ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE OJĀPĀLI ART FORM AND ITS ANTIQUITY

(A) The meaning and significance of the term Ojāpāli:

The term ojāpāli is a coined word. It has two parts (i) Ojā or Ojha and (ii) pāli. The word Ojā or Ojha has come out of the Sanskrit word upādhyāya. The term Ojā or Ojha may be defined like-wise -

(a) a teacher,
(b) a teacher subordinate to another teacher,
(c) a head artisan,
(d) the head man of a troupe of singers or reciters,
(e) village-doctors skilled in charm, spell, witchcraft etc.,
(f) a skilled person,

and

(g) a master musician or instructor in music in the Sattras.

The Ojā of the performing art form of ojāpāli possesses many traits mentioned above. Ojā or Ojha in Assam signifies the head man or the leader of the ojāpāli art form. In a sense he is a teacher as he teaches the art of music, dancing, mudrās and other things to his pālis. He is the chief singer (or reciter) of the troupe. The Ojā may be called a village-doctor also as he prescribes folk medicines.

1. For detailed discussion kindly see the Chapter VI.
4. Ibid., p. 251 FN.
The word Pali may come from Sanskrit words like Palita or Pali. Assamese word Pali carries the following meanings:
(a) One of several persons who work by rotation,
(b) an assistant or subordinate artisan,
(c) one of the subordinates of the ojapali artform, and
(d) a dose of medicine.5

In the ojapali artform the palis perform their functions as assistants or helpers of the chief singer, i.e., Oja.

Although the words 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 and a single word with a single meaning, i.e., the living and popular artform of ojapali. This performing art form consists usually of three to seven minstrels. The chief singer, i.e., oja recites themes from the mythological stories with music, mudras and dance and the palis take up the refrain and repeat the song with playing of cymbals and marking of time with their feet.

B. POPULAR BELIEFS REGARDING THE ORIGIN OF THE OJAPALI ARTFORM:

Popular stories or popular artforms are always mingled with some popular beliefs or legends. The pauranic stories are the best examples of these tendencies. Even Indian tradition believes that the Indian dramas have been created by the all father Brahma.6 In the same way many popular beliefs and

5. For detailed discussion kindly see the Chapter VI.
legends have been synchronized with the origin of the artform of ojāpāli by the folk-mind. Various theories may be cited regarding the origin of the artform. A few such theories have been discussed in the following pages.

(a) The theory of divine origin: According to this theory, Indra the king of gods being satisfied with Arjuna for his victory over the demons, the born-enemy of gods, summoned Urvaśī, to perform dance and music just to entertain Arjuna. In course of the performance, Urvaśī fell in love with Arjuna. Urvaśī told Indra about her love. Indra requested Arjuna to wed Urvaśī. Pārtha did not accede to the proposal. As a result, Arjuna was cursed by Urvaśī by saying that the third Pāndava would be an eunuch for a year. Arjuna returned to the earth and remained as an eunuch. During the year, Arjuna performed songs and dances that he enjoyed in heaven in the form of a gandharva. He brought dresses and instruments from Amarāvatī. It was Arjuna who brought the gandharva-vidyā, i.e., art of ojāpāli from Paradise. According to this theory Arjuna was the originator of the ojāpāli art-form.

This theory is endorsed by M. Neog, He writes: 'The Suknaṇi ojāpāli circles believe that their art was at first brought on earth by Arjuna in the role of Brihamalā from Indra's heaven, and it was introduced to both Hindus and Muslims by the Darangī-raja (the chief of Darrang).'

7. Informant: Late Haliram Oja, patidarrang(Titkuchi), Kamrup, data collected on 12.3.92.
(b) **The theory of Parijāti**: The *bivāhar-ojāpāli* circles of Darrang believe that the art form of *bivāhar ojāpāli* (a variety of *ojāpāli* art form) was at first got by Parijāti in her dream. While she was busy with weaving at her loom suddenly she heard some melodious songs that came from heaven. All of a sudden, she came away from her loom and looked at heaven and started to dance and sing in different rāgas and gestures. It is said that she got all the essential dresses and instruments, such as *nepur, jāma, cāpkan* and *pāguri* in her dream. Later on, she taught the art of dance and song to her disciples. The art form learnt by Parijāti in dream and taught to her disciples was known as *bivāhar-ojāpāli* art form.9

(c) **The theory of Vyāsa-kalāi**: Tradition goes that Vyāsa-kalāi was the father of the *bivāhar-ojāpāli*. D. Sarma advocates this view. According to him a person who is well versed in musicology is known as Vyāsa-kalāi. The descendants of those scholars are still to be found at Vyāsapāra, a well known village of the Darrang district.10 Sarma opines that the Vyāsa-kalāis were supposed to be the gurus of music and dance.11 A *Purana pāṭhaka-Brahmana* (Daivajña) is also known as a Vyāsa. Vyāsa is nothing but a title. A Vyāsa acquiring mastery in the art of music particularly in the Mahābhārata or Purāṇa

11. Ibid.
(24)

was known as Vyāsa-kalāi. The etymological meaning of the term Vyāsa-kalāi is proficient in the art of the Vyāsa's music, i.e., the style of recitation of the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas.

At the time of Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568 A.D.) there was a Vyāsa-Kalāi. The Carita-puthi (hagiography) narrates his qualities in this way:

There is a man whose name is Vyāsa-Kalāi,
He is a brāhmin (daivajña) by caste,
He is endowed with all good qualities,
There is none equal to him.

The Katha-guru-Carita mentions one Vyāsa-Kalāi who was a devotee of Śaṅkaradeva. But the carita-puthi does not inform us anything about his proficiency in the art of oṭāpali. So, this Vyāsa-kalāi may not be the person in question. Although we do not get any information regarding the Vyāsa-kalāi in question nevertheless it may be assumed that the name of Vyāsa Kalāi was getting popular among the masses as a proper noun.

12. The formation of the word can be shown in this way:
   Vyāsa + Kala + i
   the sage Vyāsadeva; Kala = the art of Vyāsadeva's music (i.e., the style of recitation of the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇa) 'i' is a suffix which carries the sense of proficiency

13. Vyasakalai nāme janeka ācaya/
   tāṅka sama guñī nai jātita brāhmaṇa
   Daityarī Thākur : Śrī Śaṅkaradeva āru Śrī Mādhavadeva
   Pp. 77-78.

The biyāhar-olapāli circles believe that Vyāsa-kalai learnt the art of olapāli from Parijātī and he taught the art to others. In this way the performing artform of olapāli came in vague. 14(a)

Scientific Approach:

(i) The Great Tradition of Kathakatā:

The theories regarding the origin of the olapāli artform discussed above are not based on reason. Firstly, the theory of divine origin may not be taken into consideration since this theory is not logical. To give a paurānic grandeur the myth of Arjuna-Urvasī has been synchronized with the olapāli institution, as such the theories of divine origin may be rejected.

D. Sarma and A.C. Barua, the two advocators of the theories of Parijātī and Vyāsa-kalai, could not establish the historicity of these two persons. Even all the olapāli of biyāhar-olapāli variety do not accept these two theories. Old records are also not available regarding Parijātī and Vyāsa-kalai. The theory of Parijātī is purely a legend. Vyāsa-Kalai seems to be a title. Any Ojā (biyāhar ojā) who acquired proficiency in the art of Vyāsa-sangīta was called a Vyāsa-kalai.

According to a legend Vyāsa-Kalai and Kendu-Kalai were two brothers. Vyāsa-kalai was proficient in Vyāsa-Sangīta and Kendu-Kalai acquired mastery in Sukanānī Olapāli, i.e., Manasā Sangīta. The tradition of biyāhogā ojā (i.e., Vyāsa-sangīta) begins with Vyāsa-Kalai and the tradition of Manasā Sangīta begins with Kendu-Kalai. The Kāmrōpar Burahī states that there was a Brāhmin named Kendu-Kalai who worshipped Goddess Kamakhya with songs. Being pleased with the songs of Kendu Kalai Goddess Kamakhya appeared before him and danced in a naked state. The king requested Kendu-Kalai to show him Goddess Kamakhya's dance. Kendu Kalai requested the king to see Kamakhya's dance by
Vyāsa-kalāi is not a single man but there are so many Vyāsa-kalāis. So, these two theories may be eschewed.

From the aforesaid discussion it is clear that the ojāpāli art form never originated from Arjuna or Pārijātī or from Vyāsa-kalāi.

We have already mentioned that the ojāpāli art form emerged from the great tradition of Kathakata. In the Vedas we find two characters, the Upasthāpaka and Udgātā. The main function of the Upasthāpaka is to explain the mantras or to teach the mantras. In the same manner, the Udgātā is to chant hymns of the Śāmaveda. Likewise, we may mention the term Upādhyāya from which the term ojhā or ojā emanated. In Assam, the term ojhā or ojā suggests the leader of the ojāpāli art form.

The Manusmṛti defines the function of the upādhyāyā in this way:

\[
\text{ekadesām tu vedaśya vedāṅgānyapi vā punah /}
\]
\[
yoādhyāpayati vṛttīyaṁdumapādhyaṁyāṁ sa ucyate //}^{17}
\]

i.e., the upādhyāyā is a sub-teacher who instructs for wages only in a part of the Veda and is inferior to the Ācāryya.

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contd. ...14(a) peeping through a hole of the temple's walls.


15. Rgveda XI. 87.9  
16. Atharvaveda III.15.7  
17. Manusmṛti 2/241
Assamese ojha or ojā is also a teacher in a sense, because he teaches the art of music, dancing, mudrās and other things to his pālis. Like the Upādhyāya, the ojā also performs for wages. Unlike the Upādhyāya, the ojā does not teach Vedas or Vedāṅgas; but the Assamese ojā is skilled in many arts. By and large, the main purpose of the ojāpāli art form is to educate and edify the masses. From the foregoing discussion, we see that the Upādhyāya and the ojā have got many affinities in respect of their functions and activities. 18

"Although the functions of the Upaśṭēpaka, Udgaṭa as well as Upādhyāya are not the same nevertheless there is a common characteristic amongst the three. This characteristic is nothing but Kathakatā." 19

The ojāpāli may rightly be said to be a successor of the tradition of epic recitation and abhinaya. The epic recitation includes the recitation of epic-poems, such as the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata, the Bhāgavata and other Purāṇas which generally takes place on the occasion of religious festivals. This kind of recitation is always associated with some kind of abhinaya. The Kathaka performs the act of recitation and abhinaya. Just like a good orator he is required to make a liberal use of gestures for impressing the audience with what he delivers. 20 Similarly

19. Ibid, p. 252
the ojā of the olapali art form also recites the epic poems, such as the Assamese versions of the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata, the Bhāgavata and other Purāṇas. The art form generally takes place on the occasion of religious festivals and along with the recitation some kind of abhinaya is also performed. The ojā, just like a Kathaka is required to make a liberal use of gestures for impressing the audience with what he delivers. Now we may arrive safely at the conclusion that the olapali is a bearer of the great tradition of Kathakata. 21

The pan-Indian tradition of Kathakata which played an important role in the Vedic as well as the epic ages ultimately resulted in different audio-visual art forms. In this connection we may put forward a statement of C. Sivaramamurti in favour of our hypothesis: The divine benediction bestowed on dance is that it would be a great source of amusement for the world:

‘vinodajananaṁ līke nātyam etad bhavishyati,’ 21(a)

And wisdom, esteemed almost as a Veda, easily proved the best and most popular educator. More and more simplified in its language, diction and popular expression vācika but more colourful and complicated in its abhārya, costume and make up, easily comprehended by the folk in every village, arose the versions in regional languages, like Kuchipudi in Andhra, Kuravaṇji and Bhāgavatamela in Tamil Nadu, Kathakali in Kerala and Yakshagana in Karnātaka.” 22

21(a) Nātya-Śāstra, 1/120
(M.B. Ashton : Yaksagana)
This statement may be aptly applied in respect of the ojāpāli art form also. Like Yakṣaṭāma or Bhāgavatamela the ojāpāli is also a combination of dance and song. So, ojāpāli too, has a fairly long history like other performing art forms of India.

Bharata Muni in his Nātya Śāstra mentions four kinds of nāṭya-pravṛtta (i.e., local usages) prevalent in the different parts of India. These Pravṛtta are āvanti, dākināṭya, pāncalī and odhra-māgadhī.23 These classifications are entirely based upon the four-fold classification of the dramatic performance attached to four styles, viz bhārati (verbal), sātvati (grand), kaiśiki (graceful) and ārabhāti (violent).24 The Odhra-Māgadhī Pravṛtti includes Aṅga, Vāṅga, Kалиṅga, Vatsa, Odhra (Odra), Magadha, Pundra, Neপāla, Āṃtargīra, Bahirgīra, Plavamgama, Malada, Mallavartaka, Brahmottara, Bhārgava, Mārgava, Prāgjyotisa, Pulinda, Videha and Tāmrālipta.25 Prāgjyotisa mentioned by Bharata Muni is nothing but Kāmarūpa or old Assam. Basing on the observation of the Nātya-śāstra we may conjecture that a dramatic style attached to a pravṛtti was prevalent in ancient Assam before the first century B.C. Dramatic style includes both gītā (song) and nṛtya (dance) as well as vādyā (instrumental music).26 The ojāpāli style also includes both gītā and nṛtya as well as vādyā.

24. Ibid.
26. "Another peculiarity of the Hindu dramas was their general dependence on dance (nṛtya), song (gītā) and instrumental music (vādyā).” M. Ghosh (ed) Bharata Muni’s Nātya-Śāstra, Introduction, p.XIII.
Gāthaka, a synonym of ojā of the ojāpāli artform sings songs from the Epics and the purāṇas with nrtya and vādyā. It is apparent that the ojāpāli artform bears many similarities with Ordha-Māgadhī style mentioned by Bharata Muni. We can quote a comment made by B. Datta in favour of our observation: ‘The ojāpāli comprising gīta, vādyā and nrtya is a quasi-dramatic art form that bears many affinities with Ordha-Māgadhī style.’

Scholars are of opinion that the Natya-śāstra of Bharata Muni was composed before 100 B.C. According to M. Ghosh, “More than sixteen years ago, a careful investigation of the linguistic, material, geographical and ethnographic data, of the evidence to be drawn from the history of poetics and music, of the Kāmasāstra and the Arthasastra, and from inscriptions the present writer came to the conclusion that the available text of the Natya-śāstra existed in the second century after Christ while the tradition which it recorded may go back to a period as early as 100 B.C.”

Hence, we can definitely say that the ojāpāli art form was

27. The term gāthaka is found in the copper inscription granted by Svarcgadeva Laksmi Simha in connection with the land donation to Sāgara Daivajña, a well known pīyāhar ojha in the year 1774 A.D. (1696 Saka). The line runs like wise:

"śrīkṛti śrisāgarākhyāya daivajñakulajanmane /
tasmai gāthakavaryyāya trāmpatramidañca sah/"

28. B. Datta: Assamiya Saṅgītar Aitikya, p.4
current in Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa about the 1st century B.C. or earlier.

Most of the performing art forms of India and the world have rightly emanated out of religious motif. "Religious thoughts," says C.A.C. Pandeya, "made an inroad in art forms and directly or indirectly influence the motive force of regional theatrical arts." The Indian-dances are interwoven with religion. On this point Faubion Bowers says: "The connection between dance and religion is deep, particularly in Hinduism where Śiva is supposed to have created the very world by setting its first rhythm in motion by dance. Mythology abounds in descriptions of the gods dancing under a variety of circumstances." The ojāpāli art forms also emerged from religious fervour.

At the beginning, Sanskrit was the only vehicle of the ojāpāli art form (particularly the biyāhar-ojāpāli). Time passed. The modern Indian Languages became the direct vehicle of the ojāpāli. It appears that Sanskrit was the direct vehicle of the ojāpāli originally. This hypothesis may be substantiated by a few findings, since some functions of the art form are still performed in Sanskrit.

29(a) M. Sastri: Asamat Sangit Caroä, p.4
(Rāmaghenu, 6th year, Pāthāg)
31. Faubion Bowers: The Dance in India, p.15
32. N.C. Sarma: Origin and Development of the Ojāpāli, p.253
(Folklore, ed. S.Gupta, Calcutta, 1982)
(ii) The Tradition of Performing Mārgī Arts:

The oja-pali art form particularly the bi-vyāhara-oja-pali (vyāsa-saṅgīta), no doubt, is based on the tradition of performing mārgī arts of India. Prāgjyotisa-Kāmaśūpa (i.e. Assam) has variously been described as a land of music and as a land of dance. Manipur on the east is known throughout India and abroad for her unique dances, such as lāihāraobā ('to please the gods') and māsalīlā as well as kīrtan and pung cholem. Observes M. Neog, "Assam seems to have a long and strong tradition of culture of music and dance." 34

The Abhinavadarpana of Nandikesvara states that the tradition of lāsya-nṛtya begins with Ûṣā, the daughter of Vāna, the king of Sonitapura, who learnt the art from Pārvatī. Ûṣā was married to Aniruddha, a grandson of Kṛṣṇa. She taught the art to milk-maids of Dvārākā, and they taught the art to women of Saurāstra, who in their turn taught the lāsya-nṛtya to women of other countries. In this way, the art of

33. According to a legend lāihāraobā is an imitation of rāsalīlā, for which Śiva and Pārvatī created Manipur. "Research shows, however, that the legend connecting the two is far more recent in history than the actual dance. With the coming of the Hindus into Manipur and their Aryan mythology, the story was added to the already existing dance, Lāihāraobā, as can be seen from its content, is obviously connected with animistic and pre-Hindu gods of the Meithi people."

34. M. Neog: Sattriva Dances of Assam and their Rhythms, Part I, p. 4
lāsya-nrtya was traditionally handed down. 35

The Rāti-sastra mentions that women of Kāmarūpa are skilful in the arts of gīta and vādyā:

\[ gīte vādye ca nipunā sa kāmarūpakāminī / \]

It is seen that gīta, nrtya and vādyā are associated with temples. Indian music also emerged from the temples. This statement is borne out in the Assam context also. The Indian view is that God can be more easily satisfied by gīta-nrtya and vādyā than all other offerings like flowers, oblations and the rest. "The offering of dance to the accompaniment of vocal and instrumental music assures the merit of sacrifice performed." 36

Sāmagāyana, father of Pālakāpya was a great votary of music. M. Sastri thinks that Sāmagāyana hailed from Prāgjyotisā. The name Sāmagāyana itself indicates that he was a singer of

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35. pārvaṭī tvanuṣāsti sma lāsyaṁ vāñatmajāmusām //
   tāya dvāravatigopyastābhiṁ saŋraśtrayosītah /
   tabhīstu tattaddesīyastadasīgyanta yogītah //
   evam paramparāprāptametallloke praṭiśṭhitam /

M. Ghosh (ed.): Nandikesvara’s Abhinayadarpana, Slokas 5-6

36. Quoted from T. N. Sarma’s Prācin Asamat Saṅgīt āru bartamanar Samasya (Sādakrtika, edited, K. Sarma, Tezpur, 1976), p. 3


38. M. Sastri: op. cit. p. 3
the Samaveda. His worthy son Pālākāpya the writer of the Hastāyurveda was known as Maharsi for his unique scholarship, particularly in music. Pālākāpya in his Hastāyurveda states that his birth place and āśrama was situated adjacent to the great Himalayas and on the river Lauhitya (i.e., the Brahmputra). The description of the birth place as well as āśrama of pālākāpya compels us to think that Sage Pālākāpya was born within the four boundaries of Prājyotisa. H.P. Sastri asserts that the time of Pālākāpya may be in between 5th and 6th century A.D. Pālākāpya in his Hastāyurveda mentions many times about nṛtya and gītā as well as vādyā. The Nātya-SAstra justifies that the tradition of Saṅgīta and nṛtya as well as vādyā was current in Prājyotisa since the 1st century B.C.

38. M. Sastri, op. cit., p. 3
39. 'Sailarājāśritam' puryaṁ lauhityam sāgaram prati/ (Hastāyurveda 1.1.39) (quoted from M. Sastri's 'Asamat Saṅgīt Carca', p. 2
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. (i) siddhaçārayasāmuṣṭam kinnaroḍgītī nāditam/Hastāyurveda 1.1.41
(ii) pīnīnā lambānanaiva vānsa vipāsvanena vā/ daksāstam gitaghoraśca rāmayyuramekapam//Hastāyurveda, IV.V.91.
(iii) ime saṁkha mrāṅgāśca kaṁsyavadyāni pānica/ viṁśa sa pānī paparāva nāryah parigadāṅgatah // ānṛtā mahāgartham vai gāyante madhur svarāh//

Hastāyurveda, IV. XXXVI. 110-111
43. M. Sastri, op. cit., p. 4
Secondly, the ancient Hindu kings of Assam were patrons of Sangita. References to that effect may be found in the copper inscriptions of Mahābhūti-Varman and Bhāskara-Varman as well as Vanamaladeva (9th century A.D.) about their love for gīta-nṛtya and vādyā. The inscriptions of Mahābhūti-Varman (6th century A.D.) as well as Bhāskara-Varman (7th century A.D.) indicate that the kings of the Varman line performed Asvamedha Yajñas and donated land to the Brāhmīns who were conversant with Vedas. The Samagana was inevitable in such sacrifices, as such we may assume that the Samagana was performed in ancient Assam. King Bhāskara-Varman was a lover and patron of sangita. He entertained that the great Chinese traveller, Hieun Tsang with music and dances almost everyday for one month.

Vanamaladeva's (9th century A.D.) Copper inscription states that he also patronized sangita and nṛtya. His Tezpur copper plate refers to the temple of Hātaka Sulin (Siva) where the king propitiated God Siva with dance and song:

"..... devāgaraṃ vādyagīta pranādai ...." 46

44. M. Sastri, op. cit., p. 66
45. M. Neog: Sattriya Dances of Assam and Their Rhythms, Part I, p. 3.
46. M. Sastri: op. cit., p. 66
T. N. Sarma: op. cit., p. 3
M. M. Sharma (ed): Inscriptions of Ancient Assam, p. 99
"The temples with the sweet sound of the musical instruments and songs."  

King Yanamala appointed nartakas and nartakīs (daluhāṅgana) in the Ḥāṭakaśūlin temple to perform dance and songs everyday in honour of Lord Siva:

" .... kāṁśībiurīvātyantavegavatibhiḥ ramaṇīya 

daluhāṅganābhiriva sakalajanamanohariniḥbhīḥ ..."/48

"They charm one and all like the beautiful women of Daluhā. Like dancing girls, their trembling increase with the approach of dancers." 49

That the dwellers on the bank of the river Lāghitya were conversant in gīta-vādyā-nṛtya and could acquire an all-India fame in music, could be proved from a stone inscription known as Āpacāda-liṭi (inscription of Āpacāda) found in Uttara Pradesa. 50 The verse of the stone inscription runs like this:

\[
\text{ārīmaṣṭuṣṭaitavarma yuddhvijayaslaghapadāmkaṁmuḥ} \\
yasyādyāpi bibuddhakundakumudakṣumācchāhāraṁ sitam //
\]

47. M.M. Sharma (ed), Inscriptions of Ancient Assam, p.99
48. M.Sastri : op.cit.,p.67
49. T.N. Sarma : op.cit.,p.3
50. T.N. Sarma, op.cit.,Pp.2-3
The kings of the pāla-line (10th century A.D.) also patronized music. It can be justified from their copper inscriptions granted in connection with land donation to the wise Brāhmaṇs. Sculptures that are found almost all in the temple walls of ancient Assam point to the tradition of mārgī sāṅgītā current here from a fairly long past. Many images in dancing posture bearing khol (a kind of drum, like mrdaṅga) on neck and holding bhōrtāla (a kind of big cymbal) on both hands inscribed on the walls of temple still to be seen today. According to M. Sastri the time of such sculptures may be fixed with 10th century A.D.

From the above discussion it is evident that a strong and long tradition of mārgī sāṅgītā was prevalent in Prāgiyo-bīṣa- Kımarūpa from a fairly ancient times. But due to natural and political upheavals and other reasons the bright tradition of mārgī sāṅgītā dwindled to some extent, but the tradition continued uninterruptedly since the art form of ojāpāli carried it on upto the present time. Observers T.N. Sarma, "The art form of ojāpāli keeps the tradition of mārgī-sāṅgītā of ancient

51. Quoted from T.N.Sarma's "Prācīn Asamat Sāṅgītā āru barta- mānar Samasyā", p.2
52. M. Sastri, op.cit., p.67
53. M. Sastri, op.cit., p.67
Assam alive." 54 Hence, it would not be irrelevant if we say that the ojāpāli art form emerges out of the tradition of mārgī arts of India. Observing the classical base of the ojāpāli art form K. Vatsayana writes: "The dances of ojā bear many resemblances to the classical dances of India, the accompanying music is also close to the classical rāgas." 55

3. Antiquity of the Ojāpāli art form:

(i) Reference found in the Sanskrit works:

Since the ojāpāli art form emerges both from the traditions of Kathakātā and the mārgī art form, hence it has a long history. Its antiquity goes back to the style of the Śāmaṇa recitation and the style of epic recitation. It was customary in ancient India to recite the hymns of the Śāmaṇa and some portion of the epics as well as the Purāṇas. The recitation was followed by dancing and playing of musical instruments. Along with the recitation explanation of the hymns and the ślokas also continued with the help of conversation. The style of the Śāmaṇa recitation and the epic recitation have many similarities with the style of ojāpāli art form, as such the Śāmaṇa recitation and the epic recitation may be called a proto-form, of ojāpāli.

54. T.N.Sarma, op.cit., p.4

55. K.Vatsayana: Tradition of Indian Folk Dance, p.120
The art forms performed in honour of Huien Tsiang might have included the proto-form of ojāpali.

The term dalubāngana mentioned in the copper inscription of king Vanamāladeva\(^{56}\) may be equated with modern deodhani (god-wife), a well known performing art form associated with the Sukarnāi ojāpali and barmanī gān or mārepūjār gān. The term dalubāngana may indicate a proto-form of ojāpali which was prevalent at the time of king Vanamāladeva (9th century A.D.).

In the same copper plate we find the term "devapālibhin. The word Pāli may suggest the subordinates of the ojāpali institution.

Samvatsara commonly known as Vedācāryya (13th century A.D.) was a great Sanskrit Scholar of Kāmarupa-Assam. The title Vedācāryya acquired by him is an evidence of his erudition in Sanskrit. He refers to the jāgara-pūjā (jāgara-worship or jāgara-performance) which is performed in connection with the Viṣṇu-pūjā or Ardhanārīśvara Siva. Vedācāryya has given a detailed account of the jāgara-worship in his Śrītiratnakara:

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Śrutvā jāgaraṇām viṣṇoh-
Ye na gacchatī tatra vai / 
Yamena sūcitam teṣām narakām -
Yātana mayam //
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56. P. Bhattacharya (ed): op.cit., p.64
M.M. Sharma (ed): op.cit., p.100
D. Sarma (ed): Kāmarupa Śasanāvalī, p.49

57. P. Bhattacharya, op.cit., p.64
M.M. Sarma, op.cit., p.200
D. Sarma, op.cit., p.49
"Yama inflicts hellish torture on those who do not go to Viṣṇu on His awakening. On the jāgara (awakening) of Hari, the fool, who does not dance in front of Hari (Salagrama or Vigraba) you surely know that he will be reborn seven times crippled. But he who dances and sings in Hari's jāgara, if he be the devotee of you (Pārvatī), he will reach Brahma-pada and if he be the devotee of me (Śiva) he will reach Viṣṇu-pada.

58. Quoted from M. Sastrī's Asamar Vaiṣṇava Darśanar

Rūpārkha, p. 31 (FN)
On the jāgara of Viṣṇu one who does not offer offerings, (upasāras), to Him, that indifferent person although he might be assuming characteristic holy marks will become an object of ridicule of people, there will be no satisfaction in his mind, he becomes the victim of Kali (quarrels disturb his family life in his house).

According to the scriptures a person who keeps awake during the jāgaraṇa of Hari and sings and dances in accompaniment of musical instruments with rhythms and waving lights (Pradīpa) in the company of pious men receives the fruits equivalent to those resulting from performing a crore of yajñas for every period (prahara) of the night."59

The performance of song and dance with musical instruments and rhythms mentioned in the Sāttiratnākara may suggest the ojāpāli art form. The ojāpāli is inevitable in the jāgara-worship even today.60 M. Sastri holds the view that jāgara performance indicates the ojāpāli art form.61

59. Translated by R.K. Deva Sarma, Visiting Professor of Sanskrit, Gauhati University.

60. The jāgara worship is held in the month of Jyeṣṭha (April-May) in Patidarrang each year (Darrang). Of course at the time of Durgā-pūjā also jāgara is performed.

The ojāpāli (particularly Vyāsa variety) sings ḫağara in connection with Viṣṇu-puṣṭā and Śiva-ḥuṣṭā. Originally, the biyāhar ojāpāli (Vyāsa variety) had strictly adhered to the principle of not singing in Devī worship. But, in the course of time this rigidity became flexible. As a result, they used to sing in Devī-worship also. According to a tradition to sing the ḫağara royal permission was essential. The ḫağaras were the traditional assets of a few Vyāsa families of Vyāsapāra of Darrang.

A.C. Barua is of opinion that since the ḫağara implies the act of awakening the gods and goddesses and since this act of awakening was an essential part of the Yajñas performed in ancient India, hence the tradition of ḫağara might have come from the tradition of Yajña.

(ii) Reference found in the Early Assamese Literature:

The ojāpāli continued to be a very popular and living art form from a fairly old time, hence its reflection in the art and literature of Assam can not be denied. The written tradition of Assamese literature begins with Madhava Kandali (14th century A.D.). In his Assamese version of the Ramayana we find terms like nata(dancer) and bhāta(singer) frequently. e.g.

madhura mrdanga dhari vidyadhare tāve /
gandharva sakale sulalita gītā gāve //
The Vidyādharas play on mṛdanga pleasantly.

The gandharvas sing songs sweetly.

The chief of the apsarās are acting,

The bhāṭas recite capaya verses in different rhythms.

The ojāpālī music is also regarded as gandharva-vidyā or gandharva art. Hence, the line "gandharvas sing songs sweetly" may refer to the ojāpālī art form.66

In another context, Mādhava Kandālī narrates:

"nrtya gīta vādyā bhānda savade
miligailā kolāhal"67

The sounds of nrtya, gīta and vādyā made an uproar.

The ojāpālī institution consists of nrtya, gīta and vādyā, so the above observation of Mādhava Kandālī may indicate the ojāpālī.

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65. H.N. Datta Barua (ed) Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa, V.1346
The term gītal is rightly to be equated with the ojāpāli.

The Daka-Vacan mentions the term gītal:

"āanta khasile kisar gītal".

When the teeth are lost what use is as gītal (Singer)?

Manakara (15th century A.D.) a renowned poet of the Manasā-cult mentions in his book Manasā-Kavya the term gītal to convey the sense of ojāpāli:

'gitālo hāte kenthe jāgok edāla cāmar' /

Awake both in hand and throat (for tone) of the gītal and the fly-brush.

Sāṅkaradeva compared sweetness of the song of a gītal with the humming sound of bees:

'beriya guñjare yena bharamare gītal'/

The gītal sings songs like the humming sound of bees.

The ojāpāli was a living art form at the time of Sāṅkaradeva (1449-1568 A.D.). This can be justified by the Guru-carita of Rāma Carana Thākura. He relates that Sāṅkaradeva brought Choto Balorāma a daināpāli (chief of the assistants of an ojha) through Nārāyana Thākura Ātā:

'ānilanta nārāyane bhakta anupāma /
biyāsar pāli tente chato Baloram/'

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68. Popular Sayings that are handed down orally. Of course it takes the written form now.
69. Daka-Vacan or Carita (MS), No. 2372, Guwhati University
71. M. Neog (ed): Kirtan, 13/146
72. H.N. Datta Barua (ed): Guru Carita, Visakhapatnam 3028
The bhakta per excellence Narayana brought, 
The young Baloram, he was a pali of the biyahar ojapali.

According to the Kathaguru Carita, the ojapali was performed in the sraddha ceremony of Sankaradeva:

"bhakte nama gai khola-tale, gita gale ojha gai"/73

The devotees chanted the name of the Lord with khol and tala and the ojha sang gitas.

Ramaraya, a famous biographer of mediaeval Assam narrates in his Guru-lila that the ojapali and nata as well as natuwa performed their performances in the sraddha ceremony of Devadama (16th century A.D.):

'Ojapali nata natuwa biyasa
bramana yateka yanta /
dane mane samastake santosaya
bidaya diya pathanta //74

Biyah-ojapali, nata (male dancer), natuwa (dancer) and Brahmana assembled in the sraddha ceremony (of Dama) had been given farewell after pleasing them with due donations and respects (by Bhattadeva). In the same way, Ramaraya states that the ojapali was performed in the sraddha ceremony of

73. U.C. Jekharu(ed): Katha-Guru Carita, p.228
74. M.N. Chaudhury(ed): Guru-lila, V.923
Kaviratna Vaikunthanātha Bhāgavat Bhattachāryya commonly known as Bhattadeva:

\[\text{\textquoteleft\textquoteleft nāta-nāti ojāpāli aneka āsīlā/\textquoteright\textquoteright}\] 75

Many nātas (male dancers) and nātis (female dancers) as well as ojāpāli presented their performances (in the śrāddha-ceremony of Bhattadeva).

Further, Rāmarāya mentions that Deva Dāmodara took help of the ojāpāli for propagation of the tenets of the Bhāgavata:

\[\text{\textquoteleft\textquoteleft gobardhāna parvānanda ojā duijan/} \]
\[\text{\textquoteleft\textquoteleft susvare gāvanta bhāgavata rasāyana\textquoteright\textquoteright}\] 76

Govardhāna and Parvānanda the two ojās sang the Bhāgavata full of Bhakti-rasa, in the sonorous voice.

Daityārī Thākura a well known biographer of the 17th century A.D. writes in his Guru-carita entitled Sri Śrī Saṅkaradeva-Madhavadeva Carit that the great Saint-poet Saṅkaradeva preached his new doctrine with the help of the ojāpāli art form. 77

The Kathā-gurū carita states that the practice of Kirtana singing was current from Vaṭadra (the birth place of Saṅkaradeva) to Pāṭbāusī (resting place of Saṅkaradeva) even before Saṅkaradeva. According to the said Guru-carita, anamālā and

75. M.N. Chaudhury, op. cit., V.1009
76. M.N. Chaudhury, op. cit., V.427
77. R.M. Nath (ed): Saṅkaradeva-Madhavadeva Carita, 19/144
78. U.C. Lekharu (ed): op. cit., p.1
līlāmālā as well as bhaṭṭīmā were not recited, only the practice of Kīrtana - singing was prevalent.79

Further, the Kāthā-guru-carita informs us that even the illiterate men, like Laksmana Ojhā could get by heart the entire Assamese versions of the Dasāma (Book X of the Sanskrit Bhāgavata-Purāṇa) and the Ekādaśa skanda (Book XI of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa) and then he was recognized as an ojhā(ōjā).

References to the ojāpāli art form are found in the copper inscriptions, written in both Sanskrit and Assamese language as well as which were granted by the kings in connection with the land donation. Śiva Simha granted a copper plate (1660 Saka, 1738 A.D.) entrusting different duties of the Dhāresvāra Śiva temple to the different functionaries. Here we find the reference to the ojāpāli. The plate assigned one ojhā (ojhā) and six pālis to perform their daily duties in the temple (singing and dancing).81 Śiva Simha issued another copper inscription in the year 1739 A.D. in connection with the well-management of the Piṅgalesvāra Śiva temple. In this plate the king refers to ojhā and pāli.82 Śiva Simha granted another copper inscription in 1661 Saka, 1739 A.D. in connection with the well management of the Dhīghesvārī temple. Here we find the reference to the ojāpāli.83 Laksmī Simha granted a copper inscription in

79. U.C.Lekharu(ed), op.cit., p.1
80. Ibid., p.270
81. M.Neog(ed): Prāgya Sāsanāvalī, p.29
82. Kindly see Chapter VI
83. M.Neog(ed), op.cit., p.184
the 1774 A.D. In this copper plate the king mentions one
'Sagara biyāhar ojhā' of Kāmarūpa :

"khetri paraganār sālmāra grāmar biyāhar ojhākwe
(Sargadeva) ei māti dile/*

The king (Sargadeva) gives away this land to Sāgara Ojhā who
performs biyāha and who hails from the village Sālmāra.

In the same manner, king Laksī Simha issued another
copper inscription in the year of 1775 A.D. Here, the king
refers to one Chāntāi Dās 'biyāhar Ojhā' of Mādhava temple
of Hāzo. *

The mediaeval chronicles of Assam particularly the
Tripurā Burañjī indicates that one who possesses proficiency
in gīta-ūrtva and vādyā is called a gunin. The term gunin
seems to be a synonym of ojāpāli. But in some parts of Kāmarūpa
district the term gunin includes most of the audio-visual art
forms. According to M. Neog a gunin is rightly to be called
the biyāhar-ojāpāli. He observes that the gunins used to sing
vyāha-gīta (i.e., songs of biyāhar-ojāpāli) from one village
to another particularly in the month of Māgha(i.e., January
and February). *

More references to ojanāli may be cited but the above
discussion would be adequate to prove the antiquity of the
art form.

84. Kindly see Chapter-XII
85. Kindly see Chapter XII
86. S.K.Bhuyan(ed) : Tripurā Burañjī, p.19
87. M.Neog (ed) : Durgāvati Gīti Ramāyana, Intro, p.2.11