CHAPTER - VI

PERFORMING ARTFORM

The performing artform connotes the meaning of an action performed before the spectators. The synthetic nature of performing artform makes it collective art involving the efforts of music, dance and theatrical performance. The performing artforms are so designated because of the way in which they are presented to the attention of observers. The performing arts are generally displayed in the discourses of various occasions such as rites and rituals, fairs and festivals or public celebrations. An important deed lies on performing arts that every member of a community takes more or less active part in its ceremonial function.

One of the important dimensions of 'folklore' is performing folk art which comprises of gita-nritya and abhinaya. Gita, viz., music indicates the meaning of "an emotional experience and the idea imbused with feeling expressed through a special kind of sound based on the intonations of human speech." While the dance, eg., nritya is an "echo of music", a melodious and rhythmic movement of human body revealing the characters of people, their feelings and thoughts and the abhinaya connotes the meaning of a dramatic action performed by the actors before the spectators.

2. Ibid : P. 261
3. Ibid : P. 257
The performing arts intersect each with the other and often appear in conjunction. While the renditions of a folksong are now usually referred to as performances, they are more casual in nature than the conscious presentation of these arts by individuals or groups with folk instruments, dance, costumes and scenario props. There is usually no technique of teaching, certainly no formal technique, connected with the making and singing songs. They are learnt by the ear and transmitted in this fashion from generation to generation. The feature common to different performing arts of the tribal society is very simple nature. Though everyone may not exactly know the art, the fact is known to them and enjoyed by all to their heart's content. It is a spontaneous feeling of joy like music, dance and drama purposeful. Through the medium of dance, the elements of drama are expressed. The purpose may be primarily movement, the creation of an ephemeral, kinetic design in which concept (ideas about dance), process (what leads to performance), medium (the body instrument) and product (the dance of performance) merge but physical motion is the primary end. It is termed as 'autateli' by Anderson and Moore.4

Song, dance and drama of the Hajongs and their counterances combine to offer them an aesthetic life which is worth mentioning. They have ample time at their disposal during off season and the evening hours they utilize in their favourite arts. These arts present a vivid picture of Hajong life. Their keen observation and powers of graphic and symbolic description may easily be noticed through their song, dance and drama.

(a) **Song and Dance:**

Since almost all sung, chanted and recited forms of oral poetry are designated as song in most communities, the category includes such diverse material as folk epic and ballad, myth and legend, hymn and invocation, and rhymes and runes. The language of the songs is altogether different from that of ordinary speech. The manner of singing again differ from group to group. Repetitions and vocal interpolations characterize the singing of the folk songs.

A moving beautiful expression in song or drama is dance. The movement may be confined to hand or feet or may cover whole of the body. Dancing in a circle is the basic formation of folk dance. In the primitive societies dance is a means of collective entertainment. The belief of the tribal people is that their sacred dances were taught by their gods shows a sacred origin of the dance. The dancing in India dates back to hoary past. Rightly does observe N. Sarma, "Dance is an important facet of abhinaya. Indian dance involves both nrtta, nritya and natya. The nrtta suggests the rhythmic movement of the body for its own sake. But it cannot express bhava i.e., state by means of abhinaya. On the other hand, the nritya can suggest rasa as well as bhava eg., state." The living primitive people are leading simple life. There are no special costumes for loka nrtya. They can paint their bodies or stick peacock feathers to enhance the impact of loka nrtya but they would never wear a costume lest their free movements be inhibited. Simplicity and spontaneity are main features of the folk-dance.

Songs, music and dance of the Hajongs are a composite whole which is one of the important features of their culture. In folk songs, verse and music go together and the musical aspect is much more reflected in practice. The folk-poetry is merely a vehicle for the folk-tune. The tunes are anonymous. Handclaps and timely ejaculations reinforce the rhythm. They go on singing a small poem of four to eight lines for hours together with the help of folk music.

The terms gāhen and nāchnā are used by the Hajongs to indicate the meanings of song and dance respectively.7 The feature common to the folk song and folk dance of the Hajong community is very simple in nature. These are one sub-genre of the oral literature of the Hajongs and are perpetuated by oral tradition. The folk songs among them there is generally no technique of teaching, certainly no formal technique, connected with the making and singing of songs; they are learnt by the ear and transmitted in this fashion from generation to generation. The folk-dances of the Hajongs are colourful and stimulated. They present an amazing melody of music rhythm and folk elements. In dances there are reflected their struggle for existence, their attitude to Nature and their child-like sense of wonder at seeing the symbols change. Generally most of the dances of the Hajongs are ritualistics. They believed in the worship of evil spirits and supernatural powers. As a means of response to supernatural powers, their dances obviously are a sacred act. Not all dances of the Hajongs today are sacred, some of them have a series of charming dances performed to enliven life. Song and dance are inter-linked. The song and dance current among the Hajongs with respect to its simplicity

7. Informant: N.M. Hajong (45), Dhamar, Dist. Goalpara, dt. 2.3.98
aspect are again of diverse type and nature. Here an attempt has been made to discuss on the different types of song and dance extant amongst the Hajongs.

*Bās puja* song and dance:

*Bās puja* song and dance connected with *Madan-kām*, the sex God constitute an important part of the Hajong oral literature. The speciality of *bās puja* singing and dancing is that it can be performed on the occasion of *Madan-kām*, the sex God, which is worshipped in the month of *Bohāg* (Assamese month) annually. *Bās puja* songs and dances are performed and enjoyed more for entertainment than for any ritualistic significance.\(^7\) The young boys join together and form a troupe which moves from family to family and performs the various types of songs and dances along with their traditional musical instruments. They move to the neighbouring villages also and exchange joking and pleasantries and collect rice or money for their performance.

The musical instruments accompanying the performance are *dhuluk* (i.e., drum), *kartāl* (i.e., cymbal) and *bānsi* (i.e., flute made of bamboo). Though the *dhuluk* is made of a piece of hollowed wood with hides on both ends, it is suspended from the shoulder with a rope and is beaten with both hands so as to make a low sweet sound. Over the traditional dresses the boys wrap *gamocas* (i.e., towels) on their heads.\(^8\)

The nature of performance:

In presenting the performance the troupe is generally formed with 10 to 15 members. There is no specific number of participants.

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7. For *Bas puja* song: Supra, Chapter III (A)
8 Informant: S.N. Hajong (65), Bonda, Guwahati; dt. 26.3.2000
When entering into the performance the party is headed by the gitāl and he is followed by some assistants i.e., the pālis with instruments and the rest come last. During the performance bānsi is generally blown. The group may be divided into two parts— the singers and the instrumentalists on one side and the dancers take their stand on other side. The instrumentalists play on their instruments by standing while the gitāl sings the songs which are repeated by the pālis and the accompanied dance moves round and round clockwise and anti-clockwise. Those boys who dance with a whisk in a small decorated bamboo pole held with one hand are called them as bāsuwās in the local language.9 The main musical instruments used along with dance movements are dhuluk, tāl and bānsi. During the entire period of bās pujā continuing for three days the young boys dance in rhythms in the tunes of the musical instruments. The choreography is simple but effective. There are definite body movements for the dancers. Sometimes they posses the free hand making gestures with the various intricate stepplings. The dance is not of the margī type but of a desi type with a peculiarity of local variant. While the first few songs are devoted to various gods and goddesses the remaining ones are love songs only.10 It is the peculiar feature that the femalefolk cannot participate in singing and dancing but they enjoy the dancing and singing by their menfolk as onlookers.11

10. For Bās pujā song. Supra. Chapter III
Kārtika puja song and dance:

Kārtika puja songs and dances have a special place in the oral literature of the Hajong community. This type of the songs and dances is associated with the Kārtika puja performed on the last day of the month of Kāti (Assamese month).

The nature of performance: For the performance of the Kārtika puja songs and dances a small plot of area measuring about 30 feet wide and 40 feet long is required. A few days before the actual commencement of the puja near the Tulsi (Basil) plant an old woman performs mock cultivation by ploughing with the help of two small girls. On the day of the worship the idol of Kārtika is installed and throughout the whole night singing and dancing by womenfolk continue. The performances of Kārtika puja songs based on the various qualities of God, Kārtika constitute one of the most popular and widely extant institutions of folk-entertainment combination of singing and dancing. These songs also consist of both narrative and shorter pieces sung to the accompaniment of dances. The group of singers consists of 10 to 12 female members. The noticeable feature is that six or seven young girls and women with the bows and arrows sing the various songs and dance throughout the whole night. The songs are sung to the tune of clappings of hands. Movements of the hands and the body, although repetitive, are attractive. Much of the singing is marked by expressions of hand gestures with sexual element which is considered essential for the propitiation of the

12. For Kārtika songs, Supra, Chapter III (A)
God. Much mimetic acting is also performed through the Kartika pujā dances. Since this ritualistic dance is marked by esoteric practices dominated by eroticism, little is used the traditional musical instruments such as dhuluk, tāl, bānsi by clapping the hands.13

_Lewā-tānā song and dance:_

_Lewā-tānā_ songs and dances associated with the chorkhelā or chormāga festival are the most distinctive type of folk songs and dances of the Hajong community. The term _lewā-tānā_ is used by the Hajongs to indicate the meaning of pulling of creeper. The _lewā-tānā_ songs and dances as seen among the Hajongs have a few fixed patterns and seem to have a sexual basis, thus indicating its association with some agricultural fertility cult. It has been observed that _lewā-tānā_ dances are accompanied by songs of an erotic characters.14

In presenting the performance of _lewā-tānā_ songs and dances two troupes of Hajong youth— one consisting 10 to 15 young boys of marriageable age and the other consisting of 10 to 15 young girls of marriageable age putting on their traditional dresses and ornaments dance and sing songs of love in their language. One of them acts the role of chief assistant who beats a _dhāki_ (i.e., drum), another boy blows the _bānsi_ (i.e., flute made of bamboo and other two or three boys play the _rāmkartāl_ (a kind of cymbal). There is no other musical instrument except _dhāki, bānsi_ and _tāl_.15

13. Informant : Sashi Hajong (65), Bonda, Guwahati, dt. 10/2/2000
The preparation for the lewā-tānā songs and dances is started one and a half or two months ahead of the date of the chorkhelā festival which begins two or three days ahead Dipāwāli. During the time of this festival the troupes go round the village from family to family displaying the various types of songs and dances in the evening of day and continue from 7 days to 9 days. When the party enters the courtyard of a family, the leader of the party begins to dance and the chief singer beats the dhāki (drum) and begins to sing the song. The manner of singing is peculiar. The chief singer sings only the beginning part of pada (First stanza), the rest of which is sung by the assistants in chorus. Sung antiphonally, these songs express adoration of sweetheart, glorify youth and speak of frustration and sorrow. It has to be admitted, of course, the performance of the lewā-tānā songs and dances of the Hajongs bears similarity with the songs and dances of Assamese Bihu. Sung to the accompaniment of musical instrument such as dhāki, bansi and tāl and vigorous hand-clapping, the melodic and rhythmic patterns of lewā-tānā songs, of which there is a large number of set models to choose from, are robust and lifting in nature. Often lusty shouting and whistling come at the end of the 'prelude' to a song which is normally rendered without rhythm. At the end of the singing and dancing the troupe gives asirvāda e.g., blessings to the household and in return of it the household gives them rice or money. Similarly they visit the next family and so on.

Bhuin māgā song and dance:

The bhuin māgā songs and dances associated with the festival of Jātra pujā which is observed by the Hajongs of Assam from tithi

16. For Lewa-tana song: Supra, Chapter III (A)
of Vijayā Dasami of autumnal Durgā pujā. The performance aims at the well-being of the society.17

The nature of performance:

The troupe of the bhuin māgā song and dance is generally formed with 12 to 15 members consisting of young boys. The members of the troupe put their traditional dresses. The principal singer of the troupe is called as māo gitāl who sings the various songs during the entire time of the Jātrā pujā festival. One of them beats dhāki (i.e., drum), another boy blows the bānsi (flute) and other two or three boys play the rāmkartāls (i.e., a kind of cymbals).

The party is headed by the māo gitāl and others fellow him. He is the principal singer cum reciter who remains at the side of the group and gives the lead in the singing of the songs and others repeat them in chorus. The person who blows the bānsi remains at the rest of the group and blows the bānsi off and on. After entering into the courtyard of a family, they make a circle keeping the māo gitāl in the centre and move round and round with dancing steps. The dance movements are simple and the entire performance is marked by the singing and dancing.18

Whatever may be the origin of the bhuin māgā or thubau māgā festival, it can easily be seen that the dances and songs connected with it fully discloses the some ritualistic performances with devotion. The bhuin māgā songs and dances are performed from the Vijayā Dasami

18. Informant: S.N. Hajong (65) Bonda, dt. 27.3.1999
(autumnal Durgā Pujā) to Lakshmi pujā on the month of September/October in every year. The dance is incorporated with singing and playing style of the Hajongs in general.

Although the bhuin māgā song and dance have been gradually disappeared by leaps and bounds yet a tendency has grown among the educated youths of the Hajong community to restore this traditional song and dance.

**Gitālu gāhen (i.e., gitālu song and dance):**

The gitālu gāhen and nritya (i.e., gitālu song and dance) are one of the important folk-performances of the Hajong society. This type of songs and dances is closely associated with māre pujā and marriage ceremony. The term gitālu has been derived from the word gitāl or gidāl which means singer. The main singer of the Padmāpuran or māre performance is also known as gitāl or gidāl. In this context, although the etymology of the term gitālu gāhen is not definitely known, it is most likely that it is related with the songs sung by the gitālu. Perhaps the post of gitālu bears similarity with the ojā of the ojāpāli artform which is one of the most ancient traditional major performing artforms of Assam.

The most important and broadly common performance is the song-dance and mime combination displayed semi-professional troupes called gitālu gāhen in the local dialect. The troupe generally consists of 8 to 12 members. It is seen that the performances are held at the

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19. Informant: Same as the reference No. 18, dt. 27.3.99
time of the Manasā puja which is held on the last day of the month of Sāon (Assamese 4th month). Besides this, it is also the custom amongst the Hajongs that the performances are also organised ahead the marriage ceremony of boys and girls of every family.

The dresses and ornaments of the performers of the gitālu gāhen troupe are simple. The gitālu wears a dhuti and shirt wrapping a chādar on the neck. He does not wear headgear but wraps a gamoca (i.e., a towel) on his head. The pālis (assistant singers) wear dhutis and ganzis (banians) without having shirts. They do not use headgears and wear no nepur (i.e., anklets). The deodhānis wear mekhālā upto bosom and blouse and take a red photā i.e., red mark on their foreheads. They do not tie their hair.20

The sketch of the structure of the space of the performance of the gitālu gāhen is given below:

20. Informant: Same as the reference No. 18, dt. 27.3.99
A. Altar of the Goddess.
B. Offering to the Goddess.
C. Female shamans fallen in trances.
D. Female shamans in dance movement
E. The *gitalu*
F. The *pālis*
G. The place for *deoshi* eg., priest.
H. The sitting place of the *gitalu* including *pālis*
I. The place for male audience.
J. The place for female audience.
K. The place for drummers
L. Entrance.  

**The nature of performance:**

The performance of the *gitalu gāhen* begins with a singing of *Vandana* in standing position. At the very outset of the *Manasā* worship, the *gitalu* invokes the Goddess, *Manasā*. The *gitalu* sings the songs of the Goddess, *Manasā, Beulā Lakhindar* and *Netāi Dhubuni* cases current orally amongst them. There are dance movements and these dance movements are not stylistic and sophisticated. The *gitalu* carries a whisk by one hand and shows hand-gesture (*mudra*) by the other hand with dance movements. He stands in frontside and sometime he moves backward giving emphasis on the act of singing. The *pālis* dance from front to back and sing the songs alongwith the

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21. Informant : Same as the reference No. 18, dt. 27.3.99
gitālu. They turn again with free motion of the body. During their movements, they generally play the khols (drum), kartāl (cymbal) and bānsi. There is a co-ordination between the playing of kartāls (cymbals) and the singing of the songs. The playing of kālis (pipe), besides the khols and the kartāls, used to be a speciality of these performances.22

The language of the verses they sung are purely local dialects. The deodhānis (i.e., female shamans) are the part and parcel of the gitālu gāhen performance. Like the deodhānis of the non-tribals of Assam, the deodhānis of the Hajongs are also confined only to the femalefolk. Generally five female shamans take active part in the performance. They dance alongwith the gitālu around the altar. They act according to the themes of the song sung by the gitālu. The female shamanistic dance associated with the Manasā worship is highly influenced by the shamanistic dance current in the culture of the Hajongs, is also called as dadhāni or deodhāni nritya. One of the five female shamans dances as dadhāni or deodhāni and in the midst of the dance she fells down near the altar being senseless, which is known as dadhni dakat parā i.e., falling into trance. Belief goes that in the state of trance she can forecast regarding the future happenings. The gitālu gāhen performance is a combination of singing, dancing and acting. This performance continue for days together. The songs (i.e., gitāl gāhen) are mostly songs of the Manasā cult sung to the accompaniment of khol (drum), kartāl (cymbal) and bānsi (flute made of bamboo). The speciality of māre singing is that it can be performed on prior to the celebration of any marriage ceremony besides at a Manaśa pujā.

22. Informant: N.M. Hajong (45), Dhamar, Goalpara, dt. 29.9.99
The Hajong term for marriage song is *biā gīt*. Songs sung on the occasion of marriage are something different from what are commonly known as marriage songs in most non-tribal Assamese societies. The noticeable feature is that the Hajong womenfolk never sing marriage songs. The most interesting episode in a Hajong marriage is the continuous singing of songs by a group of singers (i.e., professional singers) called *guālu gāhen*. The instruments used in marriage songs are *dhuluk* (drum) and *kartāl* (a kind of cymbal).

Apart from these, two other forms of folk song and dance such as (i) *tenglā gāhen* (i.e., song) and dance, and (ii) *rowalāgā* song and dance were extant amongst the Hajong community in the past. These are not alive today and nothing is definitely known about their nature.

(b) Drama

Drama is a mixed form embracing dialogue, dance and music. It deals in publicly understood motives and symbols. Rightly does observe R.D. Abrahams, "Drama of any sort calls for the creation of a play world by the players, generally through the use of conventional symbolic objects—musk, costumes, a special area for playing and conventional stylized actions. Drama in other words, is primarily recognizable as a play activity and therefore, is closely related to game, dance and ritual. All of these call for the establishment of a play world that is recognizably removed from the real world and yet in many ways similar to it."  

23. Koch, S.N. : *Chandurdinga*, P. 102  
Of late, the Hajong religion is not a unified body of beliefs and practices as it used to be in the past. Since their migration from place to place due to economic condition, the Hajongs have been under constant influences of the other religions prevalent among the local people. One of the visible outcome of these influences is the emergence of the Bhakatiya cult which is an admixture of both the traditional religion of the Hajongs and neo-Vaisnavism cum Tantricism.

Some of the Hajongs have been greatly influenced by the school of Gaudiya Vaisnavism in due course than Assam neo-Vaisnavism. The spiritual guides of the majority of those professing Vainhnavism are Brahman, Gosains and their non-Brahman assistants called Adhikāris, belonging to the Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Bengali Kirtans are sung in most of the religious celebrations. There is also a large number of folk songs either containing direct references to Chaitanya Vaishnavism.

A few Hajongs have accepted Vaisnavism who celebrated religious practices by the Vaisnave Adhikāris. The Hajongs who have accepted Gaudiya Vaisnavism celebrate their religious practices by the Adhikāris with the singing of the Kirtan introduced by the saint poet Chaitanyadeva. This new system has replaced the traditional religious system. But the neo-Vaisnavite practices stated by the Hajongs could not totally wipe out the traditional religious beliefs. Some of Hajongs have given up their traditional beliefs and religious practices and have adopted neo-vaisnavism. The converted Hajongs believe neither in spiritism nor tantricism. Expect nāmkirtana, the Hajong Vaisnavas
borrowed from the local adaptation of the *Purāṇa* and has at least an indirect religious appeal.

The Formation of *Bakasura gāhen*:

The *Bakāsura gāhen* troupe consists of 12 to 15 members including grown up men, women, and boys. They are generally engaged in agriculture or some such occupations but train themselves up in their space time and give performance when invited. Usually the performances are held during winter season when they have plenty of free time. Each troupe possesses two or three *khols* (drum), two or three *bānsis* (flutes made of bamboo) and two *dhāpā kartāls* (a kind of cymbals). The musical instruments used by the troupe bear similarity with those of the Bengali folk.26

Here also the performance leans more heavily on narrative singing than an acting. The main player of the *Bakāsura gāhen* is *Krishna*. The numbers of characters in the performance are not many. The characters are child *Krishna*, *Balorāma*, *Nanda*, *Yasodā*, *Sridāma*, *Sudāma*, *Bakāsura*, *Hāo Thākur* and *Dhundasālā* (i.e., three or four jokers). A noticeable feature is that *Krishna* and *Balorāma* are regarded as the real figures of the *Purāṇa* and people offer them prayers as the incarnation of God when they enter in the stage. They throw flowers and other offerings on *Krishna* and *Balorāma*.

Costumes:

The costumes of a *Bakāsura gāhen* play are simple and unobtrusive. Child *Krishna* wears special dress and puts on a *tupi* or a

26. Informant: Same as the reference No. 25, dt. 30.3. 99
head dress. Balorāma, Hao Thākur, Sridāma, and Sudāma wear special dresses like the dress of Krishna except a tupi. Nanda wears half-pant and uses gamoca i.e., towel as a headgear. He does not wear the shirt. Yasodā has a distinct style of her own in dress. Dhundasālās wear long shirts and use gamocas as a headgear. Bakāsura: a man made up as Bakāsura with jute hair and beard appears on the stage. Māo gitālu who acts as the leader of the group, wears a dhoti of some length and shirt and a wrapper, folded lengthwise around his neck.

The use of masks and artificial beards are the main features of the play. The members of the play donot require any particular green room for their personal make up. They rather choose a house of nearby family of the Sabha Kholā (i.e., place of Sabha) 27.

The different functions and performance of the troupe:

The performance begins from the time of childhood of Krishna staying at the house of Nanda and starts with an invocation. Then māo gitālu introduces the characters of the play while his musician companions go on singing and playing the instruments. He also plays on a khol (drum). Bakāsura gāhen performance is organised under a māo gitālu who is the principal singer and manager, all rolled into one. The noticeable character is that Krishna is regarded as the main figure among the performers. He plays important role in some part of the performance.

Yasodā: Next to Master Krishna, Yasodā performs important function in this dramatic performance. She is to act as the principal

27. Informant: Same as the reference No. 25, dt. 30.3.99
performer and has to be adept in acting in the play. Next to Yasodā, the performance of māo gitalu is worth mentioning. In facts, in the present form of art, the most sought after quality in Yasodā is her capacity to make the people attract by the introduction of motherly sequences. Often Yasodā dominates the show who tightens Krishna for his childlike activities with the help of a rope.

**Hāpāl**: Hāpāl in the local dialect means a boy and the hāpāls in the Bakāsura gāhen play generally numbering three or four are boys dressed as colleague of Krishna. They are Balorāma, Sridāma, Sudāma and Hao Thākur. They also take part in acting when dramatic pieces with female characters are introduced. But their chief function is to dance and usually they go on dancing almost throughout the performance. **Dhundasālās**: Dhundasālās generally consist of three or four persons and they present some scence full of comic elements. **Bakāsura**: In the last part of the play it appears that a heron type demon named Bakāsura fights with Krishna while along with his colleagues, Krishna goes to the field for grazing the cattle. In the long run Bakāsura is killed.

**The bāin and the gāin**: Next to the māo gitalu, the important functionaries are the bāin and gāin. They are expert in various arts associated with Bakāsura gāhen performance and well verse in gita vadva and abhinaya.28

A Bakāsura performance is specially held on the occasion of chorkhela festival or some other ceremonies. In the context of these festivals, public fairs are held and in these fairs this dramatic performance

28. Informant: Same as the reference No. 25, dt. 30.3.99
is organised, which can attract the people assembled there. The witnesses of the performance give payment by buying tickets since organisers of the festival and the fairs have to pay a handsome amount to the manager of the troupe. Of course, the amount varies from place to place, which mostly depends on the popularity of the troupe and resources of the organisers. The play usually begins at the evening and generally continues throughout the night with the arrangement of light.

**Stage:** This dramatic performance is performed usually in open space. It takes place under a pandal. For the purpose a single setting is installed which remains throughout the play. In fact this setting is the stage and centre of action of the play. It is made mainly with bamboos and barks of plantain trees and consists of churning pots, churning rods and churning ropes. The audience sit around the make shift stage in a horse shoe pattern. On the open side the musicians and actors take their seat.29

The performance begins with an invocation to Lord Vishnu for getting blessings so that the performance may be performed without any kind of obstacles. The actors take their respective positions after making veneration to the stage and the spectators. Then the *māo gitālu* introduces the performers of the play. Normally the movement of the troupe is towards one particular direction, at times the performers also move backward and forward. There is also variation at the speed which is normally slow but at the last the movement becomes faster and at particular moment few actors are seen to circle the stage at a tremendous speed.30

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29. Informant: Same as the reference No. 25, dt. 30.3.99
30. Informant: Same as the reference No. 25, dt. 30.3.99
The theme of the play is based on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. But the entire story of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is not taken, only a few sequences are taken. The performance of the Bakāsura is not a full dramatic performance. As such it may be called quasi dramatic artform. The theme of the play generally proceeds through the singing of narrative songs. Now and then there is a break of some kind or other in the narrative singing. The māo gitālu gives short introduction of the story and the various characters of the theme. There is no set script for a sequence and the acting is on the whole extempore. Besides the overall pattern is previously arranged and some preparations are also made. The Bakāsura gāhen play is a combination of singing, dancing and acting, comic sequences are also frequently introduced.

**Language**: The dramas they performed are local dialects. However the language used in the performance today is a patois of the Assamese. This is particularly true of the narrative pieces and some of the dramatic dialogues.\(^{31}\)

**Kārtika gān**:

The Kārtika gān is another type of indigenous folk drama current amongst the Hajongs. The performance is generally held in the context of Kārtika worship. The Kārtika gān is predominantly a ritual dance with some dramatic elements, since there is no regular dramatic representation.

The Kārtika gān is performed exclusively by the womenfolk only. The menfolk are neither allowed to participate nor to visit the

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31. Informant : Same as the reference No. 25, dt. 30.3.99
place of occurance. It is generally performed on the last day of the month of Kāti (7th month of Assamese calendar).

In this artform whole agriculture operation is enacted through mimicry. The Kārtika gān is performed usually near the Tulsi (Basil) plant and an old woman offers the pujā impersonates God. Kārtika and known as Kāti sijjan. A pair of bananas and a pair of areca nuts along with betel leaves are made into a bundle with a piece of cloth and placed before the altar. An old woman being dressed as a man, performs mock cultivation by ploughing a very small plot of land with the help of two small girls as if they were a pair of bullocks. After ploughing, various seeds are sown at the site. Then comes the ceremonial reaping. The woman who desires a son, kneels down before the altar and cuts a sheap of corn, earlier planted there, amidst the auspicious sounds made by the woman. After this there are the simulation of thrashing, winnowing, storing, etc. Sometimes even the selling of the grain is enacted.

In the long run, comes the badul hana (ie., the action of driving the bats) part in which the women folk imitate, with small specially made bows and arrows, the action of driving bates that are supposed to represent the enemies of the crops. The artform consists of singing, dancing, mimicrying and beating of traditional musical instruments. This performance continues the whole night.32

Kāli demanā gān:

Another type of folk drama found amongst the Hajongs is known by the name Kāli demanā gan (in the local dialect) which is derived

32. Informant : Shri Sashi Hajong (55), Dudhnoi, Goalpara, dt. 9.4.99
from the Sanskrit term *Kāli daman*, i.e., subjugation Kāli, the king of snakes. The theme of the play has been based on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. But the theme of the *Kāli demanā nāta* as found among the Hajongs has little connection with the Purānic story. The performers present the theme mixing local fervours. The performance generally held in the contexts of various rituals and celebrations as well as festivals.

The structure of *Kali demanā gān*:

The troupe of *Kali demanā gan* generally consists of 12 to 15 members including men, women and boys. Drumers and pipers are essential in this performance. Besides players on *kholes* and *bānsis* as well as *kartāls* play important roles in this context. Among the characters found in the drama the following are worth mentioning, e.g., *mao gitalu*, child *Krishna*, *Balorāma*, *Nanda*, *Yasodā*, *Gopa*, *Gopinis*, *Sudāma*, *Sridāma*, *Kāli nāgā* and his wife.³³

Costumes:

The costumes of a *Kāli demanā gān* are very simple. Child *Krishna* wears emblematic dress and puts on a *tupi* or a headgear. *Balorāma*, *Sridāma*, and *Sudāma* wear special dresses like the dress of *Krishna* except the headgear. *Nanda* puts on a half pant and half shirt and uses *gamoca* (i.e., towel) as a headgear. *Yasodā* uses a usual style of her own in dress. *Māo gitālu* wears generally a simple *dhoti* and *kurtā*. He also puts a *chādar* across the shoulder. *Dhundāsālās*

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³³ Informant: Paresh Ch. Hajong (50), Lakhipur, Goalpara, dt. 31.3.99
use shorter dhotis, worn in the fashion of an average peasant and a vest or a similar short sleeved shirt. As they also act as a clown, they sometimes don outlandish headgears. A man dressed as a Kāli nāgā (eg., the king of snake) with black cloth and appears on the stage. Gopinis use simple dresses like mekhālā and chādar. The use of masks and artificial beards are also seen. The performers donot require any particular green room for their make up but they prefer to a house of nearby family of sabha khola (place of sabha).³⁴

Different functions and performance of the troupe:

The performance begins with an invocation to Lord Vishnu for getting blessings so that they can perform the performance without facing any kind of difficulty. The performers take their respective positions after making veneration to the stage and the audiences. After this the play is introduced. Then the māo gitālu introduces the characters of the play. Every Kāli demanā gān troupe is organised under a māo gitālu who is the principal singer and manager. He recites the theme of the play to the accompaniment of a khol (drum). Dance is an integral part of the Kāli demanā gān. The noticeable feature is that Krishna is regarded as the real prominent figure among the performers. He plays great role in the performance. Next to Krishna, Yasodā plays important function in the Kāli demanā gan performance. In fact in the present form of the performance she plays such a very pathetic role that the audience compel to weep at the time of bitting of Krishna by Kāli nāgā. The role of the Kāli nāgā is played by a man who is known as

³⁴. Informant : Same as the reference No. 33, dt. 31.3.99
Kāli nāgā. The anger of Kāli nāgā expresses through human like dialogues and then he bites Krishna. Dhundāsālas in the Kāli demanā play usually numbering three or four are men and actually they present some scene full with comic elements. So off and on they also present, with the co-operation of others, purely farcical pieces. In the other technique all the inessential accessories like the pālis, the bāins and the gāins are dispensed with. Only the māo gitālu and the dhundāsālas sing the narrative songs in the sitting posture to the accompaniment of the khol (drum) and kartāl (a kind of cymbal).35

Mode of presentation:

Kāli demanā performance is held on the occasion of fixed ceremonies. There is no regular performance. The party takes an amount depending of the expenditure on the resources of the organisers. The performance generally begins in the evening and continues for three hours.

The Kāli demanā play is generally performed in the open place. For the purpose a single sitting is installed. In fact this setting is the stage and centre of action of the play. The performance starts with an invocation with the accompaniment of khol (drum) and kartāl (cymbal). The dramatrical performance presents on the stage till the end of it.

The theme of the performance is based on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The performance has little connection with the original story of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the performers present these plays in

35. Informant: Same as the reference No. 33, dt. 31.3.99
their own style and in a rather ridiculous manners. There is not much dialogue, while the story proceeds with the singing of songs and the characters have resort mainly to action and gesture. The comic elements with humorous dialogues that are inserted from time to time usually have no connection with the story of the play. The whole thing presents a touching scence.36

**Language** : It is observed that all the steps of Kāli demanā performance are generally conducted in the colloquial dialects. Today the language used in much of the performance is an Assamese language.

In addition to these, three other forms of folk drama, Gopuni gāhen, Devi juddha and Ruksi gāhen were current in the Hajong society in the past, but neither are alive today nor found any active bearer.

The Hajongs and the non-tribal people of Assam have become so intimate and well acquainted with each other that they have assimilated unknowingly many points of each other's culture into their own since unknown time. The striking feature is that like the non-tribal people of Assam, the dhuliā partī as well as the nāgarā nām partī have been completely absent in the Hajong society.37

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36. Informant : Same as the reference No. 33, dt. 31.3.99
37. Informant : Same as the reference No. 33, dt. 31.3.99