CHAPTER IV

SIMILAR PERFORMING ART FORMS IN ASSAM AS WELL AS IN OTHER PART OF INDIA

The ojāpāli performing art form is not an isolated phenomenon of Assam, since, it has an pan-Indian background, the process of sanskritization having been carried on to ancient Assam by the Vedic-Aryans as well as by the two epics and the Purāṇas. The tradition of Kathakatā and the tradition of mārgī art forms entered Assam along with the bearers of the Vedic-Aryans as a result of their migration from Northern India to Prājñyotisa-Kāmarūpa. "So, we may assume that Rāmāyana-SAṅgītā and Vvāsā-saṅgītā as the traditional art forms fanned out to Assam from the rest of India, from which the ojāpāli as a full-fledged art form emerged."²

Since, the ojāpāli art form including many other performing arts currents in India sprang up from the common pool,

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1. M.N.Srinivasa and Mckim Marriott used the term Sanskritization to explain some features of religious, cultural and social change in India. Sanskritization is a process by "which a low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently 'twice-born' caste."

T.K.N. Unnithan, I, Deva & Y. Sinha(edited) Towards Sociology of Culture in India, p.16

S.I. Srivastava : Folk Culture and Oral Tradition, p.299

2. N.C.Sarma : Origin and Development of Ojāpāli, (Folklore ed. S.Gupta, p.253
i.e., the Indian tradition of Kathakata style, the ojapali art form bears many resemblances to many other performing forms prevalent in different parts of India.

(i) The Daskathi of Orissa:

The daskathi is a very popular art form of Orissa. K.B. Das is of opinion that the daskathi art form developed in the district of Ganjam. But it gradually spread to all other districts of Orissa. Like ojapali, the daskathi is also a very popular art form. The term daskathi consists of two units —

(a) dasa meaning devotee and (b) katha: meaning kathatali, i.e., one who plays on the daskathi. Kathatali means wooden pieces which are "played on in tune with the prayer of the devotee." A daskathi troupe consists of two singers; one is gavaka i.e., chief singer and the other is pali i.e., helper or assistant. Like palis of the ojapali, the pali of daskathi helps the gavaka. The two persons, i.e., gavaka and pali present themes like Chandravati, Sita-harana and Kansa-vadha, maintaining appropriate mudras, gestures and talas. They sing all the parts, change their tone hour after hour with gita-nrtya and vadya. Both the ojapali and the daskathi bear similarities in respect of content and structure as well as purpose. Both the

3. K.B. Das: A Study of Orissan Folklore, p. 113
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.

S. Roy: Music of Eastern India, p. 129
two art forms consist of music, dance, narration, dialogue, mudrās gestures and movement. The ojāpālī art form and the dāskāthīā art form are performed in ballet forms. Both the art forms relates mythological stories. The ojā i.e., chief singer and the gāvaka (chief singer) have many notable similarities. They lead the chorus, they set the refrain for the subordinates to repeat it with the marking of time on their feet. Both the ojā and the gāvaka make dancing movements with gestures of hands. Of course, unlike the gāvaka of dāskāthīā, the ojā of ojāpālī art form does not play on cymbals. In the dāskāthīā there is only one subordinate, on the contrary, in the ojāpālī there are more than one subordinate, usually three to five. Both the art forms occasionally make good use of humorous incidents to break the monotony of the audience. The aim and object of the two art forms are the same, i.e., loka-sikṣā.

(ii) Pālagāna of Orissa:

Pālagāna or pālā music of Orissa bears resemblances to the ojāpālī. The troupe of the pālā song consists of five to six minstrels. The gāvaka is the leader of the troupe. The bāvaka or the drummer plays on the mrdanga. The assistants of the gāvaka are known as pāliṅga, who play on the cymbals.

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8. N.C. Sarma, op.cit., p.255
9. Ibid.
10. E.B. Das, op.cit., p.113
11. N.C. Sarma, op.cit., p.256
12. K.B. Das, op.cit., p.70
chief of the pāliās is called the mukhya-pāliā or sīra-pāliā. 12 He is the chief helper of the gāyaka who assists the gāyaka in singing and reminds him of lines forgotten. 13 He explains the meaning of the song to the audience. The gāyaka's dress is not the same as that of the pāliās. The gāyaka "decorates his hands with silver armlets, and bangles his waist with silver chain, his forehead with vermilion and his eye with collyrium. His dress is dogmatic having no tinge of affinity with the modern fashion. He puts on a blue or red shirt, silk chādar, a hat with silver embroidery. In course of his singing he plays on a pair of small cymbals in between his right fingers. He has a chāmara which he moves slowly in his prayer." 14 Like the ojā, the gāyaka of pālā music is the leader of the party. Both the pālis and the pāliās play on cymbals, dance and help the chiefs. Like the daināpali, i.e., chief among the pālis of ojāpali, the mukhya-pāliā or the sīra-pāliā is not only chief among the pāliās, but is like a second leader of pālā music. Both the daināpali and the mukhya-pāliā help the chief singers to sing and explain the meaning of the narration. Like the ojā of ojāpali art form, the gāyaka of pālā music leads the chorus, he sets the refrain for the pāliās to repeat it with the marking of time on their feet and they play

12. K.B.Das, op.cit., p.70  
13. K.B.Das, op.cit., p.69  
14. K.B.Das, op.cit., p.69
on the cymbals with their hands. Like the gāvaka, the ojā's dress differs from that of the others. The ojā of the pāncāḷī art form also decorates his hands and head. The pāncāḷī ojāpāḷī prevalent in the Ānīti Sattra and Daksinapāṭ Sattra of Majuli has surprising similarities with pāḷā music. 15 Like the gāvaka of pāḷā music, the ojā of pāncāḷī ojāpāḷī (or gāvana-bāvana) also plays on a pair of cymbals by the right hand. The practice of playing khola is in vogue in the art form of pāncāḷī ojāpāḷī.

(iii) Pāncāḷī-gāṇa of West Bengal:

Pāncāḷī-gāṇa is a very popular art form of West Bengal based on the tradition of kathakātā. The theme of the art form is taken from the Rāmāyana or the Mahābhārata or from the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa. Besides, local and popular stories are also adopted whenever necessary. "There is no literary text for these so-called dramas; they have developed out of oral tradition only all the participants" being unlettered or semi-literate." 17 Vocal music play an important role in this art form. "The quality of the performance" says A. Bhattacharya, "is judged by the music only." 18

Assam's ojāpāḷī particularly the art form of pāncāḷī ojāpāḷī bears some similarities with Bengali's pāncāḷī-gāṇa. Both the two art forms are based on the tradition of kathakātā. They have

15. N. G. Sarma, op.cit., p. 256
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
affinities in respect of themes also. Music plays an important role in both the art forms.

(iv) Pawada of Maharashtra:

Among the tradition of the performing arts in Maharashtra the pawada (or pavada) is an older form. It describes heroic deeds of kings and princes. The etymological meaning of the term pawada is heroic deeds and intelligence and ability of the learned and the poetic description of that ability or its praise. The word has occupied its place in the Marathi language for the last 1000 years. The term pawada is found as pamada in Brajabhasa and pawado in Malvar and powada in Madhya Pradesh as well as in Uttar Pradesh.

Originally the art form pawada was a religious dance and in course of time the art form lost its original rigidity and became a direct vehicle of Virarathā Kavya, includes both the heroic deeds of men and gods. Now it is used for "a variety of contemporary themes like national unity, patriotism, social reforms and family planning."

The art form is dramatic in character and is inclined always towards the historical incidents and is sung in accompaniment with instruments like daph, tuntune and manjira. Like ojāpāli it is a group song and dance. The leader of the group

19. K. Vatsayana: Traditions of Indian Folkdance, p. 218
20. S. Parmar: Bharatiya Loka Sahitya, p. 105
21. Ibid. 22. Ibid. 23. Ibid, p. 106
24. ----: Traditional Folkmedia in India, p. 57
is known as căhira. The căhira and the oía have many similarities in respect of performance. Both the căhira and the oía wear anklets on their feet. Like the oía of ojāpāli art form, the căhira of pāwāda art form "while singing indulges in dramatic gestures, describing the heroic deeds, which lend effect to the whole performance. Tempo is always heightened by a refrain constantly coming over to the closing of stanzas."25 Like ojāpāli the pāwāda is an outdoor music. "It is sung in the open so the voice must necessarily be projected vigorously."26 According to A. Ranade the tune of pāwāda is straight and simple and unified which practically amounts to lack of variety.27 On the contrary the tune of ojāpāli, excluding māregān (a variety of the ojāpāli art form) is not straight and simple and unified. Hence, the tune of ojāpāli does not lack variety. Although rāga-rasa relationship is not adhered to in the pāwāda28 nevertheless this relationship is strictly maintained in the ojāpāli art form particularly in the biyāh-gowa variety. A. Ranade opines that the art form pāwāda uses thirty-six rāginis.29 Similarly, the ojāpāli art form particularly the biyāh-gowa variety uses six-rāgas and thirty-six rāginis. Both pāwāda singer and the ojāpāli singers perform their performances in as standing position.30 Unlike the pāwāda singers, the ojāpāli singers donot

25. S. Parmar: op. cit., p. 75
27. Ibid., p. 60
28. Ibid., p. 61
29. Ibid.
30. Of course, the Ojāpāli singers perform their performances in sitting position in the context of worship only.
use any string instrument. But like the pāwada, the pālīs of ojāpāli art form use only a rhythm-instrument, i.e., tāla.

(v) Alhā of Uttar Pradesh:

Like pāwada of Maharasstra, the art form of alhā of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh sings heroic ballads. Observes S. Parmar: "The alhā, one of the popular ballad-forms of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, has survived since ages, both in context and structure."31 Both ojāpāli and alhā enjoy popularity for their content and art of singing. Originally, the alhā was composed in Bundelkandi and attributed to poet Jagnik, but unfortunately that text has been lost. About a century ago Waterfield had attempted the translation of the then available form of this long narrative. Waterfield could not complete the full translation as he died after some time. His work was resumed by Dr. Grierson who translated the rest of the ballad into prose and not in the same metre as his predecessor had done. Despite variants of extravaganza and folk-like ornamentation, the structural form of this narrative has not changed. It has kept up the stereotyped episodical sequences, which move round the two heroes Alhā and Udal, unchanged. Throughout North India the ballad is sung with gusto, zeal and extolling voice."32 But the texts of both the biyāh-gowa and the t; suknāni ojāpālis remain unchanged since, Assam's ojāpālis

31. S. Parmar, op.cit.,p.2
32. S. Parmar, Ibid.,p.72
depend on the written tradition of the Assamese version of the Mahābhārata and the Padma Purāṇa. Of course, the tribal people like the Rābhās of the district of Goalpara depend on oral tradition in respect of their māregān, i.e., song of the Snake-goddess Padmāvatī or Barmanīgān, i.e., song of Padmāvatī. So, there is every probability for undergoing changes in respect of text and texture of these songs, however, the context remains unchanged. Like ālḥā, māregān and Barmanīgān now take the written shape.

Both in ojāpālī and ālḥā there are chief gāyakas (singers) and assistant singers. The ālḥā uses only a percussion instrument, i.e., dholak. On the other hand, the pālis of ojāpālī art form use only a rhythm-instrument, i.e., tāla. The biyāh-gowā ojāpālī, a variety of the ojāpālī does not use dhola. The paṅcālī ojā uses both mañirā and khola (a kind of mrdanga). The sukraṇi ojāpālī and the māregān gowā ojāpālī beat dholas, at the time of awakening of gods and goddesses and at the time of dance, (i.e., deodhāni nāc, dance of the deodhāni).

Like ojāpālī, the ālḥā performs maṅgalācaraṇa (prologue) before the beginning of actual performance. Both the ojā and the Alḥā as well as the Udāl sing with appropriate gestures and dances. The ojāpālī art form and the ālḥā art form generally

33. The Padma Purāṇa does not refer to the Sanskrit Padma-Purāṇa.
perform their performances in standing position. The ojāpāli sings with gusto, zeal and extolling voice in the manner of the ālha art form.

(vi) Bharathari of Uttar Pradesh:

The art form bharathari is based on all-India tradition of Kathakatā. Like ojāpāli, Bharathari is also a group-dancing and singing. The bharathari art form narrates the story of king Bharathari which is current in a ballad form in Uttar Pradesh. At the very outset of the performance the chief singer of bharathari along with his assistants invoke gods and goddesses, such as Ganesā, Maheśa, Sarasvatī, Durgā and so on. The ojāpāli art form also at the very beginning of the performance offer prayer to different gods and goddesses. The singers of bharathari

34. The word bharathari is from Sanskrit bhārtrhari (Bhartrhari), a well known poet of classical Sanskrit. According to some scholars Bhartrhari was a king who was a son of king Indradeo. He ruled over Ujjain. King Bhartrhari married Princess Sagdei of Simhaladvipa. She has a mystical fore knowledge that Bhartrhari was her son in her previous life. After the marriage ceremony, Bhartrhari entered the room of his wife Sagdei. The cot broke-down as soon as he put his step on it. His newly married wife Sagdei smiled at him with a mysterious fore knowledge. He came out hurriedly from the room. Being disappointed with his wife the king took resort to the feet of Bābā Gorakhanāth. With the kind grace of his religious guru he could solve the mystery of his previous life.
occasionally play with different musical instruments, such as dh'olaka, sarengi and tālas. Like the ojā of ojāpāli art form, the chief singer of bharathari art form dances with gestures to suggest rasa and bhāva (State). S. Singh holds the view that the ojāpāli art form has notable similarity with the bharthari at least in the style of story-telling as well as in the art of singing.

(vii) Ahir of Uttar Pradesh:

The art form ahir owes its origin to the great Indian tradition of Kathakata. The word ahir comes from the Sanskrit term ābhira which may aptly be connected with the great Kṛṣṇa-løre. As in the ojāpāli art form, the artform ahir also consists of gīta-nṛtya-abhinaya and vādyā. The performers wear tight short knickers and leave the upper part bare. The arms and neck are adorned with ornaments. A string of brass bells is tied round the lower waist as a band. The foot work is intricate and delicate; the bells on the waist instead of the ankles in an interesting syncopation pattern in

35. Informant: Dr. S. Singh, data collected on 8.12.84.
36. Informant: Dr. J.B.Tripathi of Uttar Pradesh who serves in the Handique Girls College, Gauhati-1, as the Head of the Department of English. Data collected on 20.2.84.
37. Dr. Shridhar Singh Professor and Head, Department of Hindi, Gauhati University who hails from Uttar Pradesh and who uses to stay in Assam since 1981, opines that there are many similar aspects in the ojāpāli and the bharathari. Data collected on 18.12.84.
rhythm. Songs invariably accompany the dances, instrumental accompaniment consists of only dholak (drum) and the cymbals (kansi)."  

The oja of ojapali art form also puts a pair of ankles on his feet and the palis play on tala. Like the ojapali, the theme of the song of the ahir art form varies from occasion to occasion.

(viii) Bhand pathar of Jammu and Kashmir and the Punjab:

The ojapali art form no doubt is the earliest dramatic form with music, dance, abhinaya and dialogue. So the art form like bond-pather of Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab has got many affinities with the art form of ojapali. To justify our statement we can cite a remark made by A. Rangacharya: "In the earlier days, even in the north, narrative poems lent themselves to dramatic representation and wandering minstrels would give a performance anywhere. This, we learn, was the situation in the earliest dramatic form called ojapali in Assam. The principal character oja would recite a mythological story and in between have dialogue with others in prose. An entire group would join in the dancing and singing. The bonds in Kashmir and the Punjab were similar roving bands of singers and dancers."  

(ix) Ramalila of North India:

The Ramalila is one of the most popular art forms current throughout North India. "An important characteristic of the

38. K. Vatsayana, op. cit., p. 134
38a. Informant: Dr. S. Sinha.
39. "The word bhand means the Sanskrit bhaga - a satirical dramatic forms while patthar seems to associate with natra meaning dramatis personae." S. Parmar: Traditional Folkmedia in India, p. 35
40. A. Rangacharya: The Indian Theatre, p. 86
Ramalîlā is that it is not confined to a particular region but is presented in many regions. It is the major dramatic form in the Hindi speaking states: Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and Punjab and Bihar also.⁴⁰

The traditional Rāmāyana theatre is based on the tradition of epic recitation (i.e., Kathakāτā tradition of the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata) handed down through the ages from the time of the great sage Vālmīki. "At some point in history, the tradition of recitation got connected with the folk dramatic presentation of the epic."⁴¹ Hence, it can be assumed that there was no dramatic performance which might be found to-day in original Rāmalīlā. Observes I. Awasthi: "The traditional Rāmalīlā has developed its dramatic form on the basis of recitation of Rāmācharitamānas. It is the recitation which determines the structure of the performance."⁴²

Even to-day Rāmalīlā without having the theatrical performance is still seen in the Kumaon region in Haryana at certain places and in the Patunda village of Rajasthan.⁴³ This style of Rāmalīlā is operatic. "In this style the recitation from the Mānas is set to classical rāgas and the dialogues are also delivered in song."⁴⁴ In this respect, the ojāpāli art form has some affinities with the Rāmalīlā in the context of theme, structure and performance.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 507.
⁴² Ibid, p. 512
⁴³ Ibid, p. 511
⁴⁴ Ibid.
(x) **Yaksagāna of Karnataka**:  

It should be mentioned here that the **Yaksagāna** is a very stylistic and ritualistic art form in the coastal district of Karnataka primarily gives emphasis on *gita-nṛtya-abhinava* and *vāḍya*. The themes of **Yaksagāna** are almost always selected from the **Mahābhārata**, the **Rāmāyana** and the **Bhāgavata-Purāṇa**. Stories which involve battle and fighting are best preferred. The **Bhāgavata**, the chief character of **Yaksagāna** emerged from the tradition of the **charana**.

Originally, the **Yaksagāna** referred to songs of the demi-gods. M.M.Bhat believes that the **Gattāna**, a form of composition adaptable for singing and recitation may be accepted as the forerunner of Kannada **Yaksagāna**. R.R. Diwakar observes that there are references to pantomime and doll shows as early as the twelfth century which prove the existence of a Kannada theatre that catered to the masses. The shows were performed out of doors and the plays, based on the Epic and historical events.

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45. A. Rangacharya, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78
46. Ibid., p. 79
47. M.B. Ashton: **Yaksagāna**, p. 19
48. B. Christie
themes, contained music, dance and dialogue. K.S. Karanth thinks that the Yaksagana is a style of music and this may have been the first element of this dance-drama to develop.

That the make up, costumes and theatrical performances were not inclusive in the perimeter of Yaksagana initially might be conjectured from the following observations: "The tālamaddale inscription and the palm-leaf manuscript together suggest that at least by the mid-sixteenth century stories were written to be sung in Yaksagana-style, accompanied by tāla (small cymbals) and maddale (drum) and perhaps impromptu dialogue which explained and/or expanded the content of the song. From 1621 to the nineteen-forties there are apparently no writings which deal with Yaksagana as a composite art of music, dance, costume and make up, and impromptu dialogue."

More substantial evidences are not necessary to justify that the audiovisual art form Yaksagana was a tripple symphony of gīta, nṛtya and vādya originally and dramatic presentation incorporated later on into it, as such it would not be apocryphal if we say that the Yaksagana is a music and dance based art form. Hence, ojapali and Yaksagana are similar art forms in respect of gīta-nṛtya and abhinaya.

49. M.B. Ashton & B. Christie, op.cit., p.19
51. M.B. Ashton & B. Christie, op.cit., p.22
(xi) Kuttu of Kerala:

The kuttu, a well known performing art form of Kerala bears many similarities with the ojāpāli. Like Assam's ojāpāli, the kuttu narrates from the Rāmāyana as well as the Mahābhārata. The kuttu art form is performed in collaboration with three singers. Likewise, the ojāpāli art form consists of 3 to 5 or 7 assistant singers with whose help the ojā performs. The main singer of the kuttu art form is known as cākiyārā. Like the ojā, the cākiyārā dances while singing with mudrās and tālās, recites the narrative parts, expounds, and acts showing the bhāvas in accordance with rules of abhīnaya laid down by the Nātya-sāstra. 52

According to A. Rangacharya, the Kathākali is an improvised art form of kuttu or kudiyattam. 53 The term Kathākali refers to the art of story telling. 54 The main function of the ojāpāli is also story-telling. Hence, in spirit, both the Kathākali art form and the ojāpāli form are same. The Kathākali is performed in a ballet form. 55 In the same manner, the ojāpāli is a ballet form.

(xii) Punaram of Madhya Pradesh:

From the thematic point of view the Punaram artiste bears similarity with the art form of ojāpāli. "Reciting

52. Di Menon: The Kuttu of Kerala Theatre (Journal of the Music Academy, Madras, Vol.xxv. part I-V). Quoted from S.N.Sarma's Asamiya Nātya Sāhitya, pp.6-7
53. A. Rangacharya, op.cit., p.83
54. C.A.C.Pandey: The Art of Kathākali, p.14
55. Ibid., p.18
kathā from the epics is a very common event in rural India and this common event is performed by artistes like punaram and ojāpāli. The Punaram is more or less a one-man performance but he is able to present a large array of characters from the epic. On the contrary the ojāpāli artiste is never a one-man affair, since it requires at least three persons to conduct a performance.

(xiii) Rāmāyana-song of Bengal:

A. Bhattacharya holds the view that the tradition of Rāmāyana recitation by a troupe consisting of traditional musicians known as gavanas is still in vogue in Bengal. "The musicians with a chowrie in one of his hands and a pair of mandira (brass-bell) in the other and wearing a pair of jingling anklets stands up at the middle of the assembly and narrates musically the incidents of the Rāmāyana occasionally with a show of dance, particularly Rama's going to exile and the death of Dasaratha including his cremation and funeral in a most sorrowful tune befitting the occasion." Like ojāpāli, this Rāmāyana-gīyān form is replete with gīta-nrtya-abhinaya and vādyā. Both the artistes have got similarities in respect of content, theme and structure.

(xiv) Meitei Jagdi of Manipur:

Among the stylistic performing art forms current in Manipur the meitei jagdi is worth-mentioning. It is an improvised part

56. S. Parmar, op.cit., p. 65
57. A. Bhattacharya, op.cit., p. 606-07
58. Ibid., p. 606
of the well known art form laihārōaba. "Bhagyachandra Maharaj
and his technical associates the dance masters or gurus appear
to have transformed the stylistic features of the Lai-Hārōaba
into a chiselled dance technique of the meitei-jāgoi based on
the chālis and the several bhāngi parengs such as the achouba
pareng, the brindabān pareng; and the khurumba pareng, which
enter into the fabric of the dance of the rāsa."59

The meitei-jāgoi has surprising similarity with the ojāpāli
particularly in the context of dance-technique. Observes K.
Vatsyayan: "Obviously even prior to the royal proclamation and
decision of presenting the rāsa dances, a style of dance must
have been prevalent in Manipur which had perhaps some connection
with the ojāpālis of Assam. The nature and extent of this connec­
tion is not clear, but an analysis of the dance technique, and
the several components of the Assamese school show that there
are affinities, whether as natural parallel growths, in adjoining
areas or as a result of some interaction."60 Even the dance move­
ment of the meitei-jāgoi is akin to that of the ojāpāli art
form.61

(xv) Kusan-gāna of Assam and Bengal:

Kusan-gāna is one of the most popular performing art forms
current in the district of Goalpara of Assam and in the northern

59. K. Vatsyayan: A Study of Some Traditions of Performing Arts
in Eastern India, p 60

60. Ibid, pp.60-61

61. Ibid, p.61
part of Bengal. Kuśan-gāna consists of gītā-nṛtya and abhinava. The word kuśan comes from the term kuśa, the younger son of Rama. The term gana refers to song. But subsequently the term gana came to indicate the sense of dramatic performance as in Yaksagāna.

It is well known that "the traditional Rāmāyaṇa theatre is based primarily on the recitation of the epic which had a rich tradition of several centuries. In the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa itself we have reference to Kuśa and Lava reciting the Rāmāyaṇa in the court of Rāma, it is believed that the word kuśilava reciter actor is an outcome of this."62 So, it is likely to be that originally kuśan-gāna was a style of music like ojāpāli music and subsequently dramatic presentation entered into the art form as in Yaksagāna.

As in the ojāpāli, there is a principal singer in Kuśan-gāna known as mul or moul and gītāl or gidāl.63 In some parts of the Kamarup-district and Goalpara district the ojā is known as gītāl or gidāl. The dohārī or dowārī, i.e., the chief assistant of gītāl bears many similarities with the dānāpālī, i.e., the chief assistant of ojā. Excluding the gītāl and the dohārī there are at least fifteen to twenty assistants in the art form of Kuśan-gāna known as pāils.64

62. I. Awasthi, op. cit., p.507
63. mul or maul, (Skt. mūla i.e., principal. ātāl > ātāl, medial unvoiced - 't' voiced 'd'
64. pāil (Skt. pāli or pālita, by epenthesis pāil
"The pālīs are the assistants (cf. Assamese pāli) of whom there are usually several in a troupe. Their main function is to provide the choral support to the singing of the mul by repeating the refrain and to maintain the continuity in the singing of the narrative by putting in such pieces as ā, ha, etc. at the end of every movement."

So, it would not be far from truth if we say that both the pālī of o.ia'oali and the pālī of Kusān-�āna have got many similarities from the functional point of view. Strong resemblances are found both in o.ia'pālī and kusān-�āna in respect of contents of their recitation, since both the art forms recite themes from the Epics and the Purānas with showing of different bhāvas.

Kusān-�āna of Bengal does not show major differences with that of Assam's Kusān-�āna, of course some local folk elements got amalgamated with Bengal's Kusān-�āna.

From the above discussion it is clear that the art form o.ia'pālī has got many similarities with other performing art forms prevailing in different regions of India. Even this art form bears similarity with the art form of Gandharva-�āna (cf. Yaksāgāna and Kusān-�āna) current in Nepal.


66. T.N.Sarma: Pānicāpuspa, p. 122
Jāgarana gān and rayānī gān are two traditional performing art forms associated with the worship of the snake goddess Manasa widely current in Bengal. There is no difference between these two art forms in respect of theme, content and context. They differ only in name. Both jāgarana gān and rayānī gān are performed in the context of Manasa pūjā. Like jāgarana gān the ojāpāli of Manasa variety may continue for many days. Both the ojāpāli and jāgarana gān are generally performed in the courtyards.

Jāgarana gān is known as rayānī gān in East Bengal. The songs of Manasa recited by professional parties are called rayānī gān. The troupe consists of 12 to 15 members recruited from both sexes. Assam's ojāpāli troupe consists of 5 to 7 pālis and females are never allowed to sing Manasa-song in accompaniment with the ojāpāli. Like rayānī gān the ojāpāli may continue up to three, five or seven days or so on. From the point of performance it can be said that both jāgarana gān and rayānī gān recite the songs of Manasa in sitting position, but the ojāpāli art form recites the songs of Manasa both in sitting and standing positions.

"The ojāpāli is a pan-Indian art form and hence it owes its all-India character despite local peculiarities in respect of language and narrative technique."