Performing folk art is one of the most important and significant sector of folk lore and folk life studies. This sector consists of primarily traditional music, dance and drama. From the point of view of folkloristic studies, the word performance is closely associated with each and every item of folklore, irrespective of its generic application. This concept reflects that, all items of folklore when delivered are performed. However, performance here strictly means the conscious presentation of these arts, such as dance, drama, folk music etc. by individuals or groups who, carry these art forms from one generation to another. (Ahmed: 2012: 8). Therefore, according to R.M. Dorson, dance may be considered as echo of music, melodious and rhythmic movement of human body revealing the character of people, their feelings and thought. (Dorson: 1972) The drama i.e. abhinaya connotes the meaning of a dramatic action performed by the actors before the audience or spectators. Music connotes the meaning of an emotional experience and the idea imbued with feelings expressed through a special kind of sound based on the intonations of human speech. (Broev:Aestheties:260).

However, it is clear that all the performing arts are mainly performed in connection with the different rites and rituals, fairs and festivals and public celebrations. The main purpose of the performing art is to interact between the performers and the audiences or spectators. An important fact about performing art is that, every member of a society takes more or less an active part, in their own ceremonial functions. It provides spontaneous feelings of joy among the people. This art may be enjoyed by all to their heart’s content. Through the medium of dance, elements of drama are expressed. In the
performing art forms, songs (music) and dances are inseparable, but drama includes both songs and dances.

The traditional music or songs are passed on by ear and performed by memory rather than by written or printed musical score. *Besides, having its limited independent place in the genre of performing folk art, traditional music usually crosses generic barriers and forms part of many other genres. For example, folk dance, folk drama, dance-drama, oral poetrty, ritual and prayers always carry some elements of music with them.* (Handoo:1989:22).

It is already mentioned that, most of the time, the folk music (song) and the different types of dances go together and also share many characteristics. In the context of dance, besides the keen eye of an expert, special attention of the costumes, stage, musical instruments, the audiences and the overall interaction of all these aspects are essential for the totality of the performance. On the other hand, most of the forms of folk drama i.e. acting are closely associated with rituals and festivals and have close affinity with dance and music. As for example, the dance-drama is now recognized as a kind of new genre on the assumption that it contains the elements of both the dance and the drama.

The Rabhas of Assam are rich in their traditional culture. They have a rich heritage of performing folk art forms and it is explicitly reflected in their composite traditional culture. All the three sectors of performing art forms of Rabhas i.e. songs, dances and drama or acting bears this colorful cultural heritage with a unique way. The different performing art forms of Rabhas related to Manasa cult may be mentioned as below —

(a) Ojapali
(b) Mare Geet or Mare-gan; and
(c) Deodhani
The Ojapali

The Ojapali is an important and significant performing art form i.e. audio-visual performance found among the Rabhas of Assam particularly in the south Kamrup and south Goalpara districts. It is one of the major traditional performing art forms, which seems to have based on the pan Indian tradition of Kathakata. (Bora:2008:155). According to N.C. Sarma, the Upadhyayh is a sub-teacher who instructs a part of Veda for wages only and is inferior to the Acharya. Assamese Oja or Ojha is also a teacher in a sense, because he teaches the art of music and dancing, mudra and other things to his Palis. Like the Upadhyayh, the Oja does never teach Vedas or Vedangas, but the Assamese Oja is skilled in many arts (Sarma:1982:251). On the other hand, the word Pali bears similarity in meaning with that of Sanskrit Palita. Though the term Pali bears different meaning in different contexts, in respect of Ojapali, it denotes assistants or helpers of the chief singer i.e. Oja. (Goswami:1985:21) The word Ojapali consists of two words with different meanings, but it is used as a single word with single meaning. Although the word Oja and the Pali are two different words with different connotations, nevertheless the two words join with each other in such a way that they seem to be one single word with a single meaning, i.e. the living and popular art form of Ojapali. This performing art form consists usually of three to seven members i.e. palis. The chief singer, i.e. Oja recites themes from the mythological stories with music, mudras and dances and the Palis take up the refrain and repeat the songs, playing of cymbals and marking of time with their feet (Goswami:1985:21).

The Ojapali performing art form is one of the most ancient traditional performing art forms of Assam. It has been prevailing among the people from generation to generation traditionally. It is very difficult to trace the origin of the Ojapali as a performing art form in Assam, but it is undoubtedly an ancient art form. According to N.C. Sarma, “the origin of the ojapali may go back to remote antiquity.”
Therefore, it is clear that the institution of *Ojapali* art form has been prevailing in Assam particularly in the lower part of Assam from earliest times. According to some scholars, *Mahapurusha Sankardeva* was also influenced by such type of performing art forms, for which, he could have taken the idea of performing *Ojapali* and *Putala nac* (Puppet theatre).

From the point of view of texts and subject matters of the songs and verses, *Ojapali* may be broadly divided into two categories—one singing from the *Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas* and the other singing from other texts.

Some *Ojapalis* sing and recite the verses and songs i.e. texts which are associated with the subject matter and theme of *Ramayana, Mahabharata, Purana* etc. To interact with the people about the myths, legends and tales associated with Lord Bishnu, Lord Krishna etc. is the main objectives of such type of *Ojapali*.

On the other hand, some *Ojapalis* recite and sing verses and songs related with the worship of different goddesses (*Devi Puja*) or snake goddess Manasa or Padma, Barmani puja etc. instead of texts from the *Ramayana, Mahabharata, or Purana* etc. This type of *Ojapali* is generally associated with the cult of *Saivais* or *Shaktism*. These songs and verses with its unique nature and characteristics, which are sung by such type of *Ojapali* is also known as *Manasa-Sangit*, i.e. songs of Manasa.

Depending on the theme of songs and verses, the *Ojapalis* are also sub-divided into following categories.

(a) Suknanni or Sukananni *Ojapali* ;  
(b) *Ojapali* of Bishahari saga ;  
(c) Mare-geet or Mare-gan guwa *Ojapali* ;  
(d) *Ojapalis* related with the songs of Padma Purana ;  
(e) Tukuria *Ojapali* ;  
(f) Gitalu-geet or Gitalu- gahan ; and
The Rabhas of Kamrup and Goalpara districts of Assam perform Ojapali art form, which is mainly known as Maregan guwa ojapali. Ojapali performing art forms have been prevailing among the Rabhas of Assam from the earliest times. This performing art is closely associated with the worship of the snake goddess Manasa or Bishahari or Padma. As a kind of choral art form, Ojapali is most essential in the worship. Both the Oja and the Palis sing songs from the Bishahari saga prevalent among them orally at the time of worshipping the goddess. In the worship, the Deodhanis displays different dance movements in accordance with the theme of songs sung by the Ojapalis. The worship of goddess Manasa or Bishahari is also popularly known as Mare puja or Barmani puja among the Rabhas.

The troupe of Ojapali mainly consists of an Oja, six to ten (even more) Palis and one or two (even more) Deodhanis i.e. shamanistic dancers. This troupe is popularly known as Mare gan guwa ojapali among the Rabhas. The tradition of Dainapali is totally absent in this form of Ojapali. The Oja is the main leader of the troupe. He is also the main singer of the troupe. The choral performance of Ojapali is held simultaneously with the formal worship to the accompaniment of the rhythmic jingling sound of small cymbals. The Oja recites and sings the narrative verses of Manasa epic as well as the Mare geets with different dance and appropriate hand postures (mudra), in which his assistants (known as palis) repeat the refrain. Frequently, the Oja indulges in dialogue with his Palis in order to make his narrative recitations more absorbing and interesting to the audience. The Ojapalis sing the songs from the Bishahari saga, which are scattered among the Rabha people in the form of oral traditional literature and these songs are known as Mare-geet or Maroi geet or Maregan. Later, Praneswar Rabha collected, compiled and composed these songs from the different Rabha habitat areas and ultimately, in the year 1987, he had published these songs in a book format entitled as Mayavanti Bishahari. On the other hand, some Ojapalis also sing the songs of the Padmapurana in this context. The Rabhas of the Daranggiri area in southern Goalpara
district have their own version of the *Padma-purana* with considerable dialectal variations. The *Oja* and *Palis* recite and dance in standing position and they have diverse forms of dances with their local names and local characteristics (Goswami: 2015:39).

**Dresses and ornaments of Ojapali**

Minor variations are found in respect of dresses and ornaments among the different types of *Ojapalis* like *Biyah, Suknanni, Mare gan gowa ojapali* etc. Generally, *Oja* wears a *paggri* on his head, a long *panjabi* and a *dhoti*. The *Palis* also have *paggris* on their heads. They may have a *chador* or *gamosa* hanging from their shoulders. (Goswami: 2015:38). Some *Ojas* wear *Pag-jama* or *ghuri*, bangles, *unti*, ring and *nupur*, and ties a *tangali* (waistband). The *pag-jama* shows evidently Mughal influences, like that of *Sutradhara*. Again, some *Ojas* do not wear *ghuri* or *nupur*, but instead appear in an ordinary *dhoti* and a kind of turban over a knot of long hair (Das: 1972:133)

But, the dresses and ornaments of *Ojapalis* who sing *Mare-geets* or *Maroi-geets* are very simple and not common with the other forms of *Ojapali* found in Assam. This reflects the unique aspects of Rabha traditional and tribal culture. The *Oja* wears a *dhoti* and a shirt placing a *Chadar* on the neck hanging both sides up to the knees. Like other forms of *Ojapali*, *Ojas* occasionally wear the *Paggri*. Generally, in the type of *Mare gan gowa ojapali*, *Oja* does not wear headgear but wraps a *gamocha* on his head. The *Palis* wear white *jamas* around their waist. They wear vests without shirts. They wrap no headgear, but wear *nupur* i.e. rattling instrument on their feet. They tie their waist with a long green cloth known as *botuk* or *butak* or *tangali*. In southern Kamrup, particularly Rabha dominated areas; *Oja* wears a vest on top and a *ghagra* from his waist. The *Palis* had just vests and *dhotis*. The *Deodhani* wear *Mekhela* and *Chadar* and take a red *photα* i.e. red mark on the forehead. The *Deodhani* does not tie her hair. At present, it is remarkabl that, in the Mare puja observed by the Rabhas, the Ojapalis wear particular uniform as their identity marker. Apart from it, they wear the *Ghuri* resembling the
costume of Beula, the daughter–in-law of Chando Sadagar who wore such type of costume at the time of her performance of Ojapali dance in the context of pleasing the gods to get back Lakhindar’s life in the other world.

The structure of the performance of Maregan i.e. Ojapali among the Rabhas has a pattern. Of course, the pattern may not be same in every performance.

While performing the Ojapali the performers, almost invariably face the Alter of the goddess Barmani i.e. decorated Maju specially made for this occasion. Just in front of the alter the offerings to the goddess are placed. The place for female audience is reserved near the offerings at one side of the floor while the male audience sits on the other side. The performance takes place in the middle of the floor. The preist sits in front of the male audience and the Oja and the Palis take their position just near the priest infront of the male audience. In between the female audience, the priest, the Oja and the Palis the female shamans dance to the tune of the song and fall in, a trance for sometime at particular point of the story and come out from trance at another point of the story. This falling in a trance by the shaman is called dak para and coming out of trance is called dak utha.

In the worship of Barmani or Bishahari, the performance of the Ojapali is started with a singing of Vandana in sitting position. At the very bigining of the puja, the Oja invokes different gods and goddesses. The Oja sings the songs of Siva and Beula-Lakhindar episodes, which are prevalent among the Rabhas in the form of oral literature. However, at the time of their performance, they emphasise on the tune of the songs and try to maintain their originality. Different types of dance movements are associated with the Ojapali, but these dance movements are not sophisticated, lacking the fineness of classical dances and. During the performance, they use two or three pairs of Khuti tal i.e. small cymbals tied with a rope. One of the cymbals is known as mala i.e. male and other is known as mati i.e. female.
In the Suknanni Ojapali, only Oja shows hand-gestures (Mudra) and perform dance movements meaningfully in accordance with the theme of the songs sung by them. The Palis do not move but they keep tala with their feet moving forward and backward slightly. But in respect of Maregan, generally the Oja does not show any hand-gestures i.e. mudras. He stands at the front of the palis and sometimes he moves backward giving importance to the songs, which are sung by him in accordance with the theme of the songs. But, the Palis move from front to back and return again with free motion of the body keeping tala with their feet and rattling sound with the nupur i.e. anklets they wear. Some dance forms of the Palis are more complicated. Sometimes they roll on the ground, which are more difficult to perform. All these dance forms performed by the Oja palis of Mare geet are traditional Rabha folk dances in respect of its rhythm, tempo etc. In Suknanni and Durgavari Ojapali, the Oja explains the lyrics and refrain of the songs and simultaneously make the audience understand about the theme of the songs with the help of his Palis. Sometimes the Oja also make the audience delighted by witty words. On the other hand, in the Ojapali of Mare geets, Oja and Palis do not explain the verses and songs. Sometimes the Oja recites the verses and songs to make the Palis understand and the Palis also support his recitations. At the time of their movements, occasionally they make different sounds to attract the mind of the audiences.

In the Ojapali prevalent among the Rabhas, there are three types of beating pattern of the tala which are known as — ek tal, dui tal and tin tal. There is an unique coordination between the beating of cymbals and the movements of the feet in the context of Ojapali. Ojapalis do not perform their art forms continuously i.e. without break. After singing and dancing for one or two hours, they stop-their performances and take rest for a while after which again they start. The pattern of dance movements performed by the Ojapalis is popularly known by different local names. These names mostly depend on local variations and as per local folk traditions. These are — Dali dhanga, Kati ghurwa, Ghurani nac, Kauti nac, Telengi nac, Guin nac, Pathali nac, Digh nac, Dui pokia nac, Tinipokia nac, Thela nac, Sagun nac, Neoul nac, Ojaburani nac, Doli bhanga nac Tengal
mosora nac etc. The languages of the verses and songs are purely of colloquial pattern, which has a separate and unique identity as a form of dialect used by the Assamese tribals like the Rabhas. Therefore, the Ojapali of Mare geet distinctly reflect the traditional and unique tribal culture of the Rabha people of Assam. Again, the Deodhani is a part and parcel of the Ojapali art form in this context. Therefore, the Deodhani acts and dances in accordance with the themes of the songs sung by the Ojapali. (Bora:2008:158)

Mare geet or Maroi geet or Mare gan

Rabhas are rich in their traditional folk songs like the other tribes of Assam. There are different types of folk songs, which are scattered among them in the form of their oral literature. The songs may be categorized as (a) Devotional songs, (b) Songs associated with festivals, (c) Songs associated with rites and rituals, (d) Songs associated with love and yearning, (e) Lullaby and nursery rhymes (f) Ballads etc. Their vast accomplishments of folksongs range from simple cradle songs, songs of everyday life to the world of transcending mystic compositions of the minstrels. This evinces the fact that their chivalrous fore fathers were capable of translating their sensitive moral and intellectual urge into poetic art. (Bora:2008:43). The Rabhas, like other tribal and non-tribal people of Assam, regularly perform their rites and rituals along with different fairs and festivals. Community singing of hymns, different devotional and religious songs sung by both men and women are considered as a unique and significant feature of their traditional society. However, through these folk songs of Rabhas, their traditional and cultural identity, different beliefs and superstitions, customs, social values and their overall unique tribal characteristics are reflected distinctly.

The Mare geet or Maroi geet or Mare gan is considered as one of the popular folk songs among the Rabhas of South Kamrup and South Goalpara areas. Thses songs are associated with the worship of their goddess Barmani or Bishahari, who is considered as folk and local form of the snake goddess Manasa. This worship is also popularly known
as Mare puja, which is one of the most important religious festivals among the Rabhas. A semi-professional troupe called Ojapali performs the puja. In the context of the worship of the deity, such type of “Ojapali” troupes sing various songs and this kind of songs are known as Mare gan or Mare geet or Maroi geet. These songs have been prevailing among them orally from the earliest times. Anonymous poets or singers of the Rabha community, who were most probably secluded devotee or votary of the goddess Bishahari, originally composed these. No written tradition is associated with the songs for which these are distinctly excluded in the writings of the other Manasa poets of Assam like Durgavar, Mankar and Narayandeva. The text of the bulk of the songs are narrative in nature dealing with the myths and legends as well as tales associated with Manasa, the snake goddess and her encounter with the merchant Chando. The Rabha Ojapalis sing and recite these songs during the worship of goddess Barmani and they act with the different dance movements in accordance with the theme of the songs sung by them. Therefore, from the point of view of performing art form, these songs play a very vital and significant role in the worship of Barmani or Bishahari. It is already mentioned that the Ojapali, Maregeet or Maregan and Deodhani are essential elements of Mare puja in the context of performing folk art forms in the Rabha religious culture. On the other hand, Rabha folk characters and the tribal elements are vitally established through these songs. These songs may be divided into two types depending upon its different folk elements, e.g. (1) Eulogistic and (2) Etiological. These two kinds of songs are performed by the Ojapalis with the accompaniment of small cymbal only. (Bora:2008:46) The eulogistic songs are sung and recited by the Ojapali performers in the context of the worship of different gods and goddesses. Ojapalis sing the story content of long the ballad like songs in standing position with the help of musical instruments such as small cymbals and anklets.

As an important performing folk art form, in the context of musical and dance forms, the Mare geets or Maregan sung by the Ojapalis may be divided broadly into two kinds. These are (a) Baheni geet and (b) Uthani geet or songs of Uthani Sirasti. Baheni
geets are basically, pujar geet i.e. songs of the worship. These songs and verses are performed in the sitting position by the performers for which, these are known as Baheni geet since baheni is derived from the root bah which means ‘to sit’. Similarly, uthani is derived from the root uth meaning to ‘stand up’ hence, Uthani geets are the songs performed in the standing position by the performers i.e. Ojapalis with various dance movements, acting and different Mudras. Therefore, these Uthani geets are more important and popular in the context of performing art forms related to Manasa cult among the Rabhas. Again, from the different aspects of musical elements, the Uthani geets may be divided into following kinds:

(a) Vandana (a hymn or salutation);
(b) Diha (refrain)
(c) Pad (verses)
(d) Jhuna or Kari geet(comic songs)
(e) Samorani (conclusion)  (Sarma:2013:123)

However, the Ojapalis who sing Maregan in the Mare puja begin their performance with a Vandana. Here is an example of songs popularly known as Baheni geet, which is sung by the Ojapali performers. This song was collected by praneswar Rabha in his Mayavanti Bishahari. This kind of songs are performed by the Ojapalis in the context of the worship of goddess Saraswati along with the snake goddess Bishahari.

Vandana : Saraswati Vandana

Diha

O’ nami ahe Saraswati

Hate kanthamala O’pawe kanthamal |
Ghane hay bhar yovati ghone Sisukala ||

O’ nami ahe Saraswati Brahma rishir jee O’

Brahma rishir jee ||

**Pad**

O’ nami ahe Saraswati

Hate padmapul O’ pawe padmapul |

Take dekhi Bishnudevar chit biyakul ||

Uthoni bahoni melani barani chari |

Jiva meli bahoni dilanta agbahi ||

Ghiriya bohil maw palankhir opar |

Daina bohal kanya baon phale bar ||

Swargote ulului munichhate joi joi |

Saraswati Bishnu devar biya khani hoy ||

Biya korai Bishnu mukhat dila pan |

Saraswati Bishnu dev hoila rajuman ||

Saraswatir biyate Brahmai kore dan |

Danat uchhakil joi bhela maju khan ||

Keote mare jal nawai siche pani |

Ashare ashare geet aidor ganthani.  (Rabha: 1987: 3)
(Meaning: The goddess Saraswati, daughter of Lord Brahma comes down with a garland on her hands and feet. Seeing her beauty, Lord Bishnu become perplexed and ready to marry her. Bishnu sits on the left side of the goddess Saraswati. With the blessings from heaven and “Hari dhani” from the men, the marriage of Saraswati and Vishnu takes place. After marriage, Saraswati gives betel nut to Vishnu and he becomes very much pleased.)(Bora:2008:46)

Another example of an excerpt of *Uthani geet* from the part of *Uthani Sirasti*, of Mayavanti Bishahari is mentioned below:

**Guru Vandana**

**Diha**

Ram ore, bondong sakhi bondong joi manasar charan ||

**Pad**

Bandang gurua paw       Saraswati amar maw

Jagia bandilung sangsare |

Bandang Devi isware       Brahma Bishnu Maheswar

Indrapurit jata deva ase ||

Trishalire devagon       sabe bandang jane jon

Krishnak bandang Narayane |

Adi bandang Alikha       bandang guru kalikha

Mathat bandilung natbare ||
Anek prabandh kari  pujang maw Bishahari

Saina name ianam tumar

Gohain hate trishul ban  basumati kampaman

Gagane lagiya gel rool ||

Gagane lagil bool  phutil kamala phul

Sajo phule hoi jay sanchare |

Bandang lakhire paw  Saraswati amar maw

Jar geete muhila sanshare ||

Asta nage bandang mata  jayashri Manasa

Pranam Karang bhangarar pawe |

Tumi bine gohain  aru gati naire

Moi jang gohain phul bane ||

(Rabha: 1987: 34)

(Meaning: I salute the goddess Manasa and pay my obeisance at her feet. I pay my obeisance at the feet of the guru and mother Saraswati. I salute all the goddesses and gods in the Indrapuri. I worship mother Bishahari, who went to the flower garden created by Shiva whose semen fell on the lotus petal and she was born.)

Diha (Refrain):
After singing Vandana, the Oja sings the first part of the diha and the Palis catch the last part of the diha instantly after the Oja finishes the first part. Diha is considered as guiding lines and also relevant to the main pad i.e. verses. Again, for the second time the Palis repeat the lines as per the tunes directed by the Oja. An example of diha is given below:

**Diha:**

*Sarpe bulere sundari ase kule,*

*Kimote dankib basak doya lagoyre |

*Dankim dankim basak chhuta loiyare ||* (P-396)

(Meaning: Snake says that the beautiful wife is lying in his lap. How shall I bite him as I feel compassion to them? I will bite him in one pretext or other.)

**Pad (lyrics and verses):**

After finishing the diha part of the song, Oja sings the verses. Diha and Pad are intimately connected because, the diha expresses the theme of the Pad i.e. the verses. The subject matter, tune and the aesthetic sense of the main verses are reflected through the Diha. On the other hand, Pad is the main text of the song. The theme or subject matters of such pads of Mare gan or Mare geet ,which are sung by the Ojapalis are : Sirasti patan (creation of the world), Durga janam (birth of Durga), Malancha Kamani (creation of flower garden), Durga phuljhari,(engagement of Durga as the gardener) Phul dak (falling asleep in the garden), Durgar parikhya (Test of Durga), Bashi Kamani(making of

*Ekhan pad* (one *pad*), in the *Mare gan*, means one chapter i.e. one complete song. An example of *diha* is mentioned below. Thereafter the *Ekhan pad* begins a few lines of which follow the *pad*:

**Diha:** *Sarpe bulere sundari ase kole,*

\[
Kimate \text{ dankim basak daya lagayre} | \\
Dankim dankim basak chhuta loiyare ||
\]

**Pad:** *Keshate dankiba narang hariya choongar |*

\[
Mundate dankiba narang jhuna narikal || \\
Kapalate dankiba narang dwitiyer chan | \\
Kanate dankiba narang marenguri pan || \\
Chakute dankiba narang swaragar tara | \\
Mukhate dankiba narang gunjare bhumura || \\
Nak gutat dankiba narang kewalier banshi |
\]
(Rabha: 1987: 396)

(Meaning: Snake says, the beautiful wife is lying in his lap, so how can I bite him. I shall bite him taking a chance though I cannot bite him in the part of his hair, head, forehead, ear, eyes, mouth, nose, cheek, tongue, neck, tooth, arm, hand, fingers, and nails out of sympathy.)

**Jhuna geet or Kari Geet:**

At the time of finishing the *pad* at the last stage, the *Oja* and the *Palis* sing a *Jhuna geet* or *Kari Geet* or *Bara mahi geet*. In the worship of Mare puja, along with the *Mare gan*, *Ojapali* performs such type of songs like *Jhuna geet* for entertainment of the audience. The *Jhuna geets* are generally songs of love and wit. In the place of performance, the *Jhuna Geet* or *Kari Geets* are performed with due permission of the women in the audience. An example of a *Jhuna Geet* or *Kari Geet* is mentioned below:
**Diha:** O’-ho-re shuna sabhar lok

Kang bahut dinar katha ||

**Pad:**  Amar bijni rajar dakhin kul

Ati alpa sil |

Rupa sardar ashiya aro

Kisu dakhal karil ||

Dhanya dhanya rupar sardar

Bar bahadur |

Garowanak dakhal karila bahudur ||

(Rabha: 1987:591)

(Meaning: The area of the king of Bijni was very small. *Rupa sardar* occupied some part of it. Thanks to *Rupa sardar* for your occupation. You occupied the Garos also to a great extent.)

Sometimes, in special references, instead of *Jhuna geet* or *Kari geet*, the *Oja palis* sing and perform the *Baramahi geet*. Elements of love are found in these songs. At present this type of songs are at to be lost among the Rabhas.

An example of *Baramahi Geet* is mentioned below:

**Diha:** Ghane ikul ghane bikul madhya samatol |

Aha prabhu re |

O’ Doive tuliya dharil uttorare kul re,
Kande obhagi moor Beula aha re bhalare ∥

Pad:  ‘Kankara saigarat kande behula sundari ∥

Akashar chan-surjya tamirao ase shuni ∥

Baishakh mashate prabhu silai barasil ∥

Saina pani gune sakal phul malil ∥ ∥

Jethar mashate prabhu jethe hurahuri ∥

Bar ghar bhangai nilo moor saina ba- marali’∥

(Rabha:1987:579)

(Meaning: Behula is crying in the Kankara Sea under the Sun and the Moon. In the month of Bahag, due to rain the flowers are blossomed. In the month of Jeth, the roof of the main house is blown up without any storm)

Samarani (Conclusion):

Like the Sukananni Ojapali, Oja and Palis of Maregan both bid farewell to the gods and goddesses who are already invoked by them at the beginning of the worship by performing their songs and verses. They end their performance with a closing song as mentioned below:

Diha: Ja-oi-ja-oí bulai bhal ∥

Pad:  Pubare Brahma deo pube chali ja ∥

Dakhinar Ashurdeo dakhine chali ja ∥

Pasimar Bishnudeo pasime chali ja ∥
Lord Brahma of East - go towards east. Ashurdeo of South - go to the south. Lord Bishnu of the West - go to the west and Mahadeo of the north - go to the North.)

**Raga in the Mare gan or Mare geet**

Concept of *ragas* (a concept of Indian Classical music) is not found in the tradition of *Mare gan* among the Rabhas. Instead of *Ragas* in their tradition, practice of *dhek* and *sur* i.e. tune is present in the performance. In this context, most probably *dhek* does not mean the *ragas*, it means tune of the songs. However, the tunes of the *Ojapalis* who sing such type of *Mare gan* are primarily melodious. Besides these, in the *Mare gan*, three types of *Tala* (rhythm) are found, as for example –

(a) *Ekubia*

(b) *Dukubia* and

(c) *Tinkubia*.

**Deodhani or Deodhani nac**

Dance is one of the most important and integral part of traditional Assamese folk culture. So, for some people, dance is a part of life itself. Many people of Assam, tribal or non-tribal perform different religious and social functions accompanied by their various dance movements. Therefore, to quote S. Sarma, *This shows that the dance has a certain theme and purpose, which it tries to reveal through movements and expressions. Mere movements have no significance, however rhythmic and balanced poses may be like the musical notes, and the movements themselves become potential and dynamic to express*
the theme of the dance. However, music forms an important element in the dance. The purport of the theme is provided by the word body of the song to which the dance corresponds. (Sarma:1979:34). On the other hand, simplicity and spontaneity are the two main qualities of the folk dances through which the lives and activities of the non-elite folks are reflected. These are also considered as their expressions and aesthetic behaviours.

It is mentioned earlier that, the worship of the snake goddess performed by the Rabhas of Assam is popularly known as Mare puja or Barmani puja or Bishahari puja. According to the puja vidhi i.e. rituals of the worship, gita-vadya (songs and musical instruments) and nritya (dance) as well as some kind of acting or abhinaya are supposed to be essential in the worship of the snake goddess Manasa or Mare puja. Thus, the Deodhani or Dedhani is an essential and important part of the Mare puja. Here the Deodhanis display different dance movements in accordance with the theme of Mare geet or Mare gan sung by the Ojapalis. In the book Folk Songs of the Bodos edited by M.M. Brahma, he mentions, The female shamanistic dance associated with the worship of the snake deity ‘Manasa’ is heavily influenced by the shamanistic dance current in the culture of the Boro Kacharis, is also known as ‘deodhani nac’. (Brahma:1960:190) Like the Deodhanis of the non-tribals of Assam, the Deodhanis of the Boro-Kacharis and Rabhas are also invariably women.

Therefore, Deodhani or Dedhani is considered as an important and significant dance among the performing folk art forms of Assam in connection with the worship of snake goddess Manasa or Barmani or Bishahari. Narayandeva, the reknowned Manasa poet of Assam, who is the writer of the Padma Purana, mentions that, worship of the snake goddess Manasa cannot be completed unless the performance of gita-vadya and nritya is held. (Bora:2008:168).

N.C. Sarma explains the term Deodhani in the following ways:

(a) The term may come from Sanskrit word Devadhani i.e. god women;
(b) The term may come from Sanskrit word *Devadhani* i.e. one who echoes the word of god; and

(c) The term *Deodhani* (female shaman) appears to be a feminine form of *Deodha* i.e. male shaman. A man supposed to be possessed by the spirit of god is called *Deodha*. Similarly, a women supposed to be possessed by the spirit of god is known as *Deodhani*. (Sarma:1988:44)

According to J. Das, the *Deodhani* dances in the Manasa puja are performed in a manner similar to the Durga, Sitala and Kali puja dances. Like the male *Deodhas* of Kamakhya, these girls also attain to a state of trance when they can foretell the future. They too lead a dedicated life like the *Devadasis*, they do not get married; dedicated to the goddess, and they learn the art of their dances from masters in all its intricacies of *tala* and *laya*. With a big vermilion mark on the forehead and the bunch of luxuriant long hair untied, a *Deodhani* starts her dance and by and by quickens her steps when her hair flows in all directions with the movement of the head: it is a *tandava* (a forceful variety of dance) performed to the quick beats of *jaidhol* (big drum) and *bhortal* (*Bhota tal*, large cymbals). It is noteworthy that like the *Bodo Deodhani*, this Marai *Deodhani* also in her dance offers worship to *Siva, Dharma, Durga, Kuver, Kartik, Lakshmi* and others, holding in hand appropriate implements like the sword and the shield, burning torch and the *dambaru*, wherever necessary. Unfortunately, the dance is being discontinued with the passage of time for lack of patronage on the part of people. (Das:2010:134-135) But it was observed during field work that at present married women as well as widows also had taken part in the deodhani dance. It has also been found that some women or girls in the audience also get inspired during the performance and start dancing *deodhani* and fall in a trance.

In the worship of *Mare* observed by the Rabhas, the most essential ingredients are *Deodhani* and *Ojapali, nritya, git-vadya* as well as *abhinaya*. At the beginning of the puja, *Deodhani* moves around the *Maju* for seven times and then *Ojapali* invokes the different gods and goddesses by reciting *Mare geet*. Thus, the *Ojapali* recite and sing
various songs i.e. *Mare geets* and simultaneously the *Deodhani* dances vigorously for a long time and ultimately in the middle of the puja she falls down on the ground in a semi conscious state. It is believed that in this state of semi consciousness, the *Deodhani* is supposed to be possessed by the spirit of the goddess Manasa and the *Deodhani* have the power of foretelling the future. This state of ecstasy of the female shaman i.e. *Deodhani* is commonly known as *dakat para* i.e. to be at the bidding of the presiding deity. Then she is awakened by the simultaneous chanting of incantations (*mantras*), i.e. songs based on the myths and tales of Beula- Lakhindar of the *Ojapali* art form. This awakening of the female shaman is popularly known as *dak utha*. Significantly, this *dakat para* as well as subsequent *dak utha* of the *Deodhani* is included as an essential part of Mare puja. (Bora: 2008: 169)

The *dakat para* is associated with the Mare puja, which is performed by the *Deodhani* from the first day of observing of the puja. Married women, girls or widows along with the *Palis* of the *Ojapali* art form perform the *Deodhani nac*, which is a shamanistic dance. Therefore, the *Deodhani* dances prevalent among the Rabhas are closely associated with the *Ojapali*. Without the help of *Ojapali*, *Deodhani* cannot perform her dance movements in the worship. On the other hand, in the state of *dakat para*, the *dhulias* and the *kalias* simultaneously play on their instruments vigorously. There are various names of the *dak*, which are – *Phul dak*, *Durga dak*, *Gohain dak*, *Chhaya maya dak* or *Chaya dak* and *Lokhai dak*. The *Deodhani* also perform different dance forms such as *Jakh-jokhinir nac*, *Garo nac*, *Langa burhar nac*, *Rabha nac*, *Kachari nac*, *Baga-bhalukar nac*, *Chandi nac*, *Ghateswari nac*, *Paura nac*, *Musolman nac*, *Bamun bamunir nac*, *Durga nac*, *Bishahari nac*, *Siva nac*, *Kachai-khaiti nac* etc. The *Palis* take part in these dances along with the *Deodhani*. Apart from these with the assistance and accompaniment of *Palis*, *Deodhani* perform other ritualistic performance in the worship, such as *Rana-Chandi Puja*, *Kachari Puja*, *Jura ghurua*, *Kachai-khaiti Puja* etc. In accordance with the songs and recitations of the *Ojapali*, *Deodhani* also enacts a semi- dramatic performance, which is associated with the different *daks*, related
myths, legends and tales in the context of Manasa puja or Mare puja. *(Daks are described in the chapter-VI)*

The *Ojapali* and *Deodhani* of Mare puja of the Rabhas put more seriousness and give importance on the performance of dramatic and semi-dramatic situations in comparison to other forms of *Ojapali* and *Deodhani* of Assam. The *Ojapalis* and *Deodhanis* generally enact different episodes relating to the story of Chando Sadagar’s trade voyage and different incidents about his enmity with the goddess Padma. With the songs and verses, such types of acting provide amusement to the audience. In the particular context, *Deodhani* also perform mimetic acting for the entertainment of the audience. Being a character of bird or in the guise of birds, *Deodhani* construct nest, lays eggs, brood, etc. in the form of acting. They also sometimes use mask according to the dramatic situations. They perform different dramatic performances describing the situations like *Godhai Barashi Bowa*, (angling by Godha) *Jakhinir Jakoire mac mora* (trapping of fish by the female ghost with the *jakoi*-a triangular fishing implement made of bamboo) etc. In accordance with the theme of songs and verses (recitations), *Deodhani* play the role of both male and female the characters, to amuse the audience.

It is remarkable that, among the Kachari, Rabha, Mech and Koch people, *Deodhani* performers are women or girls. But, in the places like Kamakhya, Ramdia, Sualkuchi, Pachoria and particular places of upper Assam (as for example, Gosani thans of Golaghat), this function of dancing and falling into trance is a male prerogative and the dancers are known as *Deodhas*. These *Deodhas* are known as *ghora* (Horse) of the goddess. In the area of Golaghat, they are known as *Hojai*, a word, which most probably indicates the Kacharies. However, it is believed that both the *Deodhanis* and *Deodhas* possess supernatural powers and are omniscient, for which people worship or adore them with fear and respect.

In the Mare puja or Maroi puja observed by the Rabhas, *Deodhani* is considered as a most essential element. On the other hand, in Bengal, the tradition of *Deodhani* is not
associated with the worship of Manasa puja. Most probably, the Kacharis influenced the Hindus to introduce Deodhani performance in the worship of goddess Manasa along with the Ojapalis. In the Kanada area of south India, tradition of Deodhanis with their shamanistic dance and the aspect of foretelling the future are found distinctly. (Vogal:1972:272) Manasa is considered primarily as a snake goddess and secondly worshipped as a goddess of mari-marok i.e. disease, epidemic etc. Deodhani is regarded as the manifestation of the goddess Manasa. So, Deodhani is an essential part of the Mare puja observed by the Rabhas along with the other tribal and non-tribal people of Assam. It is remarkable that, there was a tradition among the different tribes to attach the performing art form of Deodhani with their different celebrations, which are observed to expel evil from their society. Scriptural (i.e. classical) rituals or puja vidhis associated with the worship of goddess Manasa have no relation with Deodhani and Ojapali. (Bordoloi:1986:442-443)

During the worship of Mare puja, Deodhani maintains the rituals of fasting every day, particularly on the day of Bhor dak. Deodhani takes her seat in a particular place on a Kalpat (banana leaf) in front of the alter of the goddess (Maju of Rabhas). Before sitting in her particular place, at the very beginning she kneels down and offers prayer to the goddess. At the time of sitting in front of the alter, Deodhani covers her whole body with a white and clean sheet of cloth. Four Palis stand near her making two rows (line). Two of the first line play Joidhol (big drum) and the other two of the second play the bhoor tal (large cymbals). There are other types of choreography also in case of the position of the palis and the Deodhani. When the Ojapali invokes the gods and goddesses to enjoy the nac (dance) of the worship by singing Vandana of Mare geet, then the Deodhani gradually moves her body slightly in accordance with the rhythm of the songs sung by the Ojapalis. Then the palis start beating the joidhol, which is known as Deovadi and instantly the deodhani removes the white cloth covering her body and starts her dance movements in front of the alter and also her hair flows gradually in all directions with the movement of the head. The Deodhani performs tandava dance with different
modes to the quick beats of the *joidhol* and *Bhoortal*. The *palis* also dance along with the *Deodhani*, in the same mode simultaneously.

In the next stage, the *Deodhani* perform her dances with different gestures in accordance with the theme and subject matter of *Mare geets* sung by the *Ojapalis*. The *Deodhani* performs different *mudras* placing both of her hands on her navel. She performs her dance movements moving towards the *Palis* one by one along with the movement of each part of her body, which are considered as most important and special in the context of worship. During the time of these dances, *Palis* accompany her only by playing *Khuti tal* (a small cymbal). Then again, they start *Vadi* of the *dhol* i.e. playing of the drum and the *Deodhani* performs her dances with different *mudras* in standing position. In this stage, she moves different parts of her body like head, arms, neck, chest, waist and also moves her legs forward and backward along with the accompaniment of *Palis*.

After finishing this stage, in the worship of Mare puja, *Rana Chandi Puja*, *Kachari Puja*, *Jura ghurua Puja*, *Kachai khaiti Puja* etc. are performed. In the *Rana Chandi Puja*, *Deodhani* with the *Boli Kata Dao* perform *tandava* dance to destroy the demons and at this time, she is worshipped as *Rana chandi* (a form of Durga). In the form of *Kachai-khati*, *Deodhani* dances frantically and beheading the sacrificed animals and birds like ducks or pigeons, she drinks the blood of such sacrificed bodies. This kind of act is prevalent among the tribes of Assam from the ancient time in the worship of goddess Manasa. The last programme of the *Deodhani* ends at night, which is called *Bhor dak*. In this stage, the *Deodhani* sits near a *Pali* leaning to his body. With the beatings of *dhol* (i.e. *deovadi*), she moves her body i.e. dancing gently and subsequently she falls down on the earth longitudinally. One of the *Palis* covers her whole body with a new and white cloth. The head of the *Deodhani* is kept in the lap of a *Pali*. Then to make the *Deodhani* awaken from the state of *Dak* before dawn, the *Oja* recites the particular verses and one *Pali* winnows her body continuously by a piece of white cloth. An example of such particular type of verses is mentioned below:
“Jharu bish nai o’ jharu Bish nai |

(Aarere) lakhair harar bish jharu padumai ||”

(Meaning: Poisons i.e. bish is removed through incantations from the body of Lakhai.)

After such type of performance of blowing her body, in accordance with the beating of dhol, the Deodhani awakens and with her worship and a bow to the goddess as well as to the audience, she comes away from the place of worship. It is remarkable that, in the stage of Bhor dak, the Deodhani performs her acting and dance movements describing the tale of snake biting of Lakhinder and its subsequent different incidents in this context. This type of Ojapali and Deodhani performances helps in the aspect of spreading Shaktism in Assam by different ways.

Therefore, it is found that different kinds of performing art forms are closely associated with the Cult of Manasa among the Rabhas. In the worship of goddess Manasa, Bishahari, or Barmani etc., the performing art forms of Maregan or Mare geets, Ojapali, and Deodhani play a very significant and vital role to fulfil the purpose of the worship. The Deodhani performs various types of dance movements and dramatic enactments in accordance with the theme of Mare geets sung by the Ojapalis along with the accompaniment of the traditional musical instruments like small cymbals, dhol and bhor tal (big cymbal etc.). Various types of costumes and ornaments are also associated with these performing art forms, which are related with the Cult of Manasa among the Rabhas. All these unique aspects of performing art forms of the Cult of Manasa clearly reflect the unique and rich socio- cultural traditions prevalent among the Rabhas from the ancient time.