named after the gurus who composed them. For instance we have the 'Oja Thouranisabigi Tanchep Pareng' Oja is guru, Thouranisabi is his name, tanchep is the tala.

Tal Prabandh: When two or more compositions are strung together the composition is called the Tal prabandha. These are usually known by the songs they accompany. For instance, there is the 'Shri Sachinandan' prabandha of the song opening with 'Shri Sachinandan'.

Akhaiba: A joining phrase.

Athaba: A closing phrase.<sup>29</sup>

#### Evaluation of the Tala System

Tala with its cyclic rhythm and its aspects of laya, kriya, and prabandha is indispensable to the raslila. Not only is it a timekeeper, but it is also a form of expression and of beauty. There are talas that have drum syllables that imitate the sounds of animals and birds while their rhythms suggest their gaits, or syllables that imitate natural phenomena like rain, thunder and lightning. Some talas are expressive of joy, others of serenity and even pathos. Time measure is articulated by the syllables of the drum; these are often inspired by the dance.

The dance is choreographed within the time measures. It interprets the song. The song is also structured by the same beat measure as the dance, and so is the accompanying instrumental music. Here is an example of how the words of the song, and the drum syllables are put in a beat structure:

The song is from Radha Abhisar of Vasantaras. "Chanda Badani Dhani Karoo Abhisar..." meaning, "The one with the moonlike face approaches".

This song is set to Tal Menkup of six beats and one stress.

+            o                            +            o  
/s        chanda        ba /    dani        dha        ni        /

+            o                            +            o  
/dhin tenta ghin dhe /    dhin    tenta ghin dhe/

+            o                            +            o  
/s        karu        abhi        / sa -        ar        /

+            o                            +            o  
/dhin tenta ghin dhe /    dhin    tenta ghin dhe/

's' is a sign used to indicate a beat stressing a pause before the words.

Tal menkup of six beats is played on a slow laya and the emphasis is on the first syllable dhin. It is a heavy sound suggestive of the slow elephant-like gait (considered beautiful for a woman) of Radha as she approaches. Radha walks forward slowly placing one foot forward at the first syllable 'dhin' and then sinking gracefully into that step until the next 'dhin' when she takes the next step forward, establishing the rhythm through her movement.

### Other Instruments

#### Flute

Two kinds of flutes are used by the flutist of the raslila. They are the Bengali flute and the meitei flute. Both are made of Bamboo but are tuned to different pitches. The meitei flute called towdri is used mainly for folk music and is therefore tuned to the pancham sur, while the Bengali flute is tuned to the madhyam sur and is capable of a greater range of musical notes. It is primarily used for classical music.

The flutist accompanies the singers with the Bengali flute following the melody of the song and just as the singers have the freedom to create subtle musical variations, so is the flutist free to improvise according

to the prevailing mood. The meitei flute is used to play the most important flute solo, called the murali nad, with which (early in the performance) Krishna beckons the maidens of Braj to join him by playing alluring melodies on his flute. The meitei flute has a deliciously sweet sound and is ideal for expressing Krishna's melodious playing, (Figure 31).

The mythical hero Krishna is reputed to be a most skillful flute player and the flute music is generally associated with him. It is therefore most significant to the raslila performance.<sup>30</sup>

#### Mandila (cymbals)

Each of the four sutradharis seated in the orchestra of the Manipuri raslila holds a pair of cymbals called the mandila. The mandila is bell-metal cymbal about three inches in diameter. A green velvet loop tied through a hole at the center of the cymbal is gripped by the player while striking the cymbals together. Attached to the green loop holder are tassels approximately a foot in length. The tassels accentuate the movement of the cymbals beautifully as they are being played when used by the nupi pala (women's musical ensemble) who sing and dance while playing the cymbals.

Four pairs of mandila consistently strike the beat of the various rhythms played on the pung. The sutradhari holds one mandila in her right hand and one in her left hand. The left hand is usually held steady as the right hand mandila strikes it. The right hand mandila is used to indicate the stress or emphasis of a beat by striking and the unstress or de-emphasis of a beat; (as in the tala system), by a series of pre-determined wrist and hand movements. Each movement is designed to span the time between two stressed beats. While striking different sounds can



Figure 31 The Flute

be produced depending on how hard or how many times the mandilas are struck together.

### Construction of the Mandila

There are several kinds of cymbals in Manipur, each used for a particular type of performance. The raslila uses the mandila, a pair of small cymbals. (Figure 32) Their forerunner is the kartal or as they are also known the jhal. These are large cymbals used by the men in the sankirtana, (Figure 33) in which it is the dominant instrument along with the pung or drum. It is very loud in comparison to the delicate sound of the mandila used mainly by the women in the raslila.

The resonant and melodious sound quality of the mandilas of Manipur is quite exceptional; and to construct this small instrument well enough to produce a quality sound requires considerable skill and craftsmanship. It is a home industry, and certain leikeis like the kangangbam leikei have earned a reputation for their resident's skill in this craft, (Figure 34). The skill passed down from father to son is thus perfected within the family. As is the custom, the craftsman observed in Kangangbam leikei has his wife trained to be his assistant.

The construction process consists of two main stages. In the first stage the cup shaped cymbal is created and in the second stage it is polished. A flat bell-metal pellet is heated and shaped with the help of a hammer and tree-trunk anvil. The craftsman does the heating and the hammering, while his wife (or assistant) pumps air through a column in a consistent rhythm to keep the coal burning at a high intensity. A hole is then pierced through the center of the cymbal cup. But the cymbal still has a very rough surface and needs to be smoothed and polished, (Figure 35).

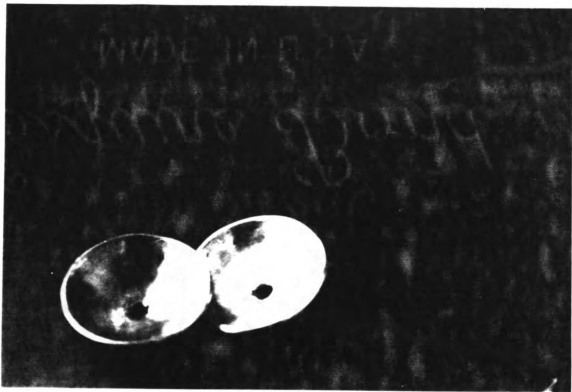


Figure 32 Mandila, Pair of Small Cymbals





Figure 33 Large Cymbals for Kartal Chalom

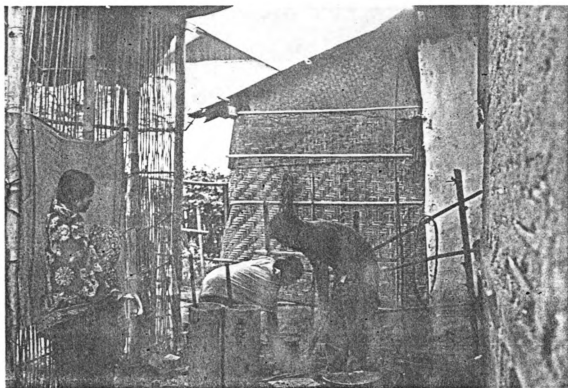


Figure 34 Home Industry for Cymbal-Making



Figure 35 Polishing the Cymbal

In the second stage The polishing is an extremely painstaking process. After smoothing the surface with the help of a crude machine, the woman stands on one leg against the wall and rotates the heel of the other foot, which is stuck into the cymbal cup,(Figure 36). The cymbal rubs against a rag soaked in the greasy polish, until it gleams like gold. The entire process takes two or three days of strenuous work. Once completed the customer collects the pair of cymbals paying about seventy-five rupees (seven dollars) and then gets the green holder and red tassels attached.

### Moibung or Conch

The conch figures in the iconography of the God Vishnu. It has a very auspicious significance in Vaishnavism and its forms of worship. It is played at every temple of Vishnu or Rama or Krishna at the time of congregational prayer and has therefore a strong association with worship all over India. In Manipur the conch playing is especially well developed. In most cases, it is blown regardless of any particular musical chord or note, as to get a sound out of it is very difficult But the Manipuri vaishnavas have produced a range of musical notes to be played representing the chanting of the names of Krishna and Chaitanya. It features in the raslila orchestra.

The conch is called the moibung in Manipuri, and its player is known as the moibung khongba. He sits in the orchestra with two conches and uses one or two according to the volume desired. (Figure 37) When played together the sound impact is greater. The moibung khongba is also responsible for playing at the temple rituals on a regular basis.

There are three main compositions played on the moibung, and they have three different pitches. These are the dirgha, which is played the



Figure 36 Final Polish with the Heel



Figure 37 Moibung Khongba Playing on the Conches

loudest and at the highest pitch, it echoes the chant melody of Harinama. The second is the Do which is of a medium pitch and represents the chant 'solonam'. The third is played at a low pitch and is called 'Dha' represents the chant Bartana Chaitanya Nam. The moibung khongba plays these according to a prescribed order at the raslila. They may be played as he thinks appropriate, and even in an emergency to cover a weak moment in the singing for instance.

The harinama chant is the inaugurating chant of an occasion. The solonam chant usually associated with anniversary celebrations and the chaitanya bartanam is usually played in processions of war or when the King travels in a procession.

In the raslila all three are used. The moibung player blows the Harinam chant at the very beginning of the raslila as soon as he receives the signal chant from the mandap mapu. The pung player (rasdhari) and the moibung khongba begin playing the raga (opening passage) simultaneously, and while they play the other members of the orchestra performance and audience bow their heads in respect and preparation for the performance.

The next important moment marked by the sound of the conch is the arrival of Krishna into the rasmandap (the song that describes his arrival). And then when the gopis arrive. It functions in some ways as an announcement of the beginning of an event. The three points of the raslila that are pre-determined are: the start of the raga, the gurughat and the Bhangis. The rest is left to the discrimination of the Moibung Khongba. The point at which he must play very low and soft and continuous like a hum, or not play at all, is during sambhog or union of Krishna and Radha. It is important that they must not be disturbed.

A local belief perpetuated in Manipur that if anyone is lost, he or she may have been captured by the evil spirits. Blowing the conch is supposed to drive the spirits away and set the captive free and so following this, the moibung player blows his conch especially loud when Krishna vanishes (antardhyana) in the Maharas. The final closing rites of the performance with the aarati are also always accompanied by the conch blowing.

The sound variations are achieved by holding the mouth-piece of the conch to the mouth in different ways. There is a tenkhau or uvula built under the silver mouth piece for vibration. A three ring conch is found to be ideal for blowing resonant notes. A special alloy of metals is selected for the construction of the mouth piece; one that will not become too heated by the sun,(Figure 38).<sup>31</sup>



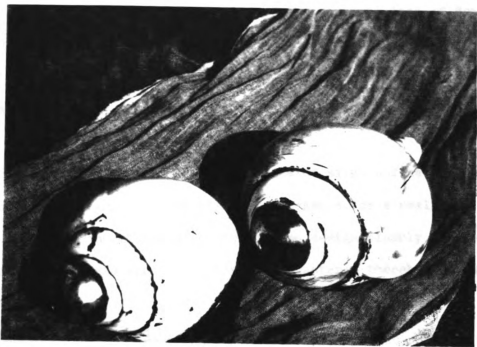


Figure 38 The Mouth of the Conches

## Ras Potloi

### The Costume of the Gopis and Krishna

The costume's significance to the action of the play is discussed to provide a backdrop against which to view its design. Each item of the potloi or raslila costume is described and illustrated with drawings or photographs. A short description of the traditional system of costume construction is also provided.

Costume and Character : The characters of the raslila are Krishna the cowherd boy and the Gopis or milkmaids of the pastoral land of Braj. There are therefore, two categories of costume, the phajjom (a flowing lower garment) worn by Krishna (Figure 39) and the kumin (skirt) worn by the gopis and Radha, (Figure 40). Potloi is the term for the entire costuming of the raslila.

Both categories of the potloi are made of silks and satin in vibrant colours with glittering sequence all too gorgeous for a realistic depiction of a cowherd boy and milkmaids. The costume design clearly suggests the idealization of these apparently simple characters, thereby indicating their divinity.

### Costume Design Influenced by the Temple and the Court

Maharaja Bhagyachandra the king who envisioned the raslila is believed to have designed the costume displayed in his vision. Besides being a theater of religion the raslila is the offspring of the Manipuri court; which is also indicated by the costume's grandeur. The king was generally assisted in the design by the queens and princess who appear to have played an active role in decisions regarding the raslila designs.

Thus the design incorporates the characteristics of the temple and the court. It permits the most splendid ornamentation but at the same time



Figure 39 Phaijom, the Lower Garment



Figure 40 Kumin, the Skirt

observes the constraints of the conservative socio-religious conventions. The women are veiled, the skirt is long and stiff so that inspite of whirling dance movements it does not rise exposing the legs. An attitude of humility and egolessness is stressed, so although the gopis are attractively garbed, they should remain un-selfconscious and free of vanity in accordance with the atmosphere for worship.

#### Costume and dance

The costume design is conducive to the two types of movement: the tandava (masculine) and the lasya (feminine). The Krishna costume allows free leg movement; the lower garment, the phaijom is made of silk and is extremely light in weight. It is secured in a way that allows easy jumping, quick springy movements, fast paced footwork use of the ground through sitting movements of the tandava style. In contrast, the gopis' costume is extremely heavy, particularly the skirt or kumin, which is stiff and cumbersome. It encages the lower body and restricts movement. It is ideal for the minimalistic movements of the gopis. They walk slowly, their upper body has greater freedom as the arms do most of the movement.

The costume therefore aids the depiction of the characters of the raslila. The lithe young Krishna is garbed in a cheerful yellow. His garment has a fluid quality enhancing the playfulness of his character, The gopis' costume depicts feminine grace through restraint; it is flattering to their appearance and lends them a quality of charm and mystery.

#### Visual interest

The raslila costume provides the major visual beauty to the performance. Scenic display is usually at its barest. The most colorful and dynamic visual interest is held by the costume and the ornaments. The

performers glitter and glow like astral bodies spinning in space. Brilliant sparks are released from reflecting brass sequence on the vermillion red and luminous green silk fabrics. The translucent white gauze fabric edged with a silver border of the veil and upper skirt, create an ethereal ambience. The lighting of the acting area is rather low due to poor electrical facilities. Instead of hampering vision it enhances the shimmering spectacle of the costume.

#### Documentation of Costume Elements

The Gopis' Costume (Figure 41)

##### Koktumbi - head dress

Worn on the top of the head, the koktumbi is black, conical in shape, and is decorated with silver sequence embroidery, and colored beads. The cone is made of a semi-circular piece of canvas and covered with black felt. The decorative trimmings are sewn on top. The semi-circular canvas is folded into a cone and fixed onto a flat round base with pointed ends which is also heavily decorated. The idea of the koktumbi stems from the top knot as the earlier custom was to tie the actresses own hair into a top knot, giving her an ascetic-like appearance. Gradually as the ornamentation increased it became necessary to have the conical support built for them. The koktumbi provided this support, it is neater in appearance and much easier to put on.

##### Maikhum - veil

The veil is made of a super-fine white gauze material with a silver edging. It is draped over the Koktumbi, and worn covering the face in all the raslilas at the palace temple. Some khulak ras performances may allow the gopis to present themselves unveiled. For example, the



Figure 41 Gopis' Costume

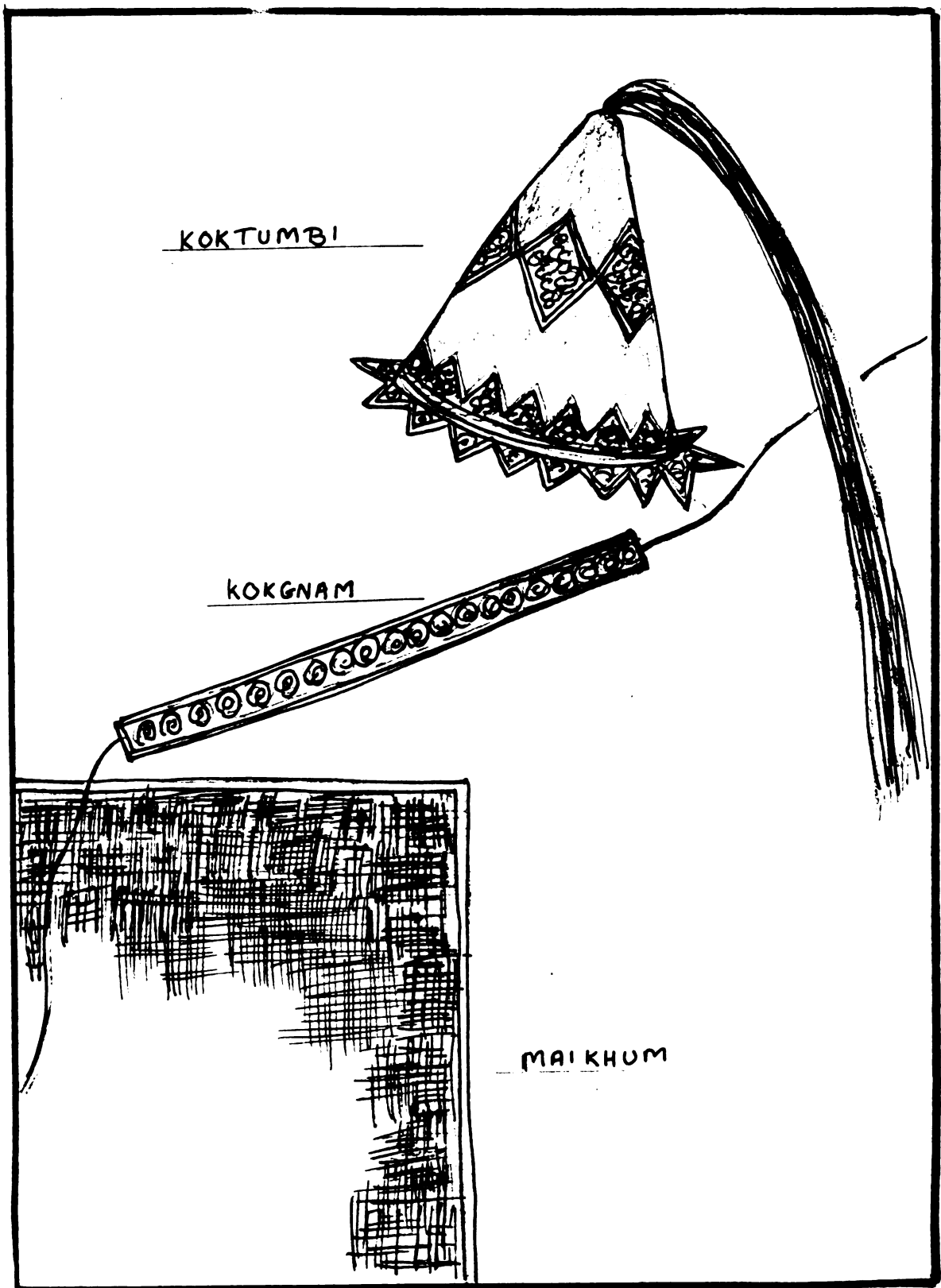


Figure 41 Gopis' Costume (cont'd)



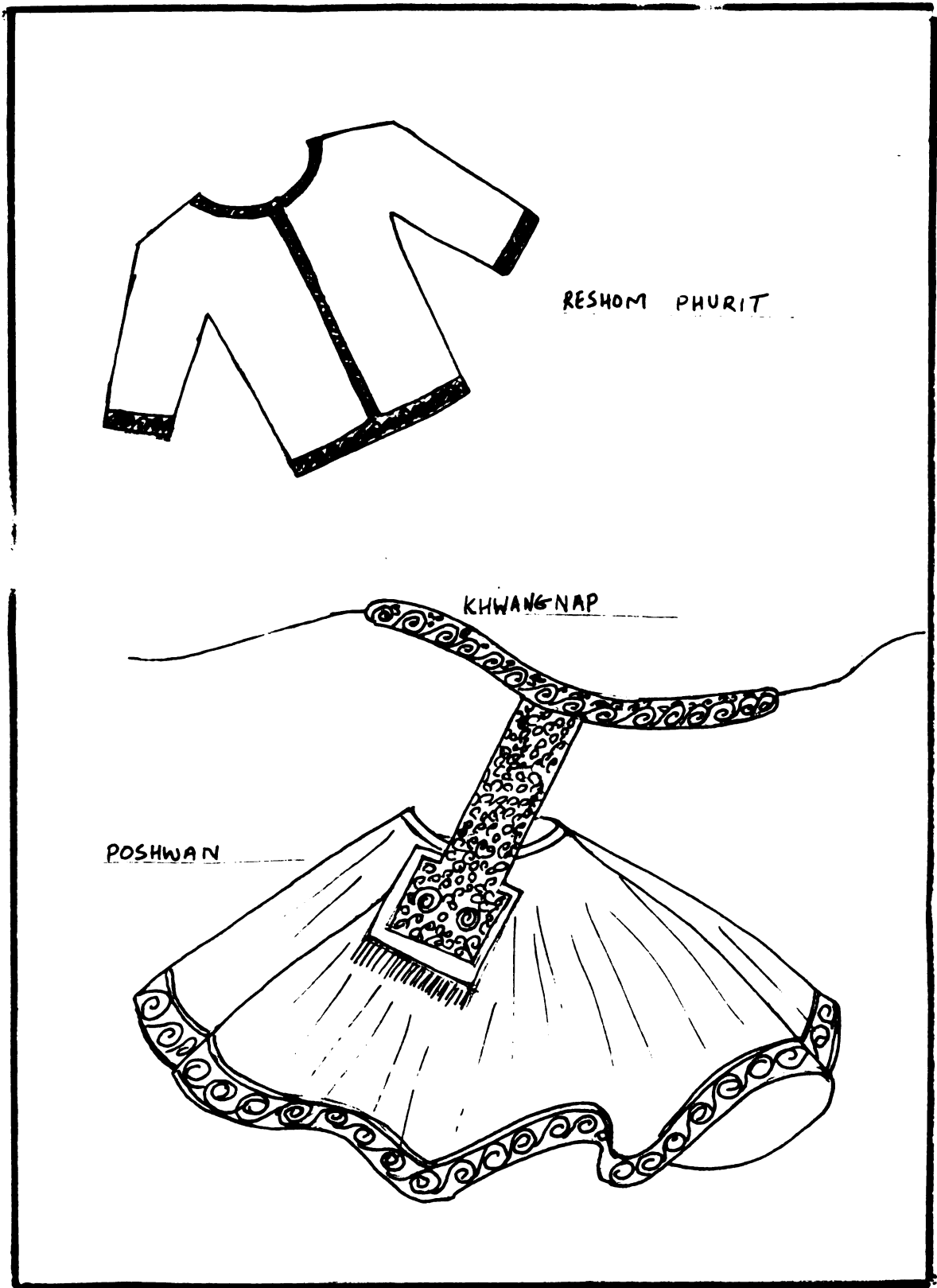
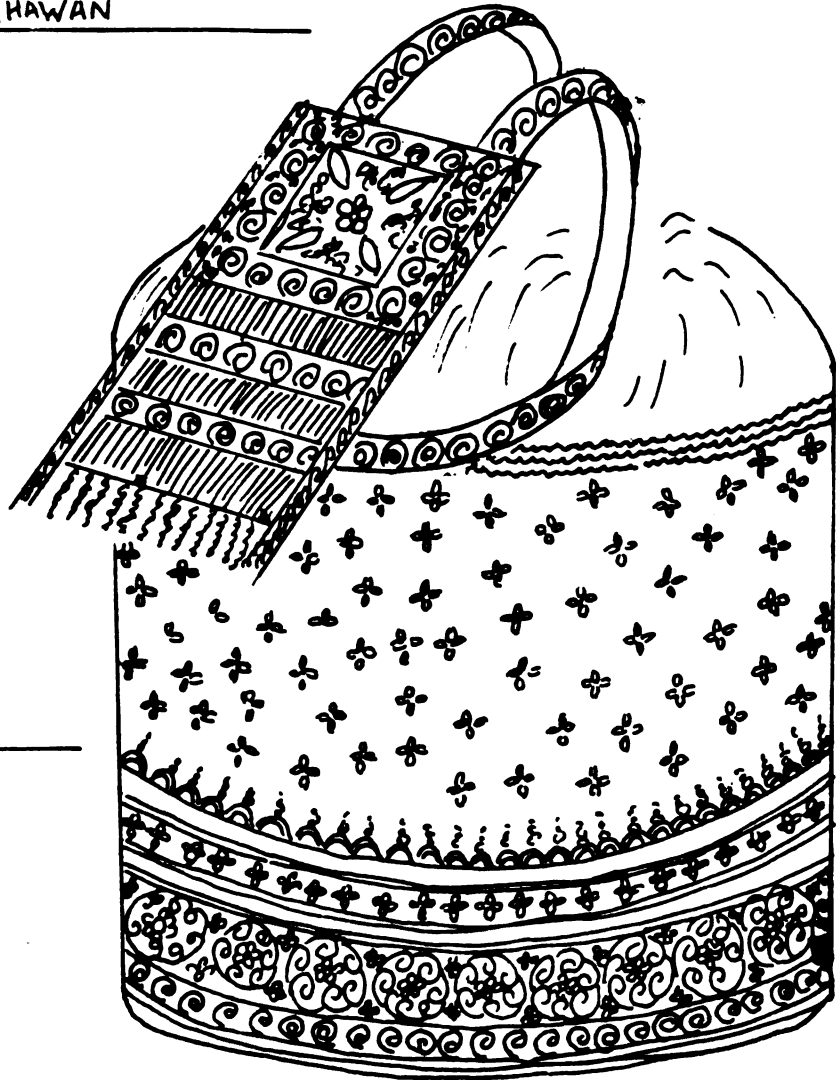


Figure 41 Gopis' Costume (cont'd)

KHAWAN



KUMIN

Figure 41 Gopis' Costume (cont'd)

costume of the Nityaras excludes the koktumbi and maikhum and uses the jhapa (a form of ornamentation for the head). Kokgnam - head band.

White cloth is sewn into a ribbon-like band with silver pellets sewn on top of it. This band is tied across the hairline framing the face.

Resom Phurit - velvet upper garment

The upper garment or blouse is of a dark green velvet, with a gold border and sequence work. The blouse has a front opening which is closed with a thread and needle just before the performance.

Poshwan - an inverted lotus shaped upper skirt

This splendid skirt is made out of transparent white gauze. The fabric has silver threads running through its warp. It is gathered together at the waist and attached to a fastener; usually a red strip of cloth. Its lower edge has a richly decorated border. This skirt is wrapped around the waist and sits on top of the main skirt, the kumin.

Kumin - main skirt

This is the most elaborate part of the raslila costume; in fact, the entire dress of the gopi is sometimes referred to as kumin. This garment is a full length skirt fastened to the waist. The gopis wear a red kumin and Radha (the favorite of Krishna) or the makok chingbi (lead dancer).

About two-thirds of this skirt is made of stiff canvas and stands around its wearer, like a stiff cylindrical box. This portion, visible under the poshwan is made of satin on the canvas base, with rich sequence work in metallic gold and mirrors. The most elaborate embroidery is the border of the skirt. The stiff cylindrical box-like structure is supported by a round circular piece of cane inserted through the underside of the skirt. The skirt along with its upper part the poshwan is rather heavy. The dancer has to bear its weight on her waist through the whole night.

Khawan - side belt This is an ornamented shoulder strap and side flap slung over the left shoulder like a burmese shoulder bag.

### Ornaments

The raslila costume of the Krishna, and gopis incorporates two kinds of ornaments. The necklaces and bangles and earrings made of brass with a gold finish, and elaborate armbands and garlands made of materials similar to the costume; that is, canvas strips with fancy bead work. The brass ornaments are made in the traditional manipuri design.

### Ornaments worn by the gopis

#### Chomai - earrings

The earrings are extremely delicate and light weight. They are made of the bell-metal dipped in a liquid gold called tejap. The design appears to have been inspired by the chhatra or ceremonial umbrella used traditonally by the Manipuris.

#### Lik-Pareng- Necklace

The necklace is made of three or four strings of beads identified as the thambalmana or the lotus leaf shaped beads. Tharoi maning, which are the snail shell shaped beads, and the marai which are the most intricately carved beads. The entire set is called the likpareng. A cotton garland called the laipareng is worn bordering the necklace. It is made of white cotton dyed at intervals.

#### Khuji - Bangles

One hollow brass band is twisted around each wrist to form a loose fitting bangle. It is intricately carved with the typical Manipuri designs.

Krishna's costume (Figure 42)Chura (a part of the headdress)

This is a peacock feathered head dress, fan shaped, worn tilting forward as it is believed to represent the many headed snake protecting Krishna.

Mukut

It is a base for the feathered head dress. It is a close fitting cap of black velvet sequenced with silver ornaments. A wooden holder is fitted at the top of a cap to support the feathered crown.

Nakhum

This is a close fitting black velvet cap sequenced with silver ornamentation.

Chirong

It is a silver wire decoration covering the mukut.

Khwangnap

A strip of decorated canvas runs down along the spine on the back of the wearer. It is attached to the bottom edge of the black velvet cap.

Kokgnam

A strip of white fabric is worn like a head band and decorated with silver sequence work.

Cherai

A beautiful white feathered train which is attached at the bottom edge of the cap along with the canvas strip. It is made of crisp white paper cut to give it a feathered look. It covers the length of the wearer's spine.



Figure 42 Krishna's Costume

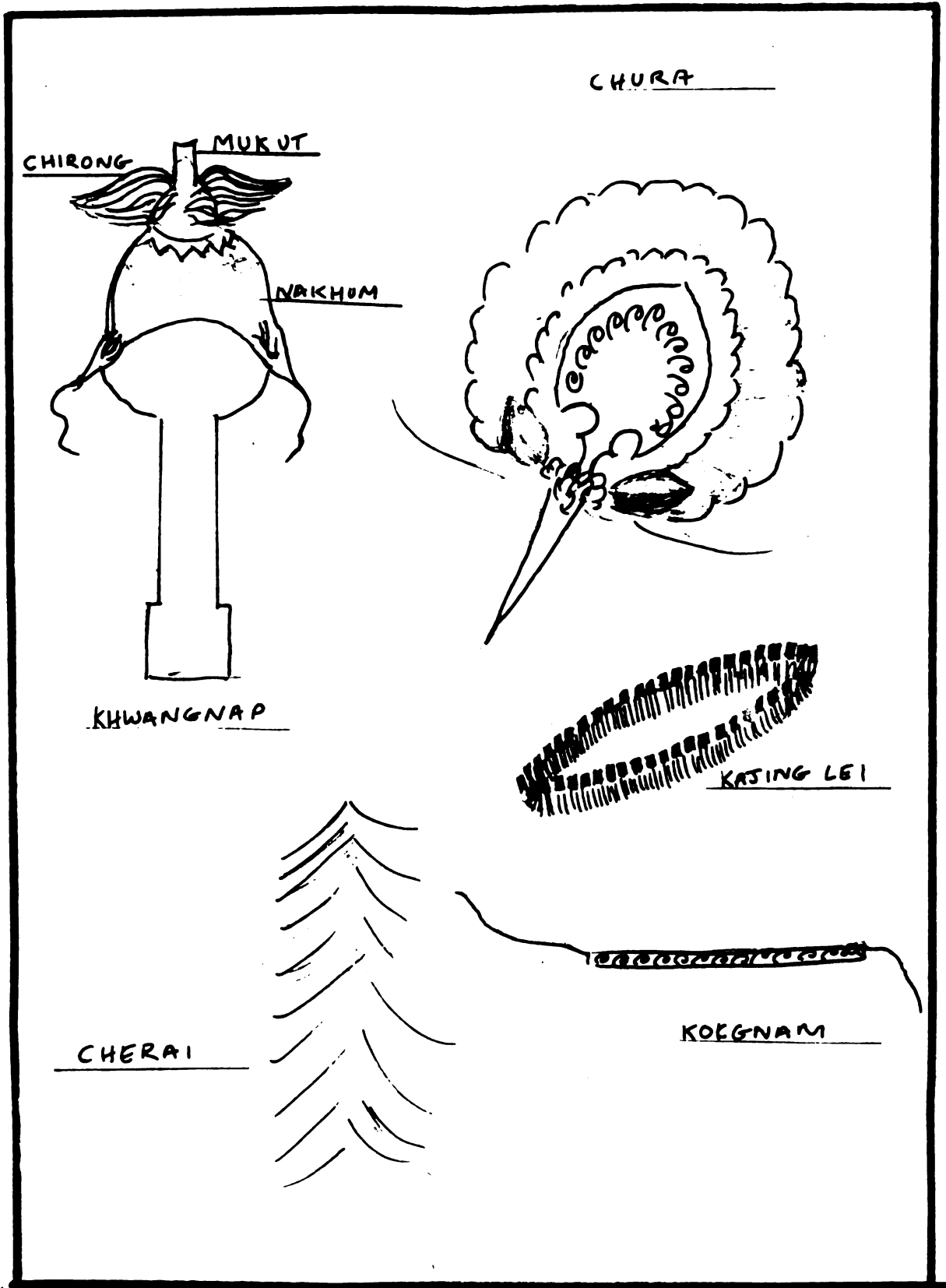


Figure 42 Krishna's Costume (cont'd)

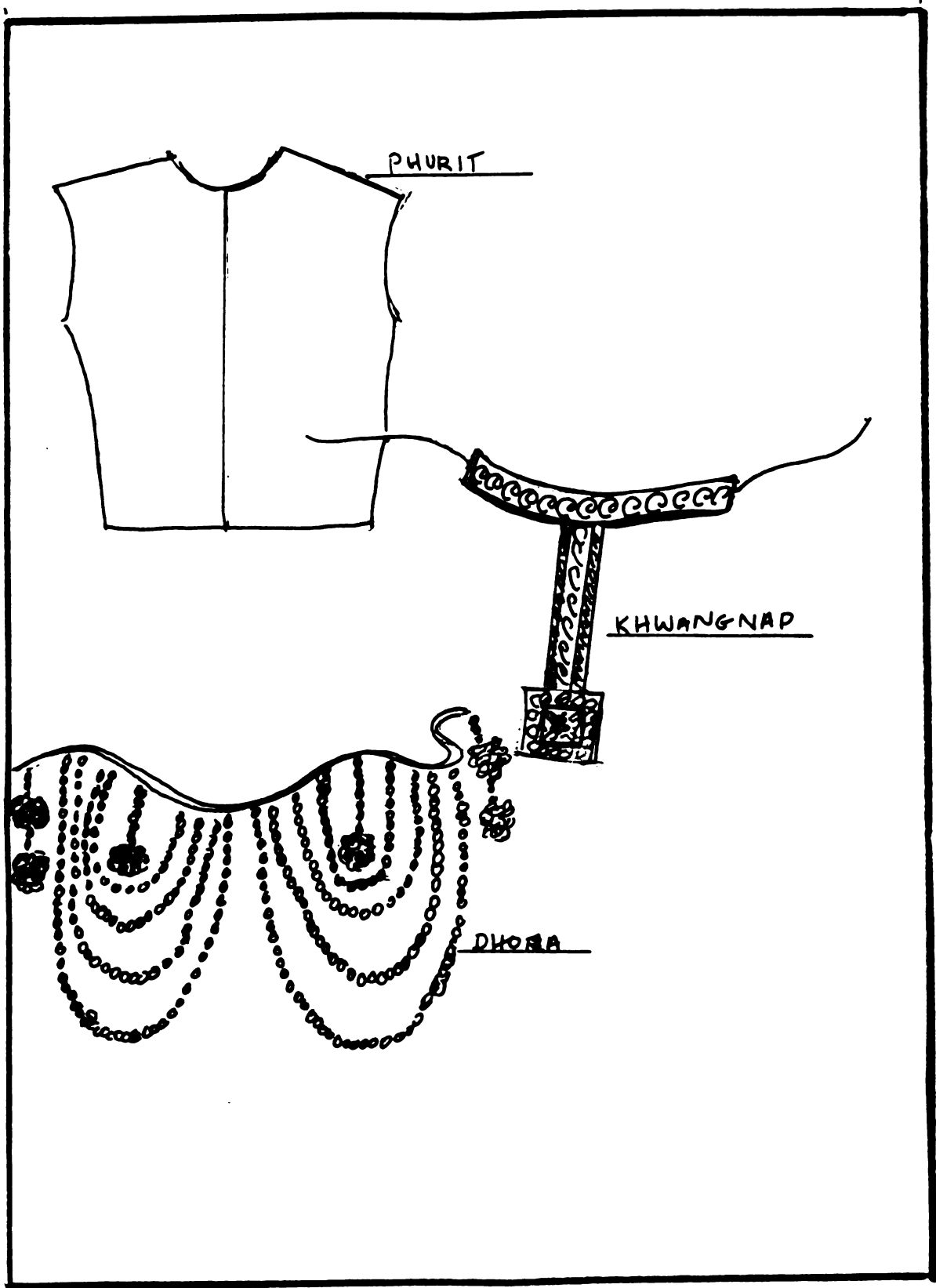


Figure 42 Krishna's Costume (cont'd)



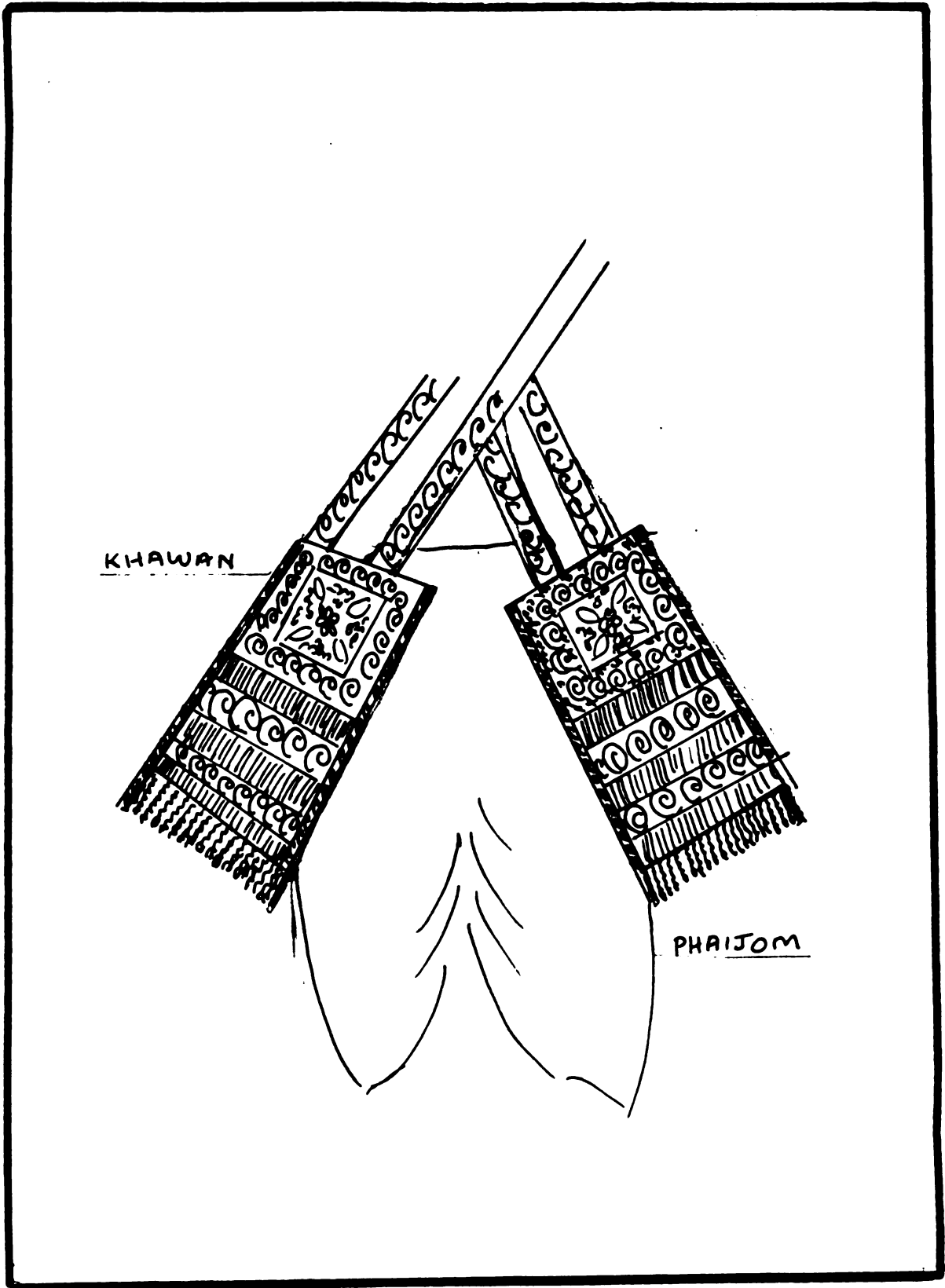


Figure 42 Krishna's Costume (cont'd)

Kajing lei

This is worn on the top of the head band, it is an attractive red and gold ornamental band to the headdress. It is a ring crowning the head, made with twisting bits of red felt around to form its upper half and attaching bits of gold plated metal all around to form its bottom half. It is quite heavy and helps the rest of the headdress stay in place. Sturdy threads run down the mukut and the cap and the entire headdress is thus fastened under the chin.

Phurit - upper garment

Traditionally young boys or girls playing the part of Krishna did not wear any upper garment instead they covered their chest with flower garlands. Now, a sleeveless blouse of shiny fabric is worn.

Pisindrai

This is an ornament worn on the chest. It is made of a shimmering material called jhari. There is a center piece representing the magical kaustubh jewel. The jhari runs across the chest from each shoulder crossing at the center.

Khawan - side belt      A peculiar ornamental portion of the costume resembling shoulder bags of Burma. It is worn across the chest, one from each shoulder.

Phaijom - lower garment

This is the lower garment worn like the traditional Indian male costume, the dhoti. It is made of a sun yellow silk with the green moirang-pee border of Manipur.

Dhora - strings

This is a decorative waist band which falls over the hips. It is made of rows of colored cloth beads strings.

Khwangnap

A waist band similar in its construction to the side belts of canvas. One strip of canvas hangs down the front shaped like an inverted 'T'

OrnamentsNachom - earrings

These are light weight metal earrings shaped like the traditional Manipuri chhatra or umbrella.

Likpareng or necklace

The necklace is made up of different strings of beads: The kiyang likpang beads usually worn by the male character, the haikhru seed shaped beads also worn only by the male character, and the thambal mana lotus shaped beads, worn by both Krishna and the gopis. These rows of beads are then framed by a cotton garland called laipareng.

Khuji are decorative bangles made of brass.

Khuttop (hand ornament)

This ornament is made of canvas fabric and bead work. It is strung on the middle finger and then tied to the wrist.

Tankha

This ornament decorates the elbow area. It is similar in design to the Khuttop.

Tal

This is an arm band decorated like the Khuttop, though it is sometimes made of brass.

Khondop

This is a Burmese slipper-like two strap foot ornament.

Khongji

This is a ornament worn around the ankles resembling ankle bells.

### Costume Construction

There are four prominent families, who have maintained the costuming craft as a tradition. They are the Mairangthems, Laishrem, Ningthemcha, Mayum of the Angom Salais clan. According to the local custom, if the head of the family is a costumer, the entire family becomes involved in the costume building. In this household industry, the man does most of the basic construction like cutting, while the women do most of the stitching and the children assist with the pasting.

The costumer is permitted to introduce design variations to some extent, without altering the traditional costume in any significant way. Only the queens and princesses had the authority to introduce major changes. It is believed that Maharaj Kumari Sanatombi was responsible for some of these. She was married to a British Governor General and was open to new innovation using new materials. Some of the changes were: the use of silver chamki instead of brass studs on the kumin, mirror bits instead of glass bits as decoration, the use of green velvet (procured through the British) instead of raw silk. The more recent changes are: foot ornaments with tiny bells or bell-like beads that used to be worn are not seen anymore and the kumin has grown much stiffer than it used to be.

### Construction of the Kumin

The main portion of the potloi is the kumin or the skirt. The basic material used for its construction is canvas. (Figure 43) The canvas is made with layers of thin white gauze starched with rice flour. The gauze and flour are dampened and arranged in layers for required thickness and left outside to dry in the sun. The under side is lined with a cotton

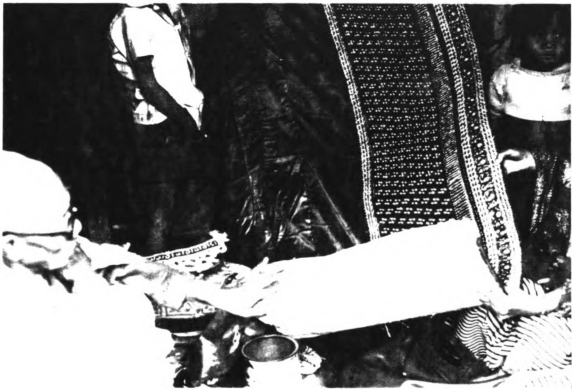


Figure 43 The Canvas of the Kumin

material. Finally the tedious process of decoration is undertaken. All the work is done by hand. (Figure 44)

The undulating curves of the poshwan or the upper skirt, is achieved by inserting a wire into the canvas border.(Figure 45)

The side belts and the front belt have a similar construction method as the kumin: the canvas, cloth and ornamentation.

Krishna's costume differs mainly in the lower garment and the headdress. The phaijom is about a yard and a half long silk fabric wrapped in a particular style around the waist and the legs.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 44 The Costumer Constructs by Hand



Figure 45 Poshwan, the Upper Skirt



### The Audience

A strong correlation exists between theater and worship. The most obvious is perhaps that both rely on interaction - theater between audience and performance, and worship - between the God and worshippers or devotees. The vaishnavas incorporate theatrical arts as worship, and their fundamental principles are founded on the correlation between the two. The raslila performance in Manipur is a prime example; as it exhibits an amalgamation of worship and performance into a single unified activity.

The raslila has Krishna the deity of the temple, as its focal character, and Krishna's devotees as the audience creating a unique audience-performance relationship; as it is also a worshiper-to-God relationship. Utilizing beauty and the delineation of the love between Krishna and Radha, the performance evokes love in the devotees heart drawing him/her close to Krishna.

It is said of Greek drama that it was "a concerted attempt to elevate the consciousness of a whole community."<sup>33</sup> The raslila's purpose too is to uplift the vaishnava community in its audience to a state of intense feeling of love, aesthetic pleasure and spiritual bliss. Thus, on a night when the moon is is fullest, the bhaktas are given this remarkable opportunity to fill their hearts with joy in the presence of Krishna, Radha, and the Gopis in the temple arenas of Manipur.

This section examines the audience identity, the audience-performance relationship, and the ideal audience member of the raslila performance.

### Audience Identity

The nature and the function of the raslila performance is socio-religious. This is primarily reflected in the composition of its audience as only Hindus are permitted into the temple precinct, and of these the majority are Manipuri vaishnavas. But although this establishes the socio-religious homogeneity of the group it must be pointed out that it does not imply a uniformity in the response to the performance.

Worship and theater are an entirely personal exercise, though they may be performed in a group. "Each person, not the audience as a group, has an intense, private encounter with the performer".<sup>31</sup> In the raslila, where the relationships lie between Krishna, Radha the gopis and devotees, the audience participation is both individual varying according to each one's faith, spiritual capacity and aesthetic understanding, as well as communal.

All vaishnava men, women and children are free to attend the performance. The more devotional of these attend out of faith in the auspicious nature of the event believing that it would be spiritually beneficial to attend. For some it is a major community event particularly where the lead performer is a relative or member of their leikei (neighborhood) and members of the royal family of Manipur or members of the government may attend to grace the occasion.

### Audience-Performance Interaction

The raslila performance is committed to the tradition of the temple of Krishna. As its content is integrally connected to the life schedule of Krishna <sup>32</sup>since ancient times, it cannot vary according to the prevailing fancy of any particular audience of a particular time. But as it stands, so far, the audience of the raslila accepts and upholds the

tradition in view of their belief in its cosmic nature and supernatural content. Also, the devotees of Krishna, seem to like to hear the same stories and see the same episodes in the life of Krishna re-enacted. For them it is like hearing about a loved one. The performance event is designed to evoke bhakti ras, an experiential state of devotional worship through art. This does not depend on any particular episode or story, the entire event of the temple performance is important; and so just to be present in the auspicious environment and realize the love of Krishna and experience the beauty is fulfilling. What is it that draws the audience to the raslila performance each year, where the stories are the same, the songs familiar, there are no changes in costume design or spectacle, the same characters are re-enacting the same Krishna-lila in the same specified manner? Perhaps it is the ultimate and most intense desire of the bhakta or devotee, to exist permanently in Brindavan, where Krishna sports with the gopis. The gradual escalation of the the devotee's desire for Krishna is illustrated below:

There is first, the hearing of the Name,  
followed by a curiosity that rapidly  
deepens into attraction. Then comes  
the contact with a true Bhakta, and then  
a gradual and ever deepening sense of His  
presence, an intense desire for direct communion  
with Him. Whereupon the soul turns into a  
Gopi, sees Him, and lives in Brindavan, near  
His feet for ever afterwards.<sup>33</sup>

The structure of the raslila or its kram, appears to reflect this notion. For instance, the performance event of the raslila begins with the sankirtana an invocatory percussion performance, invoking Chaitanya as the Guru. Here the names of Krishna are chanted, and then through the invocation of Chaitanya the contact with a true and great Bhakta is established. The singers express Chaitanya's desire to see the raslila of

Krishna and Radha thus evoking the same in the bhakta (audience member). This desire is fulfilled during the enactment of the raslila when the bhakta can identify with the gopi and experience his/ her love for Krishna resulting in his presence at "Krishna's feet" in Brindavan. Such a conducive production design is possible due to the mutual interest of a community of bhaktas which include the sponsors, organizers, performers, priests, and audience members. All concerned are devotees serving Krishna, who is the blazing center of the entire event. The raslila can perhaps be described as a theater born out of a common need, a collaborative effort and a single purpose which is the attainment of bliss in the presence of Krishna and Radha.

The sponsors who finance the performance dedicate it to the temple. The organizers, mainly the priestly order in service to the dieties, assure the upkeep of an auspicious and aromatic environment essential for worship, and perform the necessary rites. The performers concern themselves with maintaining the right attitude of grace and worship paying attention to aesthetics and technique, and the audience partakes of the event maintaining the temple decorum of costume and behavior. Their faith and love contribute greatly to the success of the event. It is both extraordinary and awe-inspiring to witness their open-hearted appreciation of the artist's performance. Their response is uninhibitedly emotional. It is not unusual to see the tears run down their faces. They also show appreciation for a particularly good performance by prostrating in obeisance in front of the performer expressing the joy and gratitude and even showering gifts on the performers during the performance,(Figure 46). In the sankirtan the performer accepts the appreciation by prostrating in obeisance with the audience member and they both weep together with joy in the love for Krishna.



Figure 46 Performer and Spectator Bow in Appreciation

The play's structure and its effect on the bhakta in the audience, shows the raslila to be a play of consciousness. The audience member enters the temple mandap in anticipation of seeing Krishna and Radha. Thus the arrival of Krishna and Radha into the Rasmandop is celebrated with joyous cries. It is an important moment whether they are in image form or characters played by children. Great exhilaration is experienced by the audience as the images of Krishna and Radha are rotated on a dias and displayed. The audience settles down after the sankirtan begins and immerse themselves in the chanting and singing. The raslila begins with the arrival of the gopis gorgeously garbed, into the rasmandala. The gopis usually begin with expressing their desire to dance and play with Krishna. Krishna's flute has awakened their desire to be with Him. They look all over for him. Once they find him they make all the arrangements for the dance. Krishna persuades them to bring his favorite Radha. The bhakta in the audience, following the path of Chaitanya, relate to Krishna as gopis, and thus identify with the gopis in the rasmandala.

This leads the audience to experience what the gopis do, their joy at finding Krishna, their pathos when he leaves them, their fun and playfulness in the games and their fear of the dark forest when left alone. The audience listens to the gopis' longing as she sings, and observes her express her desires through graceful body movements, and grows eager with hope of union with Krishna. The yearning is augmented by the tender songs of the gopis describing the alluring beauty of Krishna.

In the Maharas, for instance, Krishna mercilessly rebukes the gopis for defying social mores to be with Him. The gopis beg Him to allow them to stay; their pleas are filled with the pathos of love and longing. Krishna relents and they dance joyfully. The gopis give

in to the flaw of the ego. They grow proud and arrogant about receiving special favors from Krishna, and Krishna vanishes, leaving them searching in darkness. All is dark and fearfully silent, only Radha's sorrowful song is heard lamenting her separation from Him. The gopis grieve and repent and realize they cannot live without Him. At that moment he reappears in myriad selves; each gopi has her own Krishna, the climax of the Maharas. The bhakta in the audience passes through the emotions of joy and sorrow of pride and fall and his/her catharsis leads to the ultimate vision of Krishna with himself/herself.

#### The Ideal Audience Member

As it was said before, all vaishanava members of Manipur are welcome, and although this results in a homogenous group, each audience member's private encounter with the performance and with Krishna disallows any uniformity of response. From the contents of the section above on the audience-performance relationship, it is obvious that for an optimum appreciation of the performance, one must desire Krishna, like the gopis. A devotee is therefore preferred to a non-devotee. Krishna is the embodiment of love.

The main message of the raslila therefore is love, and anyone able to experience it through the course of the performance is able to enjoy or appreciate it. For instance, the mother of the child in the of Krishna may be a bhakta, but during that particular performance her closest relationship is probably with her child. As long as the outcome is one that inspires love, it is valid, but not ideal. The ideal bonding has to be with Krishna, in other words with the spiritual center, the source of all love. Thus, the ideal audience member for the Manipuri raslila is

most definitely a bhakta or devotee who transcends all mundane reality and sees the child or the image in the role of Krishna as Krishna himself and is thus overcome with joy. It takes a great measure of devotional feeling and spiritual purity to achieve the state of emotional rarity in order to realize in oneself the presence of Krishna. Only some among the audience are capable of such heightened awareness.



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CHAPTER FOUR  
MEANING AND VALUE OF THE RASLILA  
PERFORMANCE TRADITION

This chapter consists of an analysis of the fundamental structure of the raslila by correlating its structure or form to its function and meaning. Key features of the raslila performance have been reiterated below to draw focus on the essential purpose of the performance.

The raslila performance is an integral part of the religious practices of the Krishna bhaktas of Manipur. Its message is of devotional love for Krishna and Radha, and the performance, a celebration of their love.

Krishna and Radha are the hero-heroine or nayak-nayika of the play and its most concentrated focus. The choreographic structure draws total attention to Krishna and Radha at the center. The gopis sing and dance and enact the dramatic episodes in a circle, facing the images and not the audience,(Figure 47).

All the audience members are vaishnava (others are generally not permitted to enter), and they adhere to the dress and behaviour codes of the temple while attending the performance,(Figure 48). As devotees of Krishna, the ultimate desire of all participants is to remain forever in Brindavan with Krishna; which is why they return every year to the raslila performance.

Music and dance express devotional love or bhakti and the climatic aesthetic experience of the bhakta in the presence of Krishna and Radha is bhakti ras, an experiential state of love, beauty and spiritual bliss.

These observations show the vital spiritual/religious function of the performance. Chapter Four assesses the spiritual content of



Figure 47 Performers Face Inwards

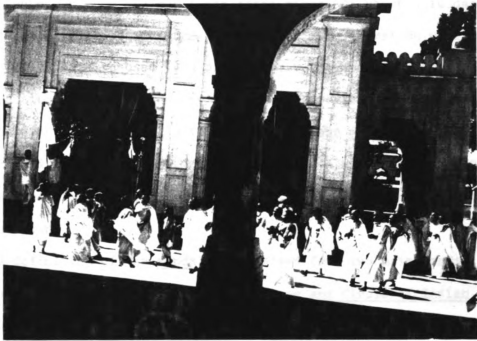


Figure 48 Audience Members Arrive Uniformly Dressed

the performance to derive its meaning and function. A direct source of information on the spiritual process of the performance lies in the brahmanic or priestly role in the performance. The priests are the temple custodians and conduct all its rituals (Figure 49). As the raslila performance is also a temple ritual, its overall structure conforms to brahmanic traditions.

The brahmanic tradition of ritual stems from the ancient vedic system of yagna or sacrificial ceremonies. Special constructs representing the cosmos were designed and built for these rites, of which a fundamental structural matrix used was the mandala (a circle formation with a focal center). It was also used as a basic format for various forms of construction: temples, theaters, musical compositions, dance choreography, and sculpture.<sup>1</sup> The raslila in Manipur uses the mandala structural matrix in its elements time, space and form. An analysis of the mandala as the essential structure of the raslila performance leads to its meaning and function.

A definition of the mandala is derived from two main works: Mandala by Jose and Miriam Arguelles and The Square and Circle of Indian Arts by Kapila Vatsyayana. The first source focuses on the universality of the mandala matrix and the second shows its structuring of the Indian arts. The correlation of the mandala to the raslila performance in Manipur is based largely on subjective observation and inference, and further research on the subject is suggested.

#### Chapter Organization

Chapter four discusses the role of the brahmins in Manipuri raslila, throwing light on the ritualistic drift of the performance. The principle of Mandala is used to examine the basic structure and function of the



Figure 49 Brahmin Priests Conduct Raslila Rituals

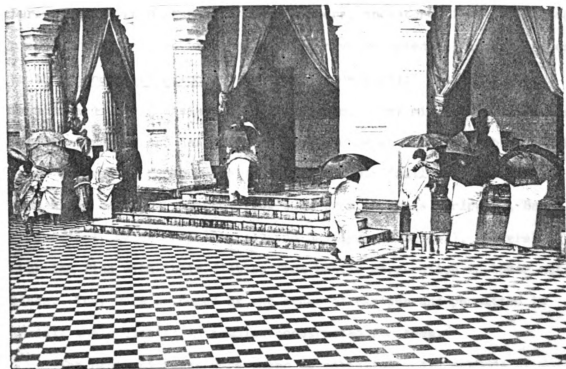


Figure 49 Brahmin Priests Conduct Raslila Rituals (cont'd)



space-time-action continuum of the performance and to decode its meaning. It concludes with a discussion on the universality of the raslila as a mandala.

#### The Manipuri Brahmins and the Raslila

With the establishment of vaishnavism in Manipur, Hindu temple worship was introduced in the religious life of the people. The temples attracted brahmins who migrated to Manipur from various regions of India. During the reign of Maharaja Bhagyachandra, ancestors of the following brahmin families have been reported to have migrated to Manipur (according to the Bamon Khunthoklon - a Manipuri manuscript): Adhikarimayum, Dhyandamayum, Vrajabasimayum and Warilibam. They migrated from Santipore, Lahore, Vrndavan and Assam. And during the reign of King Gambhir Singh, there arrived in Manipur the following brahmin families: Anoubam, Vrajamayum and Acharyamayum. They came from Agartala (Tripura), Braja (Brindavan), Dacca (East Bengal) and Santipur (W.Bengal). Several brahmins fled with their dieties from Muslim persecution in their native lands. They were welcomed by the Kings of Manipur and permitted to install their dieties in temples constructed for them.<sup>2</sup>

The Manipuri kings were eager to establish vedic methods of worship. It is said that King Bhagyachandra "...asked his people to learn the well-known Gayatri Mantra (a vedic prayer hymn) and also told that if they did not recite it, they would be excommunicated from the Vaisnava society."<sup>3</sup>

Krishna bhakti began as a path of spontaneous, direct communication with god through chanting his name; which meant a rejection of the brahmanic rituals. Temples were built solely for the congregational singing of devotional hymns and chants or kirtan; but with the installation

of the images of Krishna and Radha, brahmanic ritual was re-introduced into the bhakti movement. Thus, the brahmins regained their position in the forefront of the bhakti institutions as authorities on temple rituals and worship.

Brahmanic methodologies of temple worship are rooted in the ancient vedic heritage of India. Vedic traditions of worship are practiced by brahmins all over India to the present day. In Manipur, for instance, a few days before the raslila performance, on an auspicious date, the ras arambha (commencement of the ras) ceremony is performed. It is conducted by the officiating brahmin priest and the rasdhari and other performers participate. Offerings are first made to Ganesha and then to Vishnu. As there is no other evidence of Ganesha worship in Manipur, it seems to be an introduction of the vedic custom of invoking Ganesha at the commencement of any significant venture as he is the 'remover of obstacles'. He is invoked in most traditional performances in India. Through this rite the raslila receives brahmanic sanction before it begins.<sup>4</sup>

The brahmins perform all the purification and invocation rites along with the performers, (Figure 50). They are the custodians of the images of Krishna and Radha who are the hero and heroine of the play and are responsible for consecrating the space or the performance area where the images are to be installed. It is most likely that the brahmins were consulted for the right method of presenting the performance during the first raslila production sponsored by Maharaja Bhagyachandra. Even today, their role throughout the performance is apparent. They regard the entire performance a temple ritual and treat it as such. Therefore, it is possible that they exerted considerable influence over the structuring of the performance, which adheres to the constructs of the temple rituals.



Figure 50 Brahmin Stage Manager with Performer at a Ritual

As the mandala structure was fundamental to constructs for vedic rituals, and also suggested as the formation for the cosmic dance of Krishna and the gopis in the ancient sources, the brahmanas, knowledgeable in these matters, may have instructed the creators of the raslila performance tradition in Manipur in its design.

#### Performance as Ritual

The raslila is an exercise in 'grace'. Grace towards God, in order to receive grace from Him. It implies subduing oneself. As if in response to Confucius' suggestion to "Subdue oneself and recover the ritual disposition,"<sup>5</sup> the participants of the raslila, as well as audience members maintain a ritual disposition, expressed in the dress and behavior codes prescribed by the temple authorities.

The goal of the raslila is to evoke bhakti ras. Bhakti ras is evoked in the presence of the divine love, beauty and spirit embodied by Krishna and Radha. To experience the sweetness of devotional love necessitates the subduing of the ego achieved through the ritual process of the performance.

An observation of the performance reveals this ritual process, commencing from the initiation of training to the closing rites of the performance. The performance techniques of dance and music incorporate segments that are purely ritualistic invocations, prayers, dedications, and offerings in worship. The rituals, are therefore, overtly visible throughout the performance event indicating the essential nature of the raslila.

The raslila performance does not present new material with each successive production, but aims at the experience of bhakti requiring a transformation of personal identity and petty concerns to the greater

spirit of love and beauty embodied by Krishna and Radha. Thus it is transpersonal art which is not an end in itself, but a transmitting agent, a lens focusing the higher energies.<sup>7</sup>

#### Introduction to the Mandala

In purely geometric terms, mandala is a Sanskrit word meaning a circle and center.<sup>8</sup> Traditional usage of the mandala in ancient cultures all over the world depicts the mandala as a circle within the context of a square, (Figure 51). The circle symbolizes the cosmos while the square represents man-made structure.<sup>9</sup> The center of the circle and square signifies the beginning or the source. The full dimension of the mandala is suggested in the following passage:

A mandala consists of a series of concentric forms suggestive of a passage between different dimensions. In its essence, it pertains not only to the earth but to the macrocosm and microcosm, the largest structural processes as well as smallest. It is a gatepost between the two.

#### Basic Properties of the Mandala

According to the Arguelles, it has three basic properties: the center, symmetry and cardinal directions. The center is described as the constant, the symmetry as bilateral or dynamic (rigid or fluid), and the cardinal directions as precise in number or infinite points on a circle.<sup>11</sup>

#### Evidence of Mandalas in Ancient Cultures

The mandala, as a structural matrix symbolizing the cosmos and man, is universal. Many ancient cultures have used such structures for metaphysical or ritualistic purposes. In India's most ancient vedic literature, we find evidence of the vastu-purusha-mandala, (Figure 52) a blue print for temple architecture, and the sangita-purusha mandala, (Figure 53) a basic construct for musical composition.<sup>12</sup> Tantricism which developed greatly in Tibet and Nepal (after the 10th century AD), shows a



Figure 51 A Traditional Mandala of Tibet

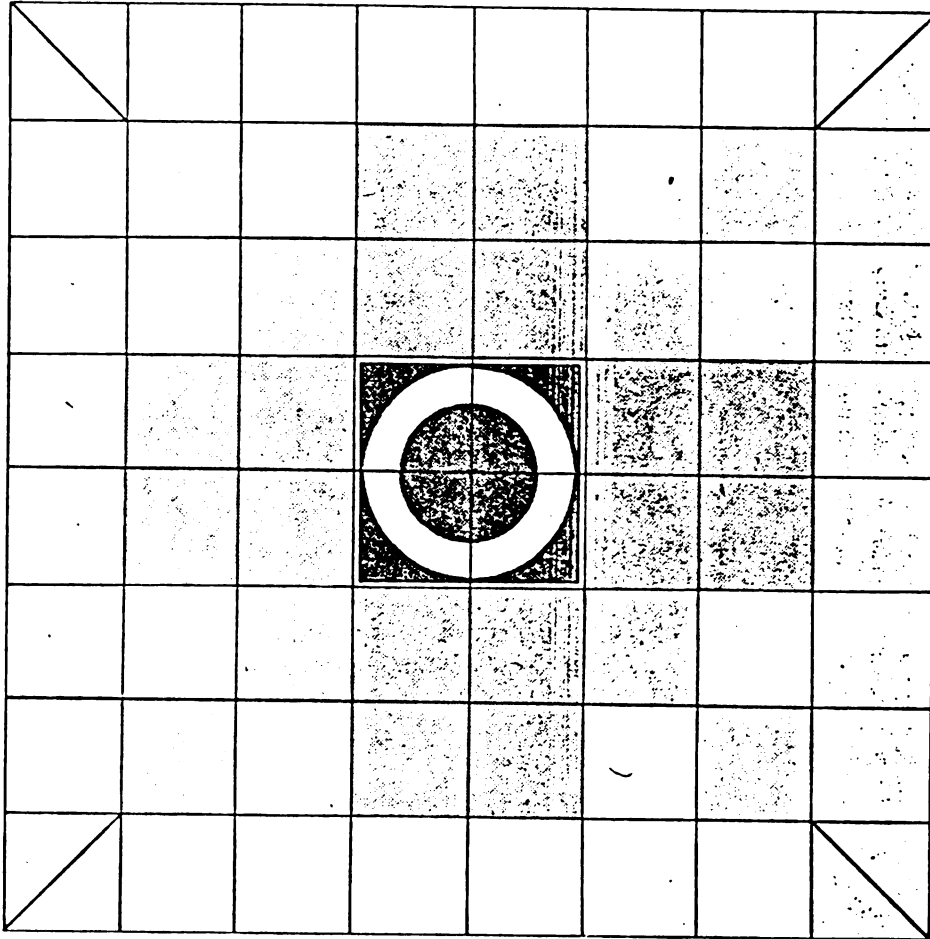


Figure 52 Vastu-Purusha-Mandala

prolific usage of the visual mandala in their traditional tankhas (paintings) It depicts the essential features of the mandala: in the center there is the ruling deity, the square is his palace or temple, and the circle is symbolic of his state of consciousness or his energy potential (shakti). In the four cardinal directions, there are four gateposts which symbolize the passage for the transmigration of the self from the material into the spirit.<sup>13</sup>

The Raslila's Correlation to the Mandala:

From a comparison of the Tibetan tankha in Figure (51) and the floor plan of the rasmandap (Figure 18) of the raslila in Manipur, the astounding similarity between the two is quite clear. The performance area is a circle, and is called the rasmandala, with the chakra or the wheel in the center. The focal emphasis of the performance is at the center where the images of the ruling deities of the temple are installed. The most outstanding choreographic pattern of the raslila performance is the circumambulation around the central figures of the gods. This choreographic formation is called rasmandali. In ancient literary sources where evidence of the origins of the raslila form of performance is traced, it is generally described as a circle dance around a central figure (gopis around Krishna). In Manipur, the dramatization occurs within the formation of the rasmandali. There are four gates to the rasmandala just as there are four gates in the Tibetan Mandala, and the seating arrangement along the pillars, forms the square around the circle.

Another remarkable correlation may be drawn, between the rasmandala and the vastu-purusha-mandala the vedic blue-print for temple architecture. In the vastu-purusha-mandala, Brahma occupies the central position



just as Krishna occupies the central position in the rasmandala. Other divinities are installed in the different directions around Brahma, and in the rasmandala we have the gopis, also twelve divinities corresponding to the Adityas are placed around the central square of the vastu-purusha-mandala.<sup>14</sup>

According to the brahmin scholars of Manipur, the twelve pillars around the rasmandala, Figure 18, represent the twelve gopalas or fellow cowherds of Krishna and also twelve important devotees of Chaitanya.<sup>15</sup>

The term mandala which means a circle with a center, has a holistic structure repeated throughout the raslila production. For instance: the performance is staged in a specially constructed pavillion called the rasmandap which has a circular performance area enclosed in a pillared square. The rasmandala or performance area, is a circle with the central rotating disc. The major choreographic pattern created by the positioning of the characters of the play is called the rasmandali; the gopis enter and during the mandali sajjan form a rasmandali or circle around Krishna and Radha. The raslila of Manipur is a highly developed and vital performance mandala with its rasmandala as a arena for the cosmic dance of Krishna and the Gopis.

#### The Time-Space Action Continuum of the Performance

Two major characteristics of the performance emerge: the amalgamation of theater and worship, and the pre-dominantly circular structure of its form. An illuminating reference to the relationship of the circularity and worship is found in the following passage by Henri-Charles Puech:

The circular movement which assures the survival of the same things by repeating them, by bringing about their continous return, is the perfect and most immediate expression (hence that which is closest to the divine)...<sup>16</sup>

The correlation of the circle form and worship is the essential principle or structural concept of the mandala.

An examination of the time, space and action reveals a unity based on their adherence to the circle structure and essentially spiritual function of bhakti. The mandala is used by correlating its properties of the center, the circle, the idea of the constant, the symmetry, and the cardinal direction to those of the raslila performance performance elements of time, space and action individually.

#### Time Structure

The circle of the mandala represents the cyclic nature of time in the raslila and the center represents its sama or the constant 'now' from which all time is projected. The cycles of the seasons, day and night, the moon, all play a part in the raslila performance. They are encapsulated in the musical system of tala a cyclic rhythm structure.

#### The Seasonal Cycle:

According to the Shrimad Bhagvat the Maharas was performed in the full-moon night of Sharad, the autumn season.<sup>17</sup> The kings of Manipur are said to have consulted vaishnava sources, as well as the suitable times for performance in Manipur while deciding on the performance seasons of the raslilas. The seasons of Autumn and Spring were probably the most convenient from a climatic as well as agricultural viewpoint. The seasons of Winter and Summer being either too cold or too wet (due to the monsoon). The seasons of autumn and spring have two full-moon nights each. The four raslilas included in this study were performed on these four full-moon nights for their initiating performances. The following is the designated raslila Calendar:

Maharas: The most auspicious raslila, has its initiating performances on the full-moon night of the month of Kartik according to the lunar calendar, Hiyengei in Manipur. It usually coincides with November.

Kunjaras: This raslila is also in autumn performed on the full-moon night of Ashwin; Mera in Manipur. It usually coincides with October.

Vasantaras: This is the raslila of the Spring season, performed on the full-moon night of Chaitra, Sajjibu in Manipur. It usually coincides with April.

Nityaras : This raslila may be performed in any season but is usually performed in the full-moon night following the Vasantaras of Mesh or Thangja in Manipur. It usually coincides with May.

The Daily Cycle: Krishna's daily schedule consists of every detail in serving him from the time he awakens until the late evening. The bhaktas (devotees) believe in serving him as if he were really present in their care. The extent to which this is taken may be seen in the following remarks by John Stratton Hawley:

He performs his toilet functions, brushes his teeth, has a rubdown, bathes and dresses. Then he is ready for the morning meal of butter, fruit sweets and milk...<sup>18</sup>.

The play of Krishna's life goes on and on every single day in every temple and home where he is adored. The raslila calendar is therefore an integral part of Krishna's diurnal schedule, and, temple worship and the raslila performance are but two arenas of a single dramatic activity.<sup>19</sup> The devotees of Krishna have divided Krishna's daily cycle into eight major time divisions known as the Ashta Kala (eight time divisions). The eighth section, at the end of each day, is the time specified for the Nitya ras (the raslila that can be performed in every season). This time begins after the evening rites (sandhya arati) at about 7:00 p.m. and ends in the early morning hours between 3:30 and 4:00 a.m. when the morning rites for Krishna are performed.<sup>20</sup> The performance time and duration corresponds to the Ashta kala cycle. The audience gathers at about 7:00 pm.

The sankirtana begins following the installation procession of the images at this time,(Figure 54). The raslila performers put on their costume at this time and the raslila performance begins around 8:30 and lasts until 4:00 in the morning.

The seasonal cycles and diurnal cycles also highlight the cycle of the moon and the earth around the sun, since each initiating raslila in the main temples are produced on full moon nights and the performance duration coincides with the setting and rising of the sun.

### The Center of Time

The raslila's notion of time suggests the projection of all time from the center which represents the present or 'now' of reality. This notion is wonderfully illustrated by Philip Rawson in his work on Tantra (an ancient religious path that particularly emphasizes the use of the mandala as a vehicle for spiritual transcendence). He compares what he calls 'the common-sense, materialistic, scientific view of time most western people hold to that of the tantra. He illustrates the 'western' notion of time with the following image:

It resembles the view we get by looking backwards only out of the rear window of a moving automobile;...as time goes by, things as they get older seem to recede towards the horizon.

And the tantric view of time as:

Tantra looks at things differently. It thinks of the past full of "objects", not as a landscape through which each person moves with his present-frame, but as a trail of things and events which is, as it were, being vomited out or projected from the mouth of the present, like the flames from the tail-vent of a rocket.

He compares the two views saying:

If we then shift our viewpoint and imagine ourselves looking back outward through the projecting open mouth of the monster (or rocket), just as we did through the auto-mobile window, we get a view of our past not inconsistent with our Western one... The real difference is that in this new image time and things did

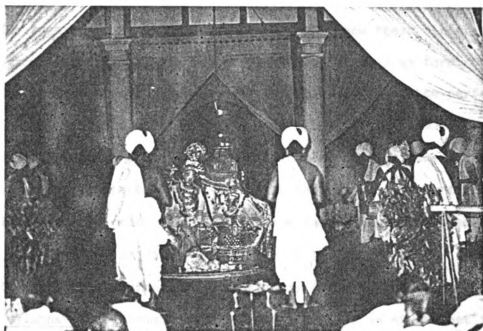


Figure 54 Sankritan Begins with an Invocation

not 'begin' at some imaginary point back in the depths of the picture. They are being projected through each one of us; each person's 'present-frame' is itself a mouth of the monster vomiting out his world of experience and knowledge. We will never be able to find the origin or causes of all things 'out there', among older projected things.... We then have to 'turn around' and look back up into the place from which experienced reality is coming...<sup>21</sup>

The time structure of the raslila corresponds to the ancient or tantric notion of time. The moment of experienced reality is represented by Krishna and Radha at the center of the rasmandala. Thus identification with Krishna and Radha, may bring about an experience of the true reality.

#### Space Structure

The rasmandap, rasmandala, and rasmandali show their direct correlation to the mandala in their connotation as well as form. Once again the central area of the arena is the focal point of the performance. The orientation of the staging, the use of space, is from the central position of Krishna and Radha. The positions of the audience and performers also relate to the center which they face. The performers form a circle around the center and the audience forms a square around the circle sharing the same center point (Figure 55).

The space's measurements show symmetry and suggest a division of the sacred vaishnava whole number sixty-four: (the dias is eight feet in diameter, the rasmandala is thirty-two feet in diameter its square measuring sixty-four square inches identical to the vastu-purusha-mandala).<sup>22</sup> The cardinal directions of East, West, North and South have the openings into the rasmandala and each direction has a special significance. The dieties face east and therefore sitting on their right, at the south side of the seating area is very auspicious. Each direction gains significance in relation to the dieties in the center. Each of these key features of the space structure of the performance show their adherence to the mandala.

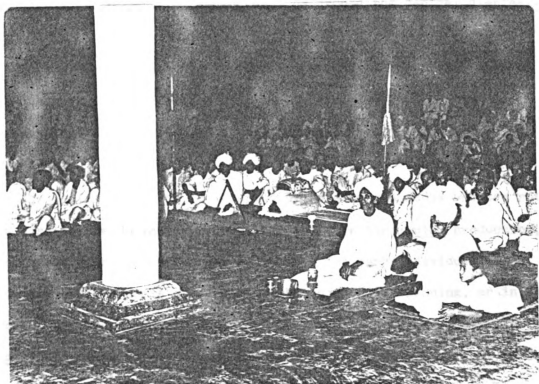


Figure 55 Audience Forms a Square Around Performance Arena

## Action Structure

Dance

The major acting technique of the performance is dance. The word for dance in Manipur is jagoi which means to turn around in a circle.<sup>23</sup> The circle is fundamental to the dance. It is continually expressed in the choreography which includes spinning, undulation, swaying, figure eight movements of the arms, hands, head, and torso. The major ground pattern is a circle, with rotation and revolution around the central deities.

Costume

The costume of the gopis is also a cylindrical skirt with circled applique work on its border adding to the visual effect of the circle choreography.

Choreography

The central position is occupied by Krishna and Radha who are rotated on a disc in the Govindaji production, while in the khulak production, Krishna and Radha dance in that position. But each individual dancer maintains her own sense of center for balance while spinning, or in the movement choreography, for instance every movement phrase, ends with a longlai and uplei movement, which begins and ends with the right hand at center position on the body.

Music

The musical adherence to the mandala is best seen in the cyclic rhythm structure which emphasizes the continuous return to the first beat or sama the constant center, as illustrated by the sangita-purusha-mandala which shows the idea of all rhythm projected from the center, moving in cycles.<sup>24</sup> The entire orchestra, singers and instrumentalists follow this rhythmic structure.



### Function of a Mandala

The apparently simplistic form of mandala has been used repeatedly by the ancients in the process of spiritual transformation. It can be described as a vehicle to aid concentration in worship or meditation. A mandala has numerous properties which may be utilized effectively to further one's spiritual growth and awareness. The following quotations from the Arguelles' work give a good general idea on the function of a mandala.

The mandala is essentially a vehicle for concentrating the mind so that it may pass beyond its usual fetters. Through the concept and structure of the mandala man may be projected into the universe and the universe into man.<sup>25</sup>

The mandala is an instrument for transcending the world of visually perceived phenomena by first centering them and turning them inward.<sup>26</sup>

The integration of worship and knowledge, and beauty is a significant feature of the Mandala, enabling it to convey a teaching to the receptive.<sup>27</sup>

An eight-fold process through which the mandala functions is described in its stages of purification, centering, orientation, construction, absorption, destruction, reintegration, and actualization.<sup>28</sup>

The following is brief description of the manner in which the raslila also follows this process.

#### Purification

The importance of cleansing and purging of the body of all toxic elements which "may be regarded as a cleaning of the basic parts so that there is no static between internal organs blocking reception."<sup>29</sup>

Purification is a very important rite in the raslila production. Fasting from the final rehearsal onwards through the performance is observed by the performers. Bathing and the application of the chandan mark are also a significant part of the process. The audience attending must also bathe,

apply the chandan tilak, and wear fresh white and pale pink clothes reserved for the temple. Also, before entering they must remove all footwear.

### Centering

This is a concentration measure to induce the 'concentric', or turn the outward flow of attention inward.<sup>30</sup> In the raslila this is done through the entire performance action. The senses, the mind and the heart, are drawn to the performance. The circle form of its space, time and action, with its focus towards the center, induces the inward concentration.

### Orientation

This process requires a central position, and from it the cardinal points in the North, South, East and West directions that are located as the territory to be consecrated, defined and set apart for the offering.<sup>31</sup>

In the raslila this is done by honoring the directions. Each direction is appointed an important divinity (usually a great devotee of Krishna and Radha) the four major entries lie in these four directions. The audience seating, as discussed earlier is based on the significance of the directions in relation to the deities at the center, and as the performers enter, especially the members of the orchestra, they pay respect to the four directions, as well as those seated in these directions. The dance choreography emphasizes the directions for starting and ending movements, though overall, the dancers orient themselves to the center, the position of Krishna and Radha.

### Construction

Concentric cycles are continually created through the performance action time and use of space. A procedure of events is created, giving the performance a structure or kram. Construction is everything created within the designated area.

### Absorption

This is the effect of the transformative process on the users in the raslila, this would be the audience. It is the expansion of mind, body and soul that has begun to receive the grace.

### Destruction

The purpose of destroying the creation is to be detached from it. In the raslila this begins when Krishna tells the gopis to return to their 'real world'. The performers go home and bathe ceremoniously to wash off the performance.

### Re-integration and Actualization

Post process results where the re-establishment of a direct connection with a source is made and then has to be lived by, in day to day events. For the Manipuris this would mean living truly devotional lives.

### The Function of the Time-Space-Action Continuum

The space design is conducive to the purpose of the eight-fold process of the mandala. The ceremonial rite performed in the center in front of the dieties, is called the mandap puja (Figure 56). Laichandon, the offering of flowers and sweet smelling sandalwood is then circulated amongst the performers and the audience, thus purifying the entire space. (Figure 57). The center point which is the concentrated focus of the performance is the point of orientation. It draws attention from all four sides and helps in concentrating, and centering and stilling the mind.

The time cycles serve the same purpose of leading one's attention to the center or 'now'. Only by being in the moment can one experience the beauty of harmony.

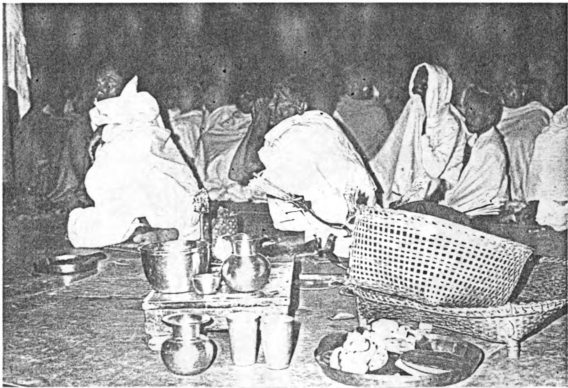


Figure 56 Mandap Puja Articles



Figure 57 Laichandon Offering

The performance elements of the raslila provides aesthetic pleasure and spiritual elixir through its arts of dance and music, its design, and its auspicious environment. Relating each element of performance to each perceptive faculty or sight, sound, smell, touch and taste, the spiritual function and meaning of the raslila performance action may be assessed.

### Sight

The eye of the participant takes in the auspicious environment, follows the liquid motion of the dancers and absorbs the radiant colors of the costume. The decor is bare, plain white curtains are draped across the pillars and green potted plants encircle the rasmandala. The major splash of colors is provided by the costume. The colors of the costume it is said, represents cosmic lights. Krishna is garbed in a brilliant yellow as he is like the sun, the source of all light. Radha, his favorite amongst the gopis, is in green and represents the soft sheen of dawn. The other gopis that form a circle around Krishna and Radha are in red. They are the rays of light from the sun spreading a red aura, (Figure 58).

An interesting correlation of this color scheme lies in the experience of spiritual seekers. One of them gives the following account of his experience:

We too have to gain the same perfect experience by penetrating deeper through the red aura in meditation. That will reveal that God is all-pervasive.<sup>32</sup>

According to this account, the inner experience of the red aura is the initial stage in meditation. Further development leads to the sight of the blue pearl (or Krishna the blue God) who is said to be the subtlest or supra-causal aspect of the soul. Thus, the raslila color scheme is believed to function directly for spiritual and meditative experience of bliss.



Figure 58 Color Scheme of the Raslila

Sound

The ear fills with the sounds of the shankha or conch, the flute of Krishna, the melodic rhythms played on the drums and the voices of the singers. The music plays throughout the performance, keeping the ear attentive.

Smell

The sense of smell is excited by the laichandon passed around as it consists of sweet smelling flowers and sandalwood paste called chandon.

Taste

The taste buds are also kept alert and working as betel leaf and nuts and coconut bits are passed around to chew on.

Touch

The sense of touch is satisfied through identification with the dance movement which is gentle and soothing.

Heart and Mind

The dance, music, lyrics and dramatic episodes play a special role in capturing the participants hearts and minds. The dance is especially expressive of bhakti or devotion. It is performed with subtle grace with gentle bending in an attitude of worship, (Figure 59). The continuous circular motion functions like the whirling of the dervishes (sufi mystics) who dance to transcend the ego. Bhakti accomplishes its spiritual goal through love. The lyrics are composed in the sweet vernacular tongues of Maithili, Brajabali and Bengali. Especially sweet sounding words are selected for the poems for the experience of love for Krishna must be sweet. The dramatic episodes intensify the passion and love for Krishna and Radha, and the moment the heart opens and allows the love to flow, it is ready for the experience of bhakti ras.





Figure 59 Expression of Bhakti in Performance

The Universal Context of the Raslila

The rasmandala of the raslila, the circle with its vital center, is at its essence the structuring of a world-view. The realization of a central force as identical to man and as to the cosmos was of utmost relevance to human existence and is reflected in the philosophy, religion and creative expression of most ancient civilizations. In fact, man's pre-occupation with cosmology in direct relationship to himself has probably been diverted dynamically only after the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to the eminent anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, that was when the "real separation occurred between science and mythical thought...at that time with Bacon, Descartes, Newton and the others, it was necessary for science to build itself up against the old generations of mythical and mystical thought."<sup>33</sup> Raslila theater belongs entirely to the world based on 'mythical and mystical thought' the world after the industrial revolution does not exist for it. It is therefore essential to evaluate the raslila performance within the context of the pre-industrial world-view that it represents, to assess its meaning in a universal context. World-View. To state a world-view is to define man's understanding of the world and himself in relation to it. Let us consider a world-view in which man, inspite of his conscious awareness and power to exert his will, does not set himself above and apart from his natural environment but maintains a harmony and balance with its laws. Nor does he attempt to change it, only to comprehend and attune himself to it. To express his relationship with the cosmos, he created forms of expression we now call 'art'. These 'art' forms (visual and performance) function as instruments to aid the necessary process for maintaining harmony between man and nature or cosmos. If we observe these forms,

certain archetypical signs emerge: There is a marked emphasis on synthesis, organic development of structure, circularity in form and thought, and most significantly, the involvement of the spiritual, by which man kept in constant awareness his relationship with the cosmos, his source of creation. The evolution of such a culture is merited by the eminent scholar Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana in the following passage:

Indeed man is constantly seen as an embodiment of the elements and forces of nature and in relationship to animal and plant life... This gives the world a different character from what is implied in the modern idea of progressive evolution. Man is not the best because he overpowers and conquers nature and is the fittest to survive but he is one amongst the many with the capacity for consciousness and self-reflection and transcendence from his pure physicality, through psychical discipline.<sup>34</sup>

#### The Ancient Indian Cosmology

India has one of the most comprehensive systems of cosmology. The Sanskrit sources particularly the Vedas, Brahmanas and Upanishads and Puranas are a storehouse of spiritual knowledge with detailed systems of its practice. The Vedas consist of the beautiful poetic imagery that forms the basis of the more astute Upanishadic philosophy of a later date, while the Brahmanas contain the methodologies of actualizing the spiritual beliefs. Interestingly, a fifth veda added to the four major works is Bharata's Natyashastra; an astounding work on the systems of dance and drama. This is an indication of the close association of dance and drama with texts on spiritual and philosophic matters in vedic times. The association rest on the fact as Bharata indicates, he took pathya or words from the Rg Veda, abhinaya or acting from the Yajurveda, gita or song from the Samaveda and rasa (emotions) from the Atharvaveda.<sup>35</sup> Bharata demonstrates the god potential of man, advocating a ritual drama through

which it can be experienced and realized. The identity between man and God or man and the cosmos is the fundamental principle observed through the Natyashastra as it is through the Vedas, Upanishads, and Brahmanas, thus leading to the parallel structures of worship and performance. A striking example is use of the Jarjara or central pole in the pre-performance ritual of the Natyashastra.

This resembles the vedic ritual use of the stambha or the central pillar. Both serve the same purpose, that of identifying the center and establishing a symbolic connection between earth, sky, or heaven.<sup>36</sup> In the Brahmanas (brahmin texts of ritual methodology), this central pole is called the yupa in the center of the yagna or sacrifice. It is significant to note that Bharata refers to natya or drama as yagna or ritual. or the greater force of energy or his idea of the perfect. The placing of the pole in the center signifies man's orientation to the cosmos, and his inner self. In Manipur, an example of the central pole is that of the jatra of the mandap, though we do not see it in the rasmandala as its place is given to the dieties, Krishna and Radha.<sup>37</sup> The vedic term Purusha indicates both man and God.<sup>38</sup> The difference lies in man being the microcosmic part of the macrocosmic God. For man to realize his identity with God is the vedic goal of worship. The ritual, including art, facilitates the projection of microcosm to the macrocosm man's conception of the universe may be suggested through his perception of form. According to Plato:

Such ideas of the circle, of the triangle of the line, are perfect, innate in the mind, and it is because they are given to the mind that we are able to project them, so to speak, on reality, although reality never offers us a perfect circle or a perfect triangle.<sup>39</sup>

This classical theory of Plato is stated in the context of the origin of mathematics in ancient Greece. In the Upanishads the idea of the innate perfection is extended to the idea of the absolute, and the axioms of mathematics relating the whole to the part do not apply to it.<sup>40</sup> For instance, here is a verse from the Isavasyopanishad:

Om Purnamadah purnamidam  
purnat purna mudacyate/  
Purnasya purnamadaya  
purna mevava sisyate.//

'That is whole and this is whole. The perfect has come out of the perfect. Yet the perfect remains, as before, perfect.'<sup>41</sup>

The essence of this principle lies in its holistic value, where there is no fraction. The part is a microcosmic identity of the whole, more a difference of contraction and expansion than subtraction and addition. The vaishnavas for instance, express, their holistic notion through their choice of the numerical whole number, sixty-four. The vaishnava dramaturgist categorize all variations into '64' with its multiples of eight, sixteen, and thirty-two. There are sixty-four rasa divisions of the shringara ras (emotional states of love, and sixty-four navika-bhedas (heroine's conditions). This number and its divisions can be found in the time structure and the space structure of the raslila performance. The basic time measure is of eight beats, and the space of the rasmandala measures 32ft by 32ft.

The division of 64 results in the whole numbers of 32, 16, 8, 4, there is no fraction of the whole number, and therefore it serves as a workable numerical symbol for the holistic philosophy of bhakti. The ideal structural symbol for this philosophy is the mandala, with its circular flow, and constant center.

Bhakti Ras

The realization or direct experience of this principle leads to the experiential state of bliss or ananda, as it is termed by the Upanishads. The Natyashastra coordinate of this state of experience is called rasa by Bharata which is difficult to translate with an equivalent English word but has been described as 'sap' or 'juice' or the 'taste' of aesthetic experience. But the vaishnavas have added another dimension to the nature of bliss. They experience ananda and rasa as rasananda or bhaktiras where the experiential states of the aesthetic and the divine are one.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Vatsyayana, Kapila, The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts New Delhi, 1983.
- <sup>2</sup> Singh, Kirti M., Religious Developments in Manipur in the 18th and 19th Centuries, Imphal, 1980
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.p.143
- <sup>4</sup> Observation of the Ras Arambha (ceremony of commencement of the raslila) at the Shri Shri Govindaji Temple of Imphal, in April 1984
- <sup>5</sup> Arguelles, Jose and Miriam, Mandala Berkeley and London 1972.p.82
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.p.34
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.p.13
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.p.12
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.p.12
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.p.13
- <sup>12</sup> Vatsyayana, Kapila, The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts New Delhi, 1983.p.73,145.
- <sup>13</sup> Arguelles, Jose and Miriam, Mandala Berkeley and London 1972.p.73
- <sup>14</sup> Vatsyayana, Kapila, The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts New Delhi, 1983.p.77
- <sup>15</sup> Consultation with Shri Surachand Sharma, a scholar in Manipuri vaishnava religion and culture.
- <sup>16</sup> Chung-liang Al Quantum Soup Dutton, 1983 p.37
- <sup>17</sup> Goswami, Pranakiahore, Shrimad Bhagwat, Raslila Calcutta 1974.

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- 28 Ibid.p.84
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- 31 Ibid.p.87
- 32 Swami Muktananda Paramahansa, Play of Conciousness Oakland,p.82
- 33 Levi-Strauss, Claude Myth and Meaning New York, 1978.p.6
- 34 Vatsyayana, Kapila, The Square and the Circle of the Indian  
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- 35 Ibid.p.40
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 In consultation with Oja Bidhu rasdhari of the Vijay Govindaji  
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- 38 Vatsyayana, Kapila, The Square and the Circle of the Indian  
Arts New Delhi, 1983.p.9



- 39 Levi-Strauss, Claude Myth and Meaning New York, 1978.p.7
- 40 Rajagopalachari Chakravarti, Upanishads Bombay 1982.p.22
- 41 Ibid. p,22,23

## CONCLUSION

The Krishna-Gopi theme, a pan-Indian phenomena found a home both in the physical environment of Manipur, which is as idyllic as the Brindavan of the bhakti poetry, and in her cultural milieu. And, as is seen in the raslila performances, the Krishna-story is so well absorbed and translated into the Manipuri idiom, that it may seem as though the entire cultural heritage of ancient Manipur prepared for it.

Today, the Manipuri raslila is perhaps one of the finest delineations of the Krishna-Gopi theme. Such an organic synthesis between form (indigenous Manipuri) and content (pan-Indian) is most remarkable considering they did not share a cohesive development. The sanskritic concepts that were introduced with Krishna-bhakti were clearly superimposed on distinctly local traditions. But, instead of resulting in glaring incongruities, both cultures merged and blended beautifully.

Another unique synthesis that occurs in the raslila performance is that of beauty of form and the expression of spiritual truth. It lends the art a sublime purpose and gives prayer an esthetic expression. Inspired by their love for Krishna and Radha, the performers of the raslila have created highly evocative techniques of dance and music which have developed the capacity to express the extraordinary phenomenon of emotional bhakti. The raslila is therefore, great art and great theater as well as a profound spiritual transaction between the lovers, man and God. It fulfills the highest vaishnava principle of the unitive nature of truth and beauty.

Thus for the devout followers of Krishna in Manipur, the raslila serves their most ardent yearnings to dance and to play with Krishna in

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

2. The second part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

Brindavan. And as explained in Chapter Four, the raslila also functions as a universal symbol of a mandala. The performance design is a map of the cosmos and of man's inner self. Just as it provides for the bhakta in Manipur, facilitating contact with Krishna and Radha at its center, it is structured to draw any receptive mind and heart into its process of purification, centering, orientation, and absorption; the theater leading the participant through inner transformation to his/her center of pure energy and bliss, to experience the ecstasy of bhaktiras.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

The main body of this paper consists of many areas that are beyond its scope and may be expanded upon in future works.

In Chapter Two, the subject of bhakti dramaturgy offers great scope as very little information is available in the English language. Infact an entire study may be devoted to the vaishnava theories of drama based on evidence from live performance traditions in India.

Chapter Three presents areas in the acting techniques of dance and music that require the attention and scholarship of ethno-musicologists and dance-ethnologists for an indepth analysis of the acting techniques of the raslila. The audience behavior and the seating arrangement may be interesting to develop into a sociological study.

Chapter Four presents the raslila as a map of inner spiritual processes and maybe explored further based on deep knowledge of tantra. Here, an illuminating study would be one on the experiential states of performers and spectators.

The region of Manipur is extraordinarily rich in performance styles and forms. There are both ancient traditions and contemporary forms that are yet to be documented and introduced outside of Manipur. Some of these are: the ancient form of wari-lila or story-telling through solo performance, the nupi-pala or groups of women performers, goshtha-lila performances on the life of child-Krishna, and the sankirtana forms, natpala and ariba pala as well as other percussion performances like dhrumel a tremendous display of drums and dancing as well as a great variety of festival performances.

1950-1951

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1952-1953

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1954-1955

Of the more contemporary forms there are the socio-political popular dramas called sumang-lila, a very charming off-shoot of which is the nupa-macha sumang-lila performed by young boys of nine and ten.

In recent years, contemporary theater based on western and eastern performance genres have developed and received high acclaim all over India. These forms should be included in any study on contemporary theater in India.

The most significant aspect of this study on the raslila is the relationship of form to function and meaning. The perception of inner reality delineated through outer form is fundamental to most traditional Asian theaters and therefore indepth decoding of the symbolism of these forms is valuable and perhaps should be considered in future works on these traditional forms.



1950

1951

1952

1953

1954

1955

1956

## GLOSSARY

## GLOSSARY

aarati	a prayer performed as a closing rite of the <u>raslila</u>
achaoba	a manipuri word meaning large.
anibaddha	free of beat measure
anubhava	an experiential state
araibi	a circle or spinning movement
ariba pala	the older form of sankirtan in Manipur
avataras	incarnations of Vishnu
bhagwan	God
bhajan	devotional song
bhakta	devotee
bhakti	devotion
bhaktiras	an emotional or experiential state of devotion and artistic beauty.
bhangi	an auspicious traditional dance sequence of the <u>raslila</u> .
brahmari	a circular or spinning movement
brahman	a priest
Brajbhumi	the land of Braj where Krishna lived.
bhava	a state of mind; the cause of a rasa or sentiment.
chali	an eight beat rhythm composition and a dance based on this composition.
chali mapi	a five-part dance composition
chakra	a wheel
dasarupaka	ten forms of drama mentioned in the <u>Natyashastra</u>
dasya	an attitude of loving service.
gopi	milkmaid
goshtha-lila	performance based on Krishna's childhood

Govindaji	Krishna
guru	teacher
Guru boriba	investiture rite
gurughat	a portion of the <u>sankirtan</u>
gajagati	an elephant gait; a poetic description of Radha's gait.
hallisaka	an ancient form of performance; a circle dance
hasya	laughter or joy
ipom	an undulating movement of the body in dance
isei	song or music
jagoi	dance
jugal rup	Krishna and Radha together
kartal	a large pair of cymbals
khulak	in the village
kirtan	devotional music
kram	in succession
Krishna-bhakti	devotion to Krishna
Krishna-lila	plays on the Krishna theme
kumin	a cylindrical skirt worn by the gopi
lasya	a graceful feminine style of dance
laya	the tempo of a musical composition
leikei	neighborhood
lila	play
loisang	organizations of the Palace
maan	hurt pride
madhura-bhakti	the erotic emotion of the devotion of Chaitanya
makok chingbi	leading gopi
mandala	circle in the context of a square

mandap-lila	performances in temple arenas
mandap mapu	president of the performance event
moibung	conch shells
murali nad	Krishna's flute calling the gopis
nartan	dance
nata	performer
natpala	the new form of sankirtan in Manipur
natya	drama
nayaka	romantic hero
nayika	heroine or beloved
nibaddha	a musical composition structured by a beat measure
nupa	male (in manipuri)
nupi	female (in manipuri)
oja	guru or teacher
pada	poetic verse in devotional poetry
padavali	a devotional poem
pala	a group like in a band
phaijom	the lower garment worn by Krishna
phainamba	a dance posture with knees bent
phaks	mats used for seating the audience
potloi	costume items
pung	drum or time
puranas	ancient religious texts
pushpanjali	an offering of flowers in prayer
raga	the beginning portion of the <u>raslila</u>
ras	a circle dance-drama

rasa	an experiential state of enjoyment in drama
rasdhari	the director and teacher of the <u>raslila</u>
rasguru	the teacher of the <u>raslila</u>
rasaka	an ancient form of dram resembling the <u>raslila</u>
raslila	a performance in Manipur on the Krishna-gopi theme.
rasmandala	circular performance area
rasmandali	The formation of a circle by the gopis around Krishna
rasmandap	the performance pavillion
rati-bhava	love as a state of mind or disposition
rupaka	a major drama form of the <u>Natyashastra</u>
sakhi	a gopi; friend of Radha
sakhya	friendship
sama	the natural basic position beginning and ending a dance or music phrase.
sambhoga	union of Krishna and Radha
sanchar	a portion of sankirtan following the raga
sangita-purusa mandala	a cosmic stucture for musical composition.
sankirtan	a group performance based on kirtan music
shanta	peace
shloka	a verse in sanskrit
shringar rasa	the sentiment of love
sthayi bhava	the latent emotional condition that evokes rasa
sutradhari	a singer narrator of the raslila
tala	cyclic rhythms
tandava	powerful and virile dance
tantra	mystical religious practice and philosophy

ulukhal ras	a performance on Krishna's childhood
uparupaka	a minor drama form
vaishnava	a follower of vaishnavism-sect of hinduism
vastu-purusha mandala	a cosmic structure for architecture
vibhava	a mood to activate the rasa
viraha	separation
yagna	ritual of offerings

## APPENDIX



## APPENDIX

Four raslilas listed exactly in the order given by gurus in Manipur.

The Kram of the Vasanta Ras of Shri Shri Govindaji:

(Provided by Aiga Ibopishak, rasdhari of the temple)

<u>Raga Macha</u> (rasdhari)	Auspicious opening syllables on the drum
<u>Lalita Raga Alap</u> (sutra)	Auspicious syllables sung
<u>Guruvandana</u> (sutra)	Salutation to the guru
<u>Vrindavan Varnan</u> (sutra)	Songs describing the beautiful forest <u>Gopi</u>
<u>Abhisar</u> (sutra and gopis)	Appearance of the gopis into the arena
<u>Prarthana</u> (gopis)	Prayers sung to Krishna
<u>Makok Chingbi Jagoi</u>	Dance solo by the leading gopi accompanied By instrumental music.
<u>Mandali Sajjan</u> (sutra)	Decoration of the circle area for the dance Danced by the gopis
<u>Gopi Raga</u> (gopis)	Auspicious syllables sung
<u>Mapop Jagoi</u> (gopis)	Dance of the Gopis in different talas
<u>Achouba Bhangi</u> (sutra)	Auspicious dance by the gopis creating the image of Krishna and then offering oneself to him.
<u>Krishna Nartan</u> (sutra)	Song describing the dance of Krishna
<u>Radha Nartan</u> (sutra)	Song describing the dance of Radha
<u>Abhir Khel</u> (sutra+gopis)	Playing with color is danced by the gopis
<u>Chandrabali Vihar</u> (sutra)	Krishna runs off with Chandrabali
<u>Sutra's Comments</u>	Sutra narrates the story of Radha's anger and Krishna's plea for forgiveness
<u>Man Bhanjan</u> (sutra)	After much persuasion Radha is consoled and the conflict resolved.

<u>Khurumba Bhangi Pareng</u> (sutra)	Final dance of offering by Gopis
<u>Prarthana</u> (gopis)	Prayers to Krishna and Radha
<u>Pushpanjali</u> (gopis)	Offering of flowers
<u>Arati</u> (gopis and sutra)	Final rites

The Lyrics of Govindajigi Vasantaras

Raga macha: drum syllables

Lalit raga: (sutra) Ta ri ri nata na a

Guru Vandana:(sutra) salutation to the guru

First an obeisance to the Guru, I bow to his feet  
 And then to the radiant moonlike people of Navadwipa  
 Beloved of Krishna, to all vaishnavas  
 To the gentle soothing breezes  
 The fresh budding vines, new blossoms  
 The cooing of the nightingale  
 The buzz of the bees, to this wonderous Vrindavan  
 I humbly bow.

Vrindavan Varnan : (sutra) a description of Vrindavan

Where the bansibat tree is covered with creepers  
 richly laden with flowers and fruit  
 that seems to be studded with jewels  
 The bansibat tree white like camphor  
 stands in the center encircled by the  
 jewel-like fruits and flowers.  
 To this greatness and wonder of Vrindavan  
 the sutra pays respect  
 With this song I create the nectar of the moon  
 Savour it in the hearing....  
 Chandrashekhhar speaks of this beauty of Vrindavan  
 where Radha and Krishna are dallying with the gopis.

Gopi Abhisar: (sutra and gopis) appearance of the Gopis

The maidens of Braj in early youth  
 Walk along joyously, like a garland of moons  
 With beautiful ear ornaments, long necklaces  
 Hair plaited prettily, swishing from side to side

On arriving at a flower strewn spot  
 They sing in praise of their soul-mate Krishna  
 Their eyes sparkle as they dart about  
 And they make their way deeper into the forest

They find Radha already there with Krishna.  
 Eager and joyful, they arrive at the tryst  
 The poet Bhagyachandra wishes he too were there  
 With the gopis.

Prarthana:(gopis) prayer to Krishna

Jai Jai to the son of Nanda, beloved of the Gopis  
 Hero of Braj, lover Shyama  
 Jai Jai dark complexioned (like the first dark cloud)  
 Jai to the one who is blissful

Mandali Sajjan:(Sutra)

Hearing the pleas of the Gopis, and conceding  
 Krishna begins the raslila and they decorate the  
 Mandali for the raslila

Sutra:

The one who dispells darkness, shines like lightening, Kamok  
 (Krishna) who wears the beautiful peacock  
 feather in his head, Like love birds together in the center, Surrounded  
 by a necklace of pearls (the gopis).  
 Bhagyachandra offers oblations the glory of Krishna.

Gopi Raga Kamod: Ta ri ta na ta na a (syllables sung by gopis)

Mapop Jagoi (main dance):

Dances to various rhythms Rajmel  
 Krishna dances with Radha 7 beats Tanchep  
 The drums create new rhythms  
 The dance, so astonishing, nobody could have seen it before  
 This ras done by the one who vanquishes all sorrow, can never  
 be seen by any or heard by any.....

The drums are played  
 Such wonderful rhythms played by the gopis  
 Their beautiful faces like a row of lotus buds.  
 Welcome to Spring gentle winds from the South  
 Scattering the aroma of the flowers, decorate the place with fresh  
 new blossoms of leaves and buds their scent attracting bees.

Jugal rup (description of their dual form)

In this Ras is Radha  
 Her body is covered with sandalwood paste  
 With Madhava one is blissful and every desire is fulfilled  
 While Krishna is dark, tender and divine his heart filled with  
 love What a wonderful Radha Madhava.

Achouba Bhangi Paring:(Gopis and Sutra)

The mrdang plays, and with all the instruments  
 Kartali is performed in the mandali  
 Shiva himself is the guardian for the rasmandal  
 Guarding its five gates Taking the name of Gopeshwar

The feet of the gopis do the bhangi movements  
 How beautifully their eyebrows dance in Bhangi  
 How graceful their body movements  
 How their eyes sparkle as they glance this way and that.  
 Ta ta thaiya thaiya  
 Various rhythms are enjoyed  
 Radha plays a veena in various rhythms  
 To this Krishna dances ta ta thaiya thaiya In the center of this  
 circle of gopis dancing He stands playing his flute  
 All the instruments play, dance with kartali(claps) Skilled gopis  
 of Braj of the Ahir clan  
 In many talas and gatis that astound  
 The coordination of their feet and hand movements  
 are so beautiful.  
 Veena Rahab, Murj, Pakhawaj are playing  
 16,000 Gopis dance with Krishna Seven svaras,  
 3 grams, 6 ragas, 36 raginis  
 All the braj gopis sing together  
 22 alaps, 49 melodies, 21 murchanas, 15 gamaks  
 Ragas all from malhar to sindhura,  
 They make give me such pleasure Drums beat, flute plays, Chitragati  
 dances with intricate feet movements.  
 So sings Madhava.

Krishna Nartan (sutra and gopis)

Krishna dances, sings plays on instruments  
 With Radha on the banks of River Yamuna  
 In the flowered tryst where the bees buzz  
 On the banks of Yamuna where the breezes are soft  
 The young and beautiful maidens feel joyful  
 Krishna is so beautiful  
 Say his beloved gopis  
 Says his most beloved Radha.

Radha Nartan (sutra and gopis)

The moon faced one dances, a maiden who pleases one  
 Chandrabadani...  
 She dances the gatis (various gaits) so well  
 In the night's ambiance she appears more beautiful  
 Young Radha fills Brindavan with her radiance  
 Radha and Krishna, seen together, appear like  
 a dark cloud and lightening.

The Braj maidens walk gracefully, dance joyfully tonight  
 Radha and Krishna dance and sing sweet songs  
 What a pleasure it is to see them together.  
 Seeing such beauty and love,  
 Bhagyachandra is overcome with devotion.

Abhirkhel: the color festivity (gopis and sutra)

O look at them play... look at those two  
 Covered with red powder  
 The sakhis (girl friends) play on instruments  
 Red powder and colored water is flowing over Brindavan  
 Gagantal, Kampatal (rhythms), all are covered with the red.  
 Lovers play with the pichkari (water squirter)  
 The gopis dance with their arms outstretched  
 Singing Jai Jai Jai

The nightingale provides the chord,  
 The bee the words, The reddened peacock dances  
 And I, humble Vaishnavadas, all I wish is to  
 wash your feet (a gesture of utter devotion)

With the pichkari he sprays her face  
 O how that hurt our eyes  
 Krishna fills his hands with color  
 He laughs joyfully, and so does Radha  
 O how that fills one with desire  
 Radha splashes color on Krishna  
 Jai (victory) to Radha.

Now the creepers, Brindavan, the parrots all  
 have turned to red  
 Even the water of River Yamuna is red.  
 All but Uddhavadas

Chandrabali Thiba (sutra) describing Krishna running off with Chandrabali

O Look there is Chandrabali with her beloved Krishna  
 See them dance in rapture  
 Krishna who has danced with the 16,000 gopis  
 Spots one, Chandrabali among them  
 Seeing her dancing he is filled with love

Man (sutra) Observing Krishna's casual treatment of her

Radha feels her love is thwarted  
 Enraged, she leaves the rasmandal  
 Without being noticed by Krishna

Krishna ukhti: (sutra) Krishna's plea

Please forgive my having wronged you  
 I was led by Madan (god of love), do not blame me,  
 and reject me this way  
 I, The son of The ruler of Braj, who is  
 Tribhuvana (master of three worlds)  
 Madhava bows before you in utter humility

Radha (sutra) Radha's reconciliation

Moved by his speech Radha lifts Krishna with her hands, Krishna who  
 has fallen humbly before her  
 She secures him in her pallu (clothing)  
 and they gaze fondly at each other  
 her anger was appeased hearing the pleas of  
 all her friends, and her sorrow vanished  
 Reunited they dance once more  
 Radha and Madhava are in bliss

Ras Vishram: (sutra and Gopis)

They are seated, those two, enveloped  
 in each others arms  
 All beautifully decked  
 The sakhis wait on them,  
 At appropriate moments one takes them  
 Scented waters, another briskly swings her  
 Fly whisk. They garland the two with  
 Malati flowers and serve them tambul (betelnut)

Khurumba Pareng:(sutra and gopis) dance offering oneself to Krishna

The platform for Ras has cooled  
 They are protectively fenced in the circle  
 String instruments are playing  
 They are even more beautiful than  
 The moon that shines brighter than ever  
 Because the moon as we know is blemished  
 But their glow is flawless  
 O Blissful Radha and Shyam  
 How they smile and blush gazing at one another  
 The she and he parrots sing praises of  
 Radha and Krishna respectively  
 The bees buzz, the nightingale sings  
 the peacock and peahen dance together  
 Someone plays, someone sings,  
 O the sweet music in this rasmandali,  
 at the banks of the river Yamuna  
 where the breeze blows soft.

Vasanta Ras Kram of the Khulak Category  
 Kram provided by Ine Khetri Tombi Devi)

<u>Raga Macha</u>	Opening syllables on the drum
<u>Lalit Raga Alap</u>	Opening syllables sung by the sutra.
<u>Guruvandana</u>	Prayer in honour of the guru
<u>Brindavan Varnan</u>	Description of Brindavan
<u>Krishna Abhisar</u>	Krishna's journey
<u>Gopi Abhisar</u>	Gopi's journey
<u>Krishna Ukti</u>	Speaks to a gopi
<u>Gopi Ukti</u>	Speaks to Krishna
<u>Prarthana</u>	Prayer
<u>Mandali Sajjan</u>	Creating the circle
<u>Mapop Jagoi</u>	Main dances
<u>Gopi Raga</u>	Opening syllables sung by gopis
<u>Achouba Bhangi</u>	Dance creating Krishna's form.
<u>Krishna Nartan</u>	Dance solo by Krishna
<u>Radha Nartan</u>	Dance solo by Radha
<u>Jugal Nartan</u>	Duet by Krishna and Radha
<u>Lalita Nartan</u>	Dance solo by Lalita (leading
<u>Vishakha Nartan</u>	Dance solo by Vishakha(second gopi)
<u>Sutra</u>	Comments
<u>Abhirkhel</u>	Playing the game with color
<u>Chandrabali Vihar</u>	Krishna makes off with Chandrabali
<u>Sutra</u>	
<u>Radha</u>	Speaks about her betrayal
<u>Krishna</u>	Realizes his mistake
<u>Dootir Prati Krishna</u>	Messengers of Krishna console Radha.

<u>Krishna</u>	Apologizes and begs her forgiveness
<u>Sakhi</u>	Pleads for Krishna
<u>Radha + Krishna</u>	Speak to each other
<u>Sakhi</u>	Speaks to them
<u>Manbhanjan</u>	Radha's anger is resolved <u>Prarthana</u> prayers
<u>Rajmel</u>	Dance
<u>Khurumba Pareng Bhangi</u>	Dance offering to Krishna
<u>Pushpanjali</u>	Flower offering
<u>Aarati</u>	Puja offering

The Kram of Maharas of Gobindaji

(Kram provided by Aiga Ibopishak)

<u>Raga Macha</u>	Opening syllables on the drum.
<u>Kanu Raga Alap</u>	Auspicious syllables sung
<u>Guru Vandana</u>	Salutations to the guru.
<u>Vrindavan Varnan</u>	Description of the forest.
<u>Sutra</u>	Sings about Krishna's
<u>Gopi Abhisar</u>	Gopi's Appearance
<u>Krishna Ukti</u>	Krishna speaks
<u>Sutra</u>	Comments on his speech
<u>Lalita</u>	Solo
<u>Vishakha</u>	Solo
<u>Chitralkha</u>	
<u>Indurekha</u>	
<u>Champakalata</u>	All these Gopis Address Krishna in turn
<u>Rangadevi</u>	
<u>Tungavidya</u>	
<u>Sudevi</u>	



<u>Prarthana</u>	Prayers
<u>Sutra</u>	Comments
<u>Mapop Jagoi</u>	Main dance
<u>Gopi Raga Alap</u>	Opening syllables sung
<u>Achaoba Bhangi</u>	Auspicious dance creating Krishna's image.
<u>Krishna Nartan</u>	Krishna's solo
<u>Radha Nartan</u>	Radha's solo
<u>Sutra</u>	Comments
<u>Shri Krishna Antardhyana</u>	Krishna vanishes with Radha and the rasmandala darkens
<u>Sutra + gopis</u>	Sing together about their search for Krishna.
<u>Radha + Krishna (sutra)</u>	Sings of them wandering away of Radha's pride and leaves her.
<u>Sutra + Radha</u>	They sing about Radha's sorrow
<u>Gopi + Radha + Sutra</u>	All sing of their decision to throw themselves into the river
<u>Sutra</u>	Comments
<u>Gopi-gopa Rasmandali</u>	Krishna arrives in myriad forms.
<u>Brindavan Bhangi Pareng</u>	Dance in praise of the forest.
<u>Prarthana</u>	Prayers.

Kunja rasKram of the Palace Temple of Govindaaji

<u>Raga Macha</u>	Opening syllables of drum
<u>Raga Alap</u>	Opening syllables sung
<u>Brindavan Varnan</u>	Description of the forest
<u>Bansi Dhvani</u>	Flute solo
<u>Gopi Abhisar</u>	Gopis Arrive
<u>Prarthana</u>	Prayers
<u>Mandali Sajjan</u>	Creating the circle
<u>Mapop Jagoi</u>	Dance of the gopis
<u>Achaoba BhangI pareng</u>	Auspicious dance creating
<u>Ukti</u>	Dialogue between Krishna, Radha and the Gopis.
<u>Prarthana</u>	Prayers to Krishna's image.
<u>Krishna Nartan</u>	Krishna's solo described
<u>Radha Nartan</u>	Radha's solo
<u>Jugal Nartan</u>	Dual form described
<u>Pushpanjali</u>	Flower Offering
<u>Arati</u>	Puja Offering

NityarasKhulak Kram of the Vijay Govinda Temple

<u>Pung raga macha(rasdhari)</u>	Opening syllables on the drum.
<u>Raga Alap (sutra)</u>	Opening syllables sung.
<u>Vrindavan Varnan (sutra)</u>	Description of the forest
<u>Krishna Abhisar (sutra)</u>	Krishna's Arrival
<u>Krishna Ukti (Krishna)</u>	Calls Brinda and they speak
<u>Murlinad (flute player)</u>	Flute solo

Gopi Abhisar

Gopis arrive

Ukti

Dialogue between Krishna, Radha and the Gopis.

Prarthana

Prayers

Shuka and Sari

Describe beauty of Krishna and Radha.

Makok Chingbi jagoi

Leading Gopi's dance

Mathan Chatpi jagoi

Second in lead gopi's dance.

Mandali Sajjan

Formation of the circle

Gopi raga

Opening syllables sung gopis

Tanum

Technical dance

Jugal rup varnan

Description of the beauty of the union of Krishna-Radha.

Krishna Nartan

Dance solo of Krishna

Radha Nartan

Dance solo of Radha

Prarthana

Prayers

Pushpanjali

Offering of Flowers

Aarati

Puja Offering

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