CHAPTER V
DIFFERENT FORMS OF OJAPĀLĪ

The ojāpālī art form may rightly be classified into a few classes from the viewpoints of text, context, structure and performance. The tradition of kathakātā paved the way for the development of the sūta and the chārana traditions; in the same way the tradition of kathakātā gave birth to different forms of ojāpālī to cater to social and religious needs. Although story telling is the very basis of the ojāpālī as a whole nevertheless different varieties of ojāpālī emerged to meet the different contexts.

The Pāncaḷī style of Music:

The ojāpālī style of music may be equated with the pāncaḷī style of songs. Pītāmbara Dvīja in his Úṣā-Parinaya Kāvya mentions the term pāncaḷī:

ratirasa biśega kahite nājuyaya/
padība pāncaḷī guru gaurava sabhāy //2

i.e., It is not to be told in detail as it is replete with eroticism; since, it will recite at the august gathering.

Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva also refers to the term pāncaḷī or pānāḷī in his Paṭaṅga Purāṇa:

Sukavi Nārāyaṇadevar surasa pāncaḷī/3

i.e., This pāncaḷī is composed by Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva.

1. Pītāmbara Dvīja an Assamese poet of early 16th century A.D.
3. Paṭaṅga Purāṇa (Ms) p.16
The word pāṅcāli or pācāli is derived from Sanskrit pāṅcāli or pāṅcālikā which carries the meaning 'a doll'. "And it is quite probable that this form of poetry was connected with the ancient amusement of puppet-play, especially popular in the country-side". 4

The Kalika-Purāṇa alludes to the term pāṅcālikā in connection with the worship of Candikā. The Purāṇa mentions that the goddess Candikā should be propitiated on the third day of the moon directly linked with the Pusya naksatra with pāṅcālikā-vihāra and sīśu-kautuka:

pusya-naksatrayukta tu tṛṭiyāyadi labhyate /
tasyām pūjyā sada devi candikā sāṅkarena ha //
pāṅcālikāvihāradyaṁ sīśunāṁ kautukaistatha //
vaivahiken vidhinā mohayecandikāṁ śivam //5

It seems that the term pāṅcālikā mentioned above denotes puppet-dance or singing of pāṅcāli or pācāli-kavyas. 6 It is likely that either the kathaka or the oja sang songs based on paurāṇic story or recited theme of kāvyas both accompaniment of gestures and dances in the style of the Sūtrādhāra of puppet dance and hence the form (i.e., ojapāli) came to be known as the pāṅcāli of Pāṅcāli. 7

5. P. Tarkaranta (ed): Kalika-Purāṇa, 86/133-34
7. B. N. Sarma: Asamīya Saṅityar Samiksātmak Itibṛtta, p. 109
According to some scholars of Bengal the pāñcālī is a style of music current in the Pañcāla Country. Music enframed in the style of the music of Pañcāla is called pāñcālī or pācālī. 8

Narahari Chakravarty (18th century A.D.) a well known scholar in the field of music specially in the music of Gaudīya Vaisnavism deals with the pāñcālī style of music in his work the Saṅgīta sarasangraha. He defines pāñcālī as a style of music which contains dhūmpada which is according to him a very essential trait of the pāñcālī style of music. 9

Gīta and Pada i.e., song and verse composed keeping in view the suitability of recitation of kathaka are known as pāñcālī in Bengal. 10 A. Bhattacharyya thinks that songs containing an episode and pertaining to the fame and glory of god and goddess are called pāñcālī in Bengal. 11 In Assam also, pāñcālīs or pācālīs were composed for the recitation of oīāpālī and hence, it would be logical if we say that the songs and verses written for the purpose of recitation and singing of oīāpālī (kathaka) performance are styled as the pāñcālī or pācālī. 12

Secondly, the term pāñcālī or pācālī may derive from Sanskrit pāṅca (meaning five). 13 N.C. Sarma holds the view that

8. S.N. Sarma, op. cit., p.109
9. Ibid., p.109
10. Ibid.
12. S.N. Sarma, The Epics and Puranas in Early Assamese Literature, p.83
13. Pāṅca + ālā + ikā > MIA· Pāṅca + al, ālā > As pāc + āl + ā, Pācālī.
the *ôjapāli* art forms may be called a combination of five elements. The *ôjapāli* troupe consists of at least five members. It is a five-fold music. Hence, it is apparent that the word 'five' plays an important role in the art form of *ôjapāli*. Due to extra-ordinary importance given to the word pañca in the art form of *ôjapāli* and as such it is known as pāncāli or pācālī. Some scholars opine that the term pācālī comes from Sanskrit pāda (foot). They advocate that the *ôjapāli* art form recites the songs and verses by moving their feet and hence, these songs and verses may be termed as the pāncāli or pācālī kāvyas.

Taking all these facts into consideration we may come to the conclusion that the *gitas* and *padas* written for the recitation of *kathakas* or *ôjapālis* are called pāncāli or pācālī-kāvyas. In fine, the pāncāli or pācālī is a style of music which deals with a sort of light amusement.

The tradition of pāncāli was prevalent in Assam before Saṅkaradeva. We have sufficient grounds to justify the statement. The *Guru-caritas* observe that Mathurādāsa Budhā Atā a Saṅkarite devotee used to sing pāncāli songs in the company of eighteen assistants. Nārāyana Thākura Atā, a devotee of Saṅkaradeva brought him later on to Mādhavadeva at Sundarīdiya. He was converted to the Saṅkarite faith and formed an *ôjapāli* troupe and performed

15. Ibid., p. 27
Kirtanas. Before the advent of Vaisnava drama choral songs and dancing had come into being, art forms like pāncālī song and ojaśpāli catered to the masses.

"From the very name viyāhar ojaśpāli we can presuppose the existence of the pāncālī kāvyas dealing with the episodes of the Mahābhārata. Unfortunately, actual specimens of such a type of kāvyas dealing with the stories of the great epic are yet to be discovered, although the Giti-Rāmāyana of Durgāvara testifies to the existence of viyāhar ojaśpāli on the Rāmāyana stories. But the absence of any specimen does not preclude the possibility of the existence of pāncālī-kāvyas on the Mahābhārata themes. Therefore, it may be surmised that during the period preceding the advent of neo-vaisnavism in Assam, the people were entertained and instructed by the ojaśpāli rendering of the pāncālī kāvyas dealing with the epic themes on the one hand and by narrative-kāvyas suitable for recitation on the other".

Being a sort of light amusement the pāncālī music 'came to be looked with suspicion by the Vaisnavites'. Inasmuch as the pāncālī music could not be recognized as stylistic music...
and as it did not adhere to Vaisnave idealism, insomuch the style had been abandoned by the epic-based ojāpāli, still the art form continued to be a living tradition in Āuntātī and Daksināpat Sattras.

The Suknāni ojāpāli no doubt is a strong bearer of the pāncaḷi music style.

From the thematic points of view the ojāpāli may be categorized into two heads:

(A) Epic-based ojāpāli
and (B) Non-epic-based ojāpāli

(A) The Epic-Based Ojāpāli:

The epic-based ojāpāli are those which solely depend on the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana as well as the Purāṇas. From the thematic point of view this form of ojāpāli does not recite the contents of other than the theme of Viśnu-lora originally. Of course, in some cases, this variety may sing songs containing the Śākta elements also. But this tendency surely a very recent development. The following varieties of ojāpāli may be included in this category:

(i) Vyāsa-saṅgīta or bijāhar ojāpāli or bijāh-gowā ojāpāli
or vyāsa-ojāpāli or sābhā-gowā ojāpāli.

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20. Viśnu-lora here does not refer to neo-vaisnaveism propagated by Saṅkaradeva. The tradition of vyāsa-saṅgīta dates back to Saṅkaradeva. Hence, vyāsa-saṅgīta may rightly be called a non-neo Vaisnava art form.
(ii) *Kamāyana-saṅgīta* or *Kamāyana-govā ojāpali* or *Rāyman ojāpali*,

(iii) *Bhāra* or *bhaurīya* or *bhairā ojāpali*,

(iv) *Durgāvarī ojāpali*,

(v) *Satrrīya ojāpali* or *biyāhīya ojāpali*,

(vi) *Pacicalī* and *Duladi ojāpali*,

Among the different varieties of the category *Vyāsa-saṅgīta* is the most important form.

(i) *Vyāsa-saṅgīta* or *biyāhar ojāpali* or *biyāh-govā ojāpali* or *vyāsa-ojāpali* or *sabhagovā ojāpali*:

The tradition of *biyāhar ojāpali* goes back to *Vyāsa-saṅgīta* which begins with the recitation of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*. This style of *saṅgīta* starts with the great sage *Vyāsa-deva* and hence it is known as *Vyāsa-saṅgīta*. The term *Vyāsa* suggests different meanings and one of them refers to a *Brahmin* who recites or expounds the *Purāṇas* in public. The term *vyāsa*

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21. The practical Sanskrit Dictionary of V.S. Apte suggests the following denotations of the term *vyāsa*:

(i) Distribution, Separation into parts,

(ii) Dissolution or analysis of a compound,

(iii) Severalty, distinction,

(iv) Diffusion, extension,

(v) width, breadth,

(vi) The diameter of a circle

(vii) A fault in pronunciation,

(viii) Arrangement, compilation

(ix) An arranger, a compiler,

(x) Name of a celebrated sage

(xi) A *Brahmana* who recites or expounds the *Purāṇas* in public.
leads to byāha and biyāh in Assamese. As in Sanskrit, Assamese biyāh also recite and expound the epics and the Purāṇas. One who acquires proficiency in the art of Vyāsa-saṅsāra may be called biyāhar ojā and including the assistants of the biyāhar ojā the troupe is styled as biyāhar-ojāpāli. According to the Sanskrit tradition a Vyāsa must be a Brāhmin. Originally, the active bearers of biyāhar ojā hailed from the Daivajña Brāhmin line. As for instance, we can cite a few lines quoted from a copper-inscription issued by king Lakṣmī Simha in the year 1696 Saka (i.e., 1774 A.D.):

Ayam pradāt kṣīti simām Kāmarūpa nisine /  
śrī kṛtī śrī Sāgarākhyaṇa daivajña kula janmāne  
tasmāi gathaka vāryaya tāmra patramidāncaḥ//22

i.e. The king Lakṣmī Simha in the Saka year 1696 donated this copper-plate to Sāgara, an inhabitant of Kāmarūpa who is born of an astrologer family (Daivajña Kula, i.e., Daivajña Brāhmin) and is the best among the Purāṇa singers (Gathaka) as a means of securing his livelihood.

Sāgara a renowned biyāhar ojā i.e., Gathaka hailed from a Daivajña family. However this rigidity did not continue, because persons other than a Daivajña Brāhmin family used to learn the art form subsequently.23

22. Informant: Gurucharan Misra, Salmara, Kamrup, The Plate collected on 10.10.84.
23. Sri Durgeswar Nath (Ojā) an active bearer of the art form of the time, recipient of the artist's pension from the Government of Assam for the year 1984, hails from the Nath or Yogi community and his father as well as grand-father were also active bearers of the art form.
In this connection we may refer to one Cántái ojha (ojā) who was supposed to be a biyāh-gowā ojā and was a non Brāhmin. He was donated lands and Paiks by the king Lakṣmī Sīsīha by issuing a copper-plate with a view to securing his livelihood in the year 1697 Saka (i.e., 1775 A.D.) Another belief goes that the ojā recites themes or stories from the works of Vyāsadeva (i.e., the Mahābhārata or the Purāṇas) is known as biyāhār ojā, irrespective of Caste and Creed. "The latter type of songs (i.e., biyāhār ojāpālī)" says M. Neog, "is known as vyāhāra-gīt (songs of Vyāsa, presumably the author of the Mahābhārata) and the chorus singing these songs is called Vyāh-gowā ojāpālī."

From the foregoing discussion we may assume that the nomenclature of this form of ojāpālī, however, comes from Vyāsa i.e., a reciter or expounder of the epics and the Purāṇas.

P.C. Das thinks that Cántái was a biyāh-gowā ojā. But the copper-plate donated to Cántái by Lakṣmī Sīsīha does not mention anything about the specialization of the form of ojāpālī as we find in the copper-plate issued to Sāgara by the same king in the previous year viz :

24. Informant : Sri Umesh Ojha, Ojhatola, Hazo collected on 11.11.84.
(a) Sagara was a gathaka (i.e. the epic or Purāna singer) and he was Daiyajña Vipra.
(b) He was a biyāhar ojha.

But the copper plate issued to Čantāi ojāa mentions only that he was an ojā or ojha. viz.

"Sargadeve Ḥazor Čantāi Ojhaṅkā dīle/" 29 i.e. The king makes donations to Čantāi ojha(ojā) of Ḥazo.

Hence, it is doubtful whether Čantāi was a biyāh-goṅa ojā or not. But it is also correct that Čantāi was associated with the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava where singing of biyāh-ojāpāli at the time of worship was a must. The Manasa variety was never allowed to be sung there. So, it would not be irrelevant if we say that Čantāi was a biyāhar ojā. There were many performers of biyāhar ojāpāli who used to settle in a ward adjacent to the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava at the behest of either the Ahom kings or the Koch kings. This ward is yet to be known as ojā-tola, but even a single ojā is not found here to-day.

From the conflicting statements cited above we may rightly arrive at the conclusion that to be a biyāh-ojā one must be a

27. "Sri Sagarākhyāya daivajña Kula jaymāne tasmait gāthaka Varvāya/"
28. Salmarā grāmar biyāhar ojha. Sagarāk Sargadeve ei māṭi dīle/ (The king makes donations to Sāgarā of Salmarā village who is biyāhar ojā or Ojha)
29. Informant: Sri Umesh Ch. Ojha Hazo, data collected on 11.11.84
30. P.C. Das, op.cit., p.275
Brahmin (Daivajña). If any body other than a Brahmin acquires proficiency in this art form, he is not regarded as biyāh-gowā ojā. Observes M. Sastri: "The biyāh-gowā -ojhā) must be a member of the Daivajña family who traditionally settled at the village Vyāsaparā. None can claim the honour of biyāh-ojhā (ojhā) other than the above family." As such, probably Oahtāi ojhā(ojā) is not called biyāh-gowā ojā in the inscription granted by Lakṣāmi Simha.

According to a tradition current in the district of Darrang the biyāh-gowā ojā may be devided into two sub-groups e.g.

(a) biyāh-ojā proper , and
(b) pharīngatīyā ojā.

(a) Biyāh ojā proper:

The ojā who was patronized by the kings of Darrang rājya and who could manage to receive the mudrā, i.e., a tauryyatrika ventra from that royal family and used to sing jāgara-gītās (i.e., songs of awakening) at the time of worship of Śiva or Viṣṇu or Durgā, performed by that family was styled as the biyāh-ojā proper.32

(b) Pharīngatīyā ojā:

The word pharīngatīyā denotes uncultivated, barren, unskilled, etc. An ojā having no proficiency in the art is called a pharīngatīyā ojā.33 However, this inference cannot be taken for granted.

31. M. Sastri : A Samat Sāṅgīt Carcā (Rāmhēnu, edited by B.K. Bhatta-
32. N.C. Sarma, Charva, 6th year, 2nd issue) p. 82
33. Informant: Sri Durgesvām Nath ojā, data collected on 1.12.84
since, this inference seems to be erroneous. The oîã or oîãlã included in the perimeter of the term Pharingatîya is not unskilled or lacking in proficiency in the art of oîãlã. As for example, late Dhaturam Sarma (a Brahmin of Yogi or Nath community) was a renowned oîã of biyãh variety. He is still to be regarded as the mother of rãga-rãginis. Sri Durgeswar Nath is a very illustrious oîã of the time. His father and his grandfather were also oîãs of credit. In fact, the oîãs who did not receive royal patronage came to be known as pharingatîya oîãs.

The active bearers of the biyãh-gowã-oîã proper hold that the music style of the pharingatîya oîã differs to some extent with that of the biyãh-oîã proper.

Scholars like D. Sarma and A.C. Barua as well as M. Neog are of opinion that the biyãh-gowã-oîã, a style of traditional song and dance originated in ancient Prãgyotisa-Kãmarûpa and was handed down through the ages and is now confined to Darrang only. This assumption may be substantiated by documental evidences that originally, this variety of art form was confined to the temples of Siva and Višnu in Kãmarûpa. Sagara Daivajña, a reputed oîha (oîã) of the biyãh-gowã form was endowed with lands and pãike by the Ahom king Laksmi Simha by issuing a copper

34. Informant: Sri Nareswar Sarma Barua, Dipila, Darang, data collected on 3.1.85
35. D. Sarma: Mongaldair Baranj, pp. 108-09
   A.C. Barua: Biyãh-oîãlã (Pravandha Saurabha, edited by P. Hazarika), p. 68
   M. Neog: Tradition and Style, p. 20
The king donated lands inscription, was a man of Kamarupa. The king donated lands and residence to Sagara ojha at Dhumuhagra in Darrang rajya. Since then, Sagara ojha used to reside at Dhumuhagra. Sagara was patronized by the kings of Darrang rajya. Gradually the village Dhumuhagra came to be known as Vyah or biyah-para, i.e., the village of biyahas. Till now, the village is famous for the traditional biyah (=vyah) singers.

This variety of ojapali is also termed as the Sabha-gova ojapali. The nomenclature seems to be based on the functional aspect, since the main function of this category of ojapali is to perform in the religious Sabhas, i.e., assemblies.

It has already been shown that the tradition of biyah-gova ojapali goes back to the remotest past. As such, this form of ojapali was the only model from which the other forms of ojapali evolved. This can be proved from the thematic, structural and contextual points of view. The biyah-gova ojapali usually takes

36. "ayam pradat kṣiti simām Kāmarupa hitine... Śrī Sāgarākhyaya/
37. (a) The copper-plate issued by Laksmlśīha.
(b) The present Darrang is a district. In the past it was a part of the kingdom of Kamarupa. During the reign of king Pratap Śīhma alias Svarganārayaśa (1603-1641 A.D.) Balinārayaśa alias Dharamanārayaśa was installed as a tributary king of Darrang. Since then, Darrang was regarded as a kingdom.
A. C. Gait : A History of Assam, p. 68
N. O. Sarma (ed) : Survey Sūryya Khādi's Daraṅga Rājavamsāvalī v.v. 764-91
38. biyah-pāra Skt. * Vyāsa + pātaka (meaning the part of a village or the half of a village) MIA * biśa + pāta  As biha + pāra, biyah pāra.
39. M. Neog : Sattriya Dances of Assam and their Rhythms, p. 11
40. Supra Chapter III.
themes from the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas, however, the Rāmāyaṇa themes are also not ignored. Since the term Vyāsa or vyāh or biyāh has extended sense to include the work of Vālmīki. Says M. Neog: "Vyāsa is traditionally the author of the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas, and the word Vyāsa or vyāh has the extended meaning to cover Vālmīki's work also." 41

So far as we know, originally, this variety of ojpāli recited themes from the Sanskrit epics and Purāṇas. But subsequently, the art form used to recite themes from the Assamese versions of the Mahābhārata, particularly the Vadhā-kāvyas (a variety of Vaisnava kāvyas dealing with the killing of demons) of Rāmasarasvatī or the Yuddha-kāvyas (kāvyas relating to fierce battles) such as the Nāgakṣa-Yuddha of Bhavadeva Vipra or the Adbhuta-Rāmāyaṇa of Raghunāth Mahanta and so on. Above all, this variety of ojpāli sings songs from the Usā Parināya (marriage of Usā) the Giti-Rāmāyaṇa of Durgāvara Kāyastha. The byāh-gowa ojpāli never sing songs of the Manasa lore. "The vyāh-gowa-oḷās performed metrical versions in Assamese of the epics and the Purāṇas. They can put any book of verse on such subjects to tune and utilise for their purpose; but, they do not sing songs of Manasa worship." 42

On the other hand, the Manasa variety of ojpāli (i.e., Manasa Saṅgīta or Sukrāṇi ojpāli) takes themes from the Manasa lore which is current both in the forms of oral tradition as well

41. M. Neog: Sankaradeva and His Times, p.251
42. ——: Sattriya Dances of Assam and their Rhythms, p.11
as written tradition. The Manasa-lore and Manasa worship are no doubt later development in comparison with the Epics and the Purana tradition.

The structural analysis of performances and the style of music and dance of biyoh-gowa-ojapali indicates that it is an earlier form than the Manasa form.

From the contextual point of view it can be said that the biyoh-gowa ojapali generally performs its performances in the context of Vasudeva-puja (worship of Vasudeva) on the other hand the manasa ojapali performs its performance in the context of Manasa-puja (worship of the snake goddess Manasa). According to scholars the tradition of Vasudeva-puja seems to have been current from the remotest past. T.N. Sarma advocates that the tradition of Vasudeva-puja must have been prevalent since the 4th or 5th century A.D. This hypothesis can be testified from the iconographical point of view. The icons of Vasudeva discovered so far in Assam no doubt are definite proofs of the strong and long tradition of Vasudeva-worship and which is current still to day in Assam. The Kalika Purana (c. 12th) enumerates

43 S.N. Sarma : Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and the Sattra Institute of Assam, p. 5
45 P.C. Chaudhury has given a detailed discussion about the icons of Vasudeva discovered in Assam in his "History of Civilization of Assam, pp. 457-59
five manifestations of Vasudeva with their Pithas. Amongst these pithas Hayagriva-Madhava at Manikuta and Vasudeva in the Dikkaravasini region are most important.  

Two copper plate grants dated 1392 A.D. and 1401 A.D. have been discovered in the subdivision of North Lakhimpur from which we get clear evidences that the worship of Vasudeva was current from fairly old times. These two copper plates were granted by the king Satyanarayana of Sadhayapurī (supposed to be modern Sadiyā) and his son Lakṣmisī Narāyaṇa respectively. In the first copper inscription a gift of two hundred putis of land in the village Bakhana is made to a Brahmin Narayana who was a regular worshipper of Vasudeva. The inscription begins with an invocation to Vasudeva, Isāna and Ambā. The second copper plate refers to Lakṣmisī Narāyaṇa's land gift to Brahmin Ravideva, son of Harideva who was a devout worshipper of Vasudeva.  

That the Vasudeva cult was a living cult before the fifteenth century may rightly be proved by the personal names to be

46. Kālika Purāṇa, chapter 80  
B. Kakati: The Mother Goddess Kamakhya, pp.71-72  
S.N. Sarma: op.cit.,p.5  
B.K. Barua: A Cultural History of Assam, p.172  
B. Kakati: Purani Kamarupar Dharmacakra, pp.124-28  

Ibid.  

48. S.N. Sarma: op.cit.,p.5  
M. Neog: Sankaradeva and His Times, p.87  

49. Ibid.
found in the copper inscriptions issued by the kings of early Kaśmīr. The Garita-puthis also furnish a few evidences in this regard. The Nidānpur grant of king Bhaskara Varman (c. 7th) contains a few personal names of Brahmins which are also the names of Vyūhaś and Vibhavas of the Pāñcarātra-Vaisnavism. It should be mentioned that the ancestors of Gopāla Ātā, a Vaiṣṇava proselytiser of the 16th century bore such names as Vāsudeva, Pradyumna, Śāṅkarasana, Kāmadeva and Aniruddha, which are invariably taken from the Pāñcarātra-cult.

The Vāsudeva cult is definitely a pre-Śāṅkarite religion. We can cite a remark of S.N.Sarma in favour of our inference. "Another noteworthy evidence of the existence of the Vāsudeva cult in the pre-Śāṅkarite period of Assam is furnished by the prevalence of the worship of Vāsudeva in Śāṁtipa rites like Śrāddha and Pārvana. Brahmins who thus worship Vāsudeva are known as Prācīna-panthī, while those whose forefathers came to Assam later and adopted the modes of Śāṁtipa practices modified by Baghumandan (c. 15th) of Bengal are not required to worship Vāsudeva".

B.Kakati holds that the cult of Vāsudeva represents an earlier form of Vaiṣṇavism that the neo-Vaiṣṇavism of mediaeval times.

50. B.K.Baruah, op.cit., p.170
   S.N.Sarma, op.cit., p.5
51. B.Kakati : The Mother Goddess Kamākhya, pp.71-72
   S.N.Sarma, op.cit., pp.5-6
52. S.N.Sarma, op.cit., p.6
53. B.Kakati, op.cit., p.70
Taking all these facts into consideration we can arrive at the conclusion that Vāsudevism was the earlier form of Vaiṣṇavism practised in Assam.

It has already been pointed that the origin of Vāsudevism may be traced in the Pañcaratra-Sāhhitās. Therefore, it would not be irrelevant if we say a few words about the Sāhhitā form of early Vaiṣṇavism. "The Sāhhitās are historically noteworthy in two ways. Firstly, the emergence of Sakta principles in the Vaiṣṇava sect. But they are also notable as being the first manuals formed to express both the beliefs and the practice of Vaiṣṇavas. In the matter of Practice they are as it were the Kalpa-sūtra of the Vaiṣṇavas. ... The theology of the chief Sāhhitās is essentially a development of the teaching of the Nārāyanīya episode of the Epic with addition of a considerable Sakta element. The basis of the philosophy is the theistic Yoga ... In the supreme state Viṣṇu and his Śakti are one paramātman without distinction. It is in creation that they become distinguishable ... In the first stage of primary creation the Śakti awakes as if from sleep in her two aspects, Kriyā (action) and bhūti (becoming), and manifests the six guṇas i.e., attributes of her Lord, viz. knowledge, unrestricted power, energy, strength, virility, splendour. The six together constitute Vāsudeva, the first Vyūha and his Śakti Laksāmī. The six fall into pairs, and from them emanate in order Saṃkarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, the second, third and fourth Vyūhas and their Śaktis. From the Vyūhas proceed twelve sub-vyūhas and twelve Vidyesvaras.... The doctrines of mantra and yantra in the sāhhitās
are indistinguishable from the Sakti teaching. Magic in all its forms, with innumerable spells and rites and talismans, is carefully described and eagerly commended. The great sectarian mantras of namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya (Bhagavata), om namo Narayanaya (sri Vaisnava) and the famous mantra of Narasimha are all adored and studied and expounded in a thousand ways. 54

Further E. G. Bhandarkar observes: "The Gopala-Krsna element does not form a part of the systems that are based upon the old Panaicaratra doctrines. The Saivika-dharma or monotheistic religion was that which was promulgated by the Bhagavagita, but the Panaicaratra system consisting as it does of the worship of Vasudeva and his several forms shews no organic connection with that work though bhakti or devotion is common to both." 55

The mode of worship of Vasudeva as found in the Kalika-purana corresponds to the analysis mentioned above. 56 The germ mantra of Vasudeva consists of dvadasakaara (of twelve syllables):

"Kathita Brahmanah puja puja puja srnu Vaisnavam/
Vijastu Vasudevaya puraiva pratipaditam //
tadangamantra rajendra dvadasakaaramucyate//
namo Bhagavate purvam Vasudevaya vai param// 57

54. J.N. Farquhar: An outline of the Religious Literature of India, pp. 183-86
56. B. Kakati: op.cit., p. 71
57. Kalika-Purana, 80/89-90
Along with Vasudeva, a pentad of complementary deities are to be worshipped. They are Rama, Krsna, Brahma, Sambhu and Gauri. Sambhu and Gauri are never to be separated in respect of worship. If they are separated the worship shall be in vain. Vasudeva has eight attendants (Yogis). They are Valabhadra, Kama, Aniruddha, Narayana, Brahma, Visnu, Narasimha and Varana. The Nayaka (leading god) is Vasudeva and the Nayika (leading goddess) is Vimala. The Yoginis (attending females) to Valabhadra and others are certain abstractions. They are Utkarshini, Jneya, Jnana, Kriya, Yoga, Prahlada, Esani and Anugrahi. Excluding Valabhadra and Kama as well as Brahma all the Yogis are four-armed having samkha-cakra-gada and padma. The worship of Vasudeva ought to be performed with different flowers and vegetarian offerings.
The **Vasudeva-pūjā-Vidhi** (Handbook of worship of Vasudeva) goes in the following way: His colour is like the lustre of crystal. His person is always decorated with the chaplet made out of wild flowers reaching down to the knees. He has a pair of yellow clothes on His body. His ears are glittering with a pair of pendants. The **Kāustubha** (a celebrated gem) decorates His **śrīvatsa** (curl of hair on the breast). He is wearing a **kīrtī** (crest) and a **vaiyānopavīta** (sacred thread). He possesses four arms. He holds **gāda** (mace) on the upper right hand and a **padma** (lotus) on the lower right hand and holds **cakra** (discuss) on the upper left hand and **sāmkha** (conch) on the lower left hand. The golden coloured **Lakṣmī** and **Śrīsa** coloured **Sarasvati** are constantly worshipping Vasudeva from either side. He is to be worshipped with His attendants: **Śaṅkara**, **Pradyumna**, **Aniruddha**, **Nārāyaṇa**, **Brahmā**, **Viṣṇu**, **Narasimha** and **Mahāvarāh**.⁶⁵

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⁶⁵ "Om Vāsudevām Saddhasphatikā saṅkāsām ājānu
λαμβιτανάλατοπασοβίταμ, πιταναστριγάδαμβαράμ śrīvatsa
kaustubhoraskam kīrtinam vaiyānopavītinam,
caturbhujam dakṣina karabhyaṁūrddhāḥ kramena
dhṛta gāda padmaṁ vāma karabhyaṁ tathāiva dhṛta cakra
śaṅkham dakṣina pārśvasthayaṁ suvarṇa varṇaya
Lakṣmyā sevyamanāṁ vāma pārśvastha śrīsa varṇayā
dhṛta gāda padmaṁ vāma karabhyaṁ tathāiva dhṛta cakra
śaṅkham dakṣina pārśvasthayaṁ suvarṇa varṇaya
Sarasvatīya sevitaṃ pañcāvarṇopeta vanamālāṅkitam kunda
kusumāḥam śrīvatsa vakṣasaṁ aruna varṇa kaustubhā
grīvam purvāidalastha saṅkarsanā pradyumnaṁiruddha
nārāyaṇabrāhmaṁ visnumahāśiṁ mahāvarahasaṁ tetam garuḍa
dhavajam garuḍāḥ śrī saṅkarsanā dyumnaṁ karuṇa
mandala vahinimandalopari sitāśadalapadmapavistam om’/

Vāsudeva-pūjā vidhi pp 6(kh)-7(k)

(owner: Late Indra Nath Sarma, Hazarikapara, Darrang).
The worship of Vāsudeva is performed by both Vedic as well as paurānic modes; 'vädic-paurānikasca mantraih pujayet', while He is to be awakened by nrtya and gīta:

nrtya gītaih samudito jāgaraṁ karamiśi

According to Vedācāryya, Vāsudeva's awakening is to be performed with the gāndharva nrtya associated with tāla:

'saśāstram jāgaraṁ yasya nrtya gāndharva samyutam/
savadyatāla samyuktām sadīpaṁ sādhubhiryutam'

So, it can be asserted that the biyāhar ojāpāli which is known as gāndharva-nrtya traditionally, is a must in the worship of Vāsudeva.

The tradition of Manasa-pūja seems to have been started later than the tradition of Vāsudeva-worship. The contextual evidence shows that the biyāh-gowa-ojāpāli art form is earlier than the manasa-ojāpāli. Being an earlier form the biyāhar ojāpāli must have influenced profusely the other forms of ojāpāli in their origin and growth.

The content analysis of the different varieties of the ojāpāli art form exhibits that the epic-based ojāpālis are mostly vaisnavite institutions in their spirit and colour and on the other hand the non-epic based ojāpāli are sākta institutions. The biyāh-gowa ojāpāli may rightly be called a classical art form, whereas, the manasa variety by and large seems to

66. Vāsudeva-pūja Vidhi, pp.6(kh)-7(k)
67. Ibid.p.18(k)
68. Quoted from M. Sastri's Asamar Vaisnava Darsanar Rūpakehā, pp.30-31
be folk art form, although the suknani variety current in the
district of Darrang surely possesses classical elements in its
songs and dances.

(ii) Ramayana-Sangita or Ramayan-gowa ojapali or Rayman Ojapali:

Though the biyah-gowa ojapali also sings songs of the Ramayana yet some ojapalis of this category confine themselves to
the Ramayana themes only. Generally, they do not sing themes
of the Mahabharata or the Puranas. Gradually, this form of
ojapali comes to be known as the ramayan-gowa ojapali. Like
the biyak variety, the ramayanagowa ojapali also perform their
performance in different vaisnava-pujas. They sing songs from
the metrical versions of the Assamese Ramayana like Madhava
Kandali (c. 14th), Ananta Kandali (c. 16th) as well as Durgavara
Kayastha (c. 16th) and so on. This form of ojapali is still to
be found in Darrang and Kamrup. "The ramayan-gowa-ojapali is
still a living art form of course, due to some reasons the art
form has dwindled to some extent, still its prevalence cannot
be ignored. In our childhood we saw the performance of the
ramayana-gowa-ojapalis very frequently. This form of ojapali
recites themes from the Assamese version of the Ramayana of
Madhava Kandali." 69

The ramayana-gowa ojapali current in the district of
Darrang in the by gone days and now does not exhibit any
difference in the matter of structure and performance from the

bihā-gowā oja-pāli. The difference lies only in the theme. M. Sastri is of the view that the biyah-gowa oja-pāli who sang the themes from the Ramayana was known as the Ramayana-gowā-oja-pāli. Apart from this both the biyah-gowa oja and the ramayana gowa oja-palis may not be regarded as two independent forms particularly in the district of Darrang. But the hypothesis cannot be applied in respect of the district of Kamrup, since there are thematic, structural and musical differences between the biyabhar oja-pāli and the ramayana-gowā oja-pāli. This form of oja-pāli sings almost exclusively from the themes of the Ramayana. The ramayana-gowā-oja-pāli prevalent in the district of Kamrup seems to be a non-classical art form. In some parts of the district of Kamrup, the ramayana-gowā oja-pāli is known as the rāyman oja-pāli. It is a short form of the term Ramayana.

(iii) Bhāura or bhāuriya or bhāira oja-pāli:

The rāmāyana-gowā oja-pāli that gives emphasis on the aspect of hāsya-rasa, i.e., humour by giving stress on bhāva, i.e., abhinaya is known as bhāura or bhāuriya oja-pāli in Kamrup. Rightly does observe M. Sastri, 'This variety of oja-pāli arouses the humour sentiment (hāsyā rasa) by gestures and movements as well as behaviour and customs as well as by dialogue. So, this form of oja-pāli is known as bhāuriya oja-pāli.'

70. Informant: Acarya Manoranjan Sastri, data collected on 29.12.84
71. Skt. rāmāyana > As, rāyman, due to metathesis.
72. M. Sastri: Asamat Sangit Carca (Ramchenu) p.82
A.C. Hazarika is of opinion that the rāmāyaṇ or rāyan-govā ojāpali is known as bhāira ojā. It is also correct that humour is an important component of the biyāhar form of ojāpali, in spite of this humour cannot play a dominant role in this variety of ojāpali, since, gīta and nṛtya are predominant here. But in the bhāira ojā emphasis is given on the humour aspect.

The Assamese term bhawariya derives from Sanskrit bhava. According to Mallingtha, the famous commentator, the term abhinaya suggests rasa and bhava. The Daśarūpaka states that the essence of nṛtya (mimetic art) and nāṭaka are bhava and rasa respectively. So, we may say that a performer of bhāva is called a bhawariya or bhaurā or bhāira. The literal meaning of the term bhawariya is 'one who represents on other's character'. The ojā and the daināpali of bhauriya ojāpali represent others' characters like Rāma, Hanumān, Rāvana and others with gestures and movement while they recite themes from the Ramāyaṇa. Even they represent social satire viewing the contemporary society in the midst of the main performance. They term this social satire as purāṇa, such as belgā-purāṇa (story of separation of a joint family), (Cau-purāṇa (story of tea), Cūtika-purāṇa (story of hotch-potch), C.R.P. Purāṇa (narration of atrocities of the C.R.P. in Assam in 1980) and the like.

73. A.C. Hazarika: Mañcālekhā, p.206
74. Oh.A. bhāva + kara, karika + āka > MIA bhāa + ariā + ā + As bhā + ariā, bhawariya
75. abhinayo rasabhavadi-vyanājaka ceṣa viṣeṣah
kirātarjuniyam, X. 42
76. anyadbhavasrayam nṛtyam /Dhañjaya: Daśarūpaka, 1/12
77. bhaurā and bhāira are short forms of the term bhawariya
78. M. Neog: Saṅkaradeva and His Times, p.268
The bhaurā ojāpāli is not a stylistic art form like the biyāh-gowa ojāpāli. It is rather a folk art form than a classical art form.

(iv) Durgāvari Ojāpāli:

The durgāvari ojāpāli is an important variety of the ojāpāli art form. Durgāvara Kāyastha was a well known poet, musician as well as singer and ojā of Assam who flourished in the 16th century A.D. He lived on the Nilacala Hill during the reign of his patron king Visva Simha of Kāmarupa-Kamatā sometime in the 16th century A.D. K. Bardolai holds that Durgāvara was born at Hazo.

His Giti-Ramāyana may rightly be called an ojāpāli version of Madhava Kandali’s Assamese version of the Rāmāyana. Says M. Neog: ‘with all its original lyrical beauty Giti-Ramāyana is for the most part only a popular version of Madhava Kandali’s work meant for the use of the ojā of ojāpāli chorus. The narration of the story is sometimes scrappy and disjoined; but then the gaps could be filled by the ojā or daināpāli.’

The ojāpāli which sings themes from the Giti-Ramāyana of Durgavara Kāyastha is styled as the durgāvari ojāpāli. Once it was widely popular in lower Assam, particularly in Kamrup and Darrang. M. Sastri opines that the durgāvari ojāpāli was performed stylistically in Darrang. But now it is not found in

80. B.K. Barua: History of Assamese Literature, p. 14
81. K. Bardolai: Sura-Paricaya, p. 10
82. B. Kakati: Puranī Assamiya Sahitya, p. 101
83. M. Neog: Assamese Literature before Sānkaradeva, p. 56
   (Aspects of Early Assamese Literature, edited by B. Kakati)
84. K. Bardolai: op. cit., p. 10
that area.\(^{(85)}\) In Kamrup also "the singing of durgāvari Ramayana song is restricted to-day to a very few isolated pockets and a handful of experts".\(^{(86)}\) The reminiscence of the durgāvari ojāpāli is now seen only in Hazo area. This art form is also meant for singing in religious assemblies.\(^{(87)}\)

(v) Satrīya ojāpāli or Biyahiya ojāpāli:

The ojāpālis restricted only to different Sattras\(^{(88)}\) of Assam are known as the Satrīya ojāpāli or biyahiya ojāpāli.

\(^{(85)}\) M. Sastri: op. cit., p. 18

\(^{(86)}\) B. Datta: Bulletin published on the occasion of Festival of Traditional performing Art Forms of Assam, Deppt. of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, 1982, p. 4

\(^{(87)}\) M. Neog (ed) Durgāvari Giti-Ramayana, Intro., p. 38

\(^{(88)}\) The word sattra is a sanskrit term which refers to a religious sitting or association. But in Assam's context it suggests a systematized institution.


'The most notable characteristic of the Vaishnavism of Assam is the Sattra institution through which the faith was propagated and established. It may be monastic as well as semi-monastic in form. The former type resembles, to a certain extent, the Buddhist monasteries of ancient times and the mathas of medieval age. But the importance of the institution lies in the fact that it is intimately connected with the Assamese society and it has become a part and parcel of Assamese life.'

S. N. Sarma, op. cit., Intro. P. xii
The Sattriya ojapali seems to be a sattraite edition of the biyaha-gowa ojapali. It has already been mentioned that the ojapali, particularly the biyaha-gowa form, was a living art form in the time of Sankaradeva who preached the new Vaisnavism by means of the ojapali:

Ramarana guru Ramadasa oja dui /  
Madhava kirtana kar dainapali bai //  
gagana mandala cove kirtanar dhvani /  
ananda sagare loka maje take sumi //

i.e., Ramarana guru and Ramadasa performed the role as the ojas and Madhava chanted kirtana as dainapali. The tone of the chanting of Kirtana touched the vault of heaven; Hearing (the ojapali singing) the listeners submerged into the seas of joy.

D.Sarma indicates that a dainapali of biyaha variety named choto Baloram was brought by Sankaradeva through Narayana Thakur from Rauta of Darrang. Choto Baloram took the biyaha-gowa ojapali into the precincts of neo-Vaisnavism and seems to have reformed the art form to some extent to suit the new doctrine.

89. Supra, Chapter III  
91. D.Sarma : Mangaldair Buraaji, p.95
The Carita-puthie relate that Mathura dasa Budhā Ātā alias Gopāla Ātā who initially accepted the Vaisnava faith according to the Chaitanya school later on he and his companions were brought by Nārāyaṇa Thākur to Mādhavadeva. Gopāla Ātā along with his company took initiation from Mādhavadeva and formed an ojāpāli chorus. They very often came to Sundaridīya sattra and performed the ojāpāli. M. Neog maintains that the ojāpāli exists in the sattra from the days of Mahāpurusa Saṅkaradeva. So, it seems not to be irrelevant if we say that the biyāhar-ojāpāli is the only model from which the Sattrīyā form of ojāpāli emerges. Says S.C. Goswami: "The Sattrīyā form of ojāpāli is heavily influenced by the biyāhar ojāpāli. The Sattrīyā ojāpāli is also known as biyāh, biyāhar-ojāpāli or biyāhiyā ojāpāli. The term biyāhiyā surely comes from the word biyāh. The dance aspect of the Sattrīyā ojāpāli has many similarities with that of biyāhar ojāpāli. From the thematic aspect also the Sattrīyā ojāpāli owes its origin to the biyāh-gowa ojāpāli since this art form sings themes of the Assamese version of Vyāsadeva’s works, i.e., the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas.

All these lead to one conclusion that the Sattrīyā ojāpāli is nothing but a neo-Vaisnavaite edition of the biyāh-gowa ojāpāli.

To say in the words of S.C. Goswami: "The Sattrīyā ojāpāli has

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93. R.M. Nath (ed): op.cit., 50/50-52
94. M. Neog: Saṅkaradeva and His Times, pp. 136-37
95. S.C. Goswami: Saṅkarī Natya Nṛtya Kalā, p. 112.
96. biyāh + iya ( śkt. ikā + āka) = biyāhiyā, medial long vowel a > ā due to vowel mutation.
97. M. Neog: op.cit., p. 27
its origin in the traditional art form of biyah-gowa ojāpāli. M. Neog points out that the Sattriya ojāpāli maintains similarity and relation with the biyah-gowa ojāpāli in many respects.

The Sattriya form of ojāpāli is widely prevalent in the different Sattras of Assam. The Kirtaniya ojā or kirtaniya-phaud\(^{(a)}\) seems to be earlier than the Sattriya ojāpāli. Writes M. Neog: "some poems like those embodied in Sankara's Kirtana-ghosā were sometimes performed by a small chorus known as ojāpāli. Such choral performances are said to have been held at Sāṅkara's Sattra at Bardowā".\(^{100}\) There are some differences between the kirtaniya-phaud and the Sattriya form of ojāpāli in respect of structure and theme.\(^{101}\)

Bhūsana Dvija writes in his Carita-puthi that both ojā and pālis sing themes of Śāṅkara's Kirtana-ghosā. This type of singing is known as ojāpāli.\(^{102}\) At the Dhūwahāt-sattrā Rāmarāma guru and Rāmadāsa played the role of ojās and Mādhava-deva performed as dāināpāli and Śāṅkara-deva clapped his hands to the rhythm of the act of singing.\(^{103}\) Daiyārī Thākur states that at Sundaridīyā Sattra one Lakamaṇa ojā performed ojāpāli alongside

\[98. \text{S.C. Goswami: op. cit., p.112}\]
\[99. \text{M. Neog: op. cit., p.89}\]
\[99(a) \text{Phaud means group of singers.}\]
\[100. \text{M. Neog: Śāṅkara-deva and His Times, p.337}\]
\[101. \text{Sattriya Dances of Assam and their Rhythms, p.89}\]
\[102. "Kirtana karaya pāli ghošaka gāvaya/ Ojā pada bole yena amṛta saṁcaya //"/\]
\[\text{D.Barkakati(ed): Bhūsana Dvija's Śrī Śrī Śāṅkara-deva, v.186}\]
\[103. \text{M. Neog: Śāṅkara-deva and His Times, p.337}\]
Mathurādāsa and others. Rāmananda Dvija writes that Hridayananda acted the role of ojā in the pada-kirtana singing.105

In the same way, the ojāpālī art form was prevalent in Pāṭbāusi sattrā also.106 Of course, now not a single ojāpālī is found in this sattrā.107 The Satrīyā ojāpālī is current both in Auniati and Dakṣinapāṭ Sattras. According to T.N. Sarma the Satrīyā form of ojāpālī of Auniati Sattra is also well known as biyāhar- ojāpālī and it sings material from the Assamese versions of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa and other Purāṇas.108 There are seven troupes of ojāpālī of the same form in that Sattra. Each of the troupes contains one ojā, a few pālis and one dāināpālī as well as one doheriya.109 One party of such ojāpālī consists of at least 25 to 30 performers including both the ojā and the doheriya as well as the dāināpālī and the new learners of the art.110 B.Sarma in his Dakṣinapāṭ Sattra writes that the sattrā possesses at least three troupes of the form. The Satrīyā-ojāpālī of this sattrā is known

105. H.Gupta (ed): Rāmananda Dvija’s Gurucarita, V.1359
106. M.N.Chaudhury(ed): Ramaraya’s Gurulīlā, vv.228,427,1009
107. Informant : Sri Harekrsna Goswami, Pāṭbāusi, data collected on 7.11.84
108. T.N.Sarma, op.cit., p.385
109. Doheriya or doheriya suggests well trained ojā who receives nirmālt (blessing) from the Satrādhikara. A doheriya is next to the ojā. All ojās do not have doheriya only the aged ojās may have the right to take a doheriya.

Informant : Sri Manik Ch. Gayan, Auniati Sattra, data collected on 7.11.84
110. T.N.Sarma, op.cit., p.389
as simply ojāpāli. The theme sung by the ojāpāli of this sattra is regarded as pada-ghosa. The Sattrīva variety of ojāpāli of Kamalābāri Sattra consists of one ojjā and any number upto 20 to 25 pālis. The performance of the Sattrīva form of ojāpāli is a must in the daily ceremonials of Sattras.

Sattras established by Dāmodaradeva and his disciples in the districts of Kamrup and Darrang do not have dances and ojāpāli performances in daily ceremonials. On the contrary, in Sattras established by disciples of Dāmodaradeva, particularly in upper Assam, dances and ojāpāli performances are essential in the daily ceremonials. T.N.Sarma tries to find out reasons behind the discrepancy apparent between the Sattras of the School of Dāmodaradeva of Kamrup-Darrang and upper Assam. He says that although Dāmodaradeva was not an antagonist of dance and other performances of the performing art forms in the Sattra nevertheless it seemed that he did not encourage dance and ojāpāli performance. Once Dāmodaradeva along with his disciples happened to stay for a night at the residence of one Beduwa Vipra of Bijayanagara. A Kirtaniya party consisting of two mrdangas and 7 to 8 pairs of Khuti tālas began to sing the Saṅkīrṭana in front of Dāmodaradeva. He could not hear the chanting of Kṛṣṇanāma due to disturbance caused by the sound of mrdanga and tālas. Suddenly he was attacked by high fever. He got ready to leave the place immediately. The devotees fervently requested him

111. B.Sarma: Daksinapāt Sattra, p.24
112. M.Neog: Sattrīva Dances of Assam and their Rhythms, p.27
113. ———: Saṅkaradeva and His Times, p.340
not to leave the place. Thereupon Damodaradeva said:

"O my devotees: listen to me,
I am listening to the glory of Lord Krishna
with concentrated attention.

But you the kirtaniyas began to perform
kirtana with mrdangas and tālas.
This is no doubt, a means of devotion of Lord Krishna.
Even then, you should bear in mind that:
It has an adverse effect on the act of listening to the
glory of Lord Krishna.

Hence, I am disturbed by the sounds of mrdangas and
tālas."\(^{114}\)

From the above, it may be assumed that Damodaradeva did
not favour dance or such other art forms in the Sattras due to
their adverse effect on the sravana. As such, nṛtya and Vādya
were deemed unnecessary in the sattras of the Dāmodara school
subsequently.\(^ {115}\) Vamsigopāladeva was deputed both by Damodaradeva
and Madhavadeva to propagate the message of new-Vaiṣṇavism in
eastern Assam.\(^ {116}\) The remark passed by Damodaradeva on āśīta

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\(^{114}\) Śunā bhakta yatā / kathā sāravanat / ēcho ami ekamane/
Sari mandirata / kirtana pāṭilā / khola kirtaniyā gane //
sīyo sēkabīda / bhakati Kṛṣṇara / tathāpi jana nīścayā/
 kathā śravanara / pratikēlā Boone / kathāka yena bhāṅgaya/ "
khola kirtanara / sabade āmara/ sarīre uthila jvara /
gīwara bīṣata / bhailo sūritēta / āsilo uthi satvāra//

Quoted from T.N.Sarma's Anunīṭi sattrar Buranji.

\(^{115}\) T.N.Sarma, op.cit., p.375

\(^{116}\) S.N.Sarma, op.cit., p.78
and vādyā could not influence him since Vasāgopāladeva left lower Assam much earlier than the incident happening at the residence of Beduwa Vipra. Hence, the ojāpāli art form is singularly absent in the sattras of the Dāmodara-school of Kamrup and Darrang. 117

The dāināpāli has no place in the sattrīya form of ojāpāli particularly in the sattras of the Śāṅkaradeva school. But the dāināpāli is a constituent part of the Sattrīya ojāpāli current in the sattras of the Dāmodara-school particularly in Upper Assam.

(vi) Pâncālī (gāvana-bāvana) and Dulādi ojāpālis

Although the pâncālī and dulādi ojāpālis are restricted only to Āuniātī and Dakṣinapāṭ sattras nevertheless these two forms of ojāpāli cannot be included in the jurisdiction of the Sattrīya ojāpāli as these two forms have no place in the daily ceremonials of the sattra. But on special occasions such as ekādaśī and saṃkrānti as well as bihu and so on both the pâncālī and the dulādi forms of ojāpāli are performed. According to the Sattraṅādhikāra of Āuniātī Sattra the pâncālī form of ojāpāli consists of five cālis, and hence, it is called pâncālī ojāpāli.

The Nāṭya-śāstra defines cāli or cāli as the effort of uniformity by between foot and shank as well as thigh and hip. 118

117. T.N. Sarma, op. cit., pp. 375-76
118. Bhārata's Naṭya-śāstra, 11/1
The term call comes from the word căli and it is the movement mainly with a single foot. The Sangitaratnakara defines cări or căli as:

$k eight \text{ sangitaratnakara defines } \text{ cări or căli as:}$

\[
\text{komalā savilāsan ca mađhuraṁ tāla-lasya-yuk} \\
\text{nātirtapaṁ nātimandāṁ tyasaṛataḥ-pracurāṁ tathā} \\
\text{padoru-kaṭi-bāhunāṁ yaugapadyena cālanāṁ}
\]

Mahārājā Bhāgyacandra Simha of Manipur (1764-89 A.D.) in his work the Govinda-saṅgītā-līlā vilāsa defines căli as the combination of four particular gātibhaṅgas, two particular types of bhramariś (gaits) and a particular rhythm styled as trimelaka. The Nāṭya-sāstra enumerates thirty-two kinds of căriś, whereas the Abhinayadarpana mentions only eight căriś.

The art form of pāṅcāli ojaḍaḷi consists of one oja and a few pāḷis. The oja holds a chāmara in his left hand and a maṇjīra in his right hand. The pāḷis hold mrdanga on their necks. Themes of recitation have generally been taken from the Bhāgavata-puṛāṇa or other puṛāṇas. The dāpāḷi may not be ignored from this ojaḍaḷi form. The role of the Śaṅkara (prompter) cannot be traced in other varieties of ojaḍaḷi but the pāṅcāli form of ojaḍaḷi is surely an exception in this context. The

119. Ukapādapracyaḥ yah sā căriyabhissajīnitaḥ/ Ibid, 11/2
120. M. Sarma(ed): Sarangadeva's Sangitaratnakara, 7, 1207-f
121. Maharājā B. C. Simha(ed): Govinda-Saṅgītā-līlā-Vilāsa
M. Neogi(Sarkardeva and His Times, p.298 ff
122. Nāṭya-Sāstra, 11/10-13
123. M. Ghosh(ed): Nandikesvara's Abhinayadarpana, S.N.298-300
Sattradhikara indicates that the Pañcaīī ojaḍāli may also be styled as pañcaīī-gān,\textsuperscript{124} or pañcaīī-gāvana-bāvana.

The duladi ojaḍāli:

The duladi form of ojaḍāli consists of one oja and a duhariya as well as a daṇāpāli and a few pālis. The Khutitāl or mañjira is the only instrument used by the pālis. The oja does not play on the cymbal. There is no use of the mrdaṅga or khola. The standing position is the only position in which the art form recites themes from the Assamese versions of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa and the other Purāṇas particularly written in the Chavi chanda (an Assamese metre). Although the form is styled as duladi ojaḍāli nevertheless it does not sing materials written in the duladi chanda (an Assamese metre). The duladi art form is also known as duladi gān.\textsuperscript{125}

B. Non-Epic-Based Ojaḍāli:

This variety of ojaḍāli differs from the epic-based ojaḍāli in respect of content, structure and context, since this form of ojaḍāli depends on the theme of the snake goddess Manasā. Ophiolatry is an ancient and common cult which is not confined to the Indians only but also found among many other races of the world.\textsuperscript{126} The serpent received almost universal veneration in

\textsuperscript{124} Informant: Sattradhikār Probhu Śrī Śrī Vishnuchandra Deva Goswami, Auniṭā Sattra, data collected on 7.11.84
\textsuperscript{125} Informant: Sattradhikāra of Auniṭā Sattra, data collected on 7.11.84
\textsuperscript{126} J. Fergusson: Tree and Serpent worship, pp. 1-64
C. S. Waves: Serpent worship and other Essays, pp. 81-106
J. Lubbock: The Origin of civilisation and the Primitive condition of Man, pp. 268-275
ancient times. The two primitive instincts fear and wonder play an important role on the growth and development of snake-worship. E.O.James has been pointed out the forces that tending to the creation of a deity or a belief: "The pressing events in the external world and in the immediate circle of human relationships, the struggle for existence and survival, the innumerable daily frustrations and our inspiring experiences, often completely outside human control and beyond comprehension, above all the ceaseless preoccupation with the means of subsistence and continuance of the species - these were and are the cause and occasions of the emotional situation out of which rite and belief have emerged." 128 Scholars are of opinion that the Dravidians contributed the snake-cult in India. But Hopkins does not accept this view on the plea that "Primitive religious characteristics are human, not racial." 129

The practice of serpent worship in India goes back to the Harappa culture of the Indus Valley. The seals and pottery discovered in Mahenjadaro so far have focused much light on the religious life of that time and on attitude towards the serpent. 130 Furthermore, some seals represent the association of snakes with trees. 131 Seals depicted with the Cobra may

127. W. Crooke: Natives of Northern India, p. 242
128. E.O. James: The Concept of Deity, p. 17
129. E.W. Hopkins: The History of Religions, p. 16
lead us to think that the veneration of the snake was surely prevalent among the people of that time. Ferguson believes that some kind of snake-cult was current in the proto-Indian period. Vogel shows that references to the snake-cult are found in the Vedas, the Mahabharata and the Puranas, the Jatakas and other religious scriptures.

Although the Aryans may have opposed the practice of snake-worship initially, ultimately they assimilated the snake-cult as a part of their religion. In the Atharvaveda snakes are invoked and worshipped. The later Hindu sastras may provide ample references to the worship of the snake. According to Mc Grindle live snake worship was popular in ancient India. This practice is not uncommon even today in India. The snake-deity is represented in Indian art in three different types: (i) theriomorphic, (ii) anthropomorphic and (iii) therio-anthropomorphic.

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132. J. Ferguson, op.cit., p.244
133. J. Ph. Vogel : Indian Serpent-Lore, Intro. pp.3-34
135. Atharvaveda, V.13, VI. 12, VII.56, VIII.7-8, XI.6,9
   Max Muller (ed): Bauddha Yana Grhyasutra, III. X. 2
137. Mc Grindle : Ancient India, p.145
139. P. K. Maity, op.cit., p.39
The tradition of serpent worship is widely prevalent in the whole of southern India. The serpent goddess is known as Mudāmā in Southern India. In north and central India the snake-god is worshipped in Zoomorphic form, and in South India generally a live snake is worshipped. But exception is found particularly in Assam and Bengal. Here the snake-god is worshipped in the form of a female deity, i.e., anthropomorphic form. And the goddess is known as Manasā. The tradition of the worship of Manasā in Bengal goes to the early period of the Pāla Kings. Observes N.N. Bhattasali: "The Senas came from Southern India and settled in Bengal in the middle of the 11th century A.D. They very likely favoured the worship of the snake Goddess Manāchā and their rise probably gave an impetus to her popularity. The decline of Buddhism by this time gradually transferred the honours paid to Jānguli to Manchā who fast became Manasā at the hand of the Brahmin theologists."

Now it may be conjectured that the practice of worship of goddess Manasā was started in Bengal in the 11th century A.D. B.K.Barua and S.N.Sarma are of opinion that the tradition of Manasā worship may have entered Assam from Bengal in the

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140. J.Ph. Vogel, op.cit.,pp.270,272
141. -Ibid- pp.268-69
142. A.Bhattacharyya(ed) : Manasā Maṅgal, Bhūmikā, p.I
143. P.K.Maity, op.cit., p.48
144. Quoted from the Manasā-Kāvya edited by B.K.Barua and S.N. Sarma, Intro.p.7
13th century A.D. along with the Muslim invaders.\textsuperscript{145} Of course, there is no textual or historical evidence that can be furnished in support of this hypothesis.

Secondly, Muslim invasion spread up to Upper Assam but the cult did not spread in Upper Assam.

"Furthermore political and cultural contacts between Bengal and Assam before the Muslim invasions were not lacking. Thus it seems unlikely that the cult spread into Assam during the Muslim invasion.\textsuperscript{146}

Hence, it may be conjectured that the cult entered into Assam from Bengal due either through cultural assimilation and historical diffusion or population migration. The cult is confined to only the districts of Kamrup, Darrang and Goalpara where both tribals and non tribals worship the snake goddess.

Although B.K.Barua and S.N.Sarma believe that the ancestors of the people of the Mariya caste were the founders of the worship of Manasa in Kamrup and Darrang,\textsuperscript{147} nevertheless that hypothesis is not convincing. The editors try to justify their conjecture from the textual evidence. Mankar (C16th) a well known Manasa-poet writes:

\begin{quote}
\textit{曼那婆陀 jāgoka rataner cāribāti/}
\textit{mādaiya-mādiyāni jāgoka jateka barati/}\textsuperscript{148}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{145} B.K.Barua & S.N.Sarma, \textit{op.cit.}, p. Intro. p.9
\textsuperscript{146} P.K.Maiti : \textit{op. cit.} p.291
\textsuperscript{147} B.K.Barua & S.N. Sarma(ed): \textit{op.cit.}, p.9
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid. ,p.3
\end{flushright}
i.e., let the four lamps made out of ratna awaken; let male worshippers (mādaiya) and female worshippers (mādiyāni) of Mādai awaken;

let those offering vrata (on account of Mādai worship) awaken.

In the same manner, Sukavi Narāyanadeva mentions:

(i) Pūjapali mariyāi jayajokāra diya/\[^{149}\]
i.e. After completion of the pūja the mariyā (worshipper of māre-pūja, i.e. Manasa-pūja) expresses rejoicings.

(ii) mariyā mariyā buIi dākite lāgīla/
taIā suni mariyāI daraśana dīla //\[^{150}\]
i.e. The Brahmin (i.e., Priest) begins to call the mariyā; hearing the call, the mariyā comes in.

From above it may be assumed that the term does not indicate a particular caste as stated by B.K. Barua and S.N. Sarma, but the term itself indicates the worshipper of māde or māre Devī, i.e. goddess Manasa.

The term māre may be explained in the following ways:

(a) Goddess Manasa is also known as Māre-devī which may be equated with goddess Mariammā. Mariammā is worshipped

\[^{149}\] Padma-Puran (Pūjakhandha) MS, p. 6
\[^{150}\] Ibid, p. 21
as a goddess of epidemic diseases in south India. In Assam Māre or Mārai is regarded as the presiding deity of epidemic diseases and bad omens. So, goddess Māre or Mārai may have migrated from south India to Assam.

(a) According to M.C. Goswami the word māre has been derived from Sanskrit mātr with the addition of Assamese privative suffix to an Assamese base mar (of the mother). Mārai is the presiding deity over epidemic disease like cholera, small-pox and unnatural deadly afflictions like snake bite.

(c) S. Sen explains the terms māre and mārai in the following ways:

"māre and mārai come from Sanskrit *mandanikā, * mandanika, *mandavika, * mandavia > *mādāi > mārai > mārai. It cannot be derived from mātr."  

(d) A stone image of Manasa with an inscription was discovered in North Bengal. S.K. Saraswati has read it as bhaṭṭināmattuva. M. Neog suggests that this form of the name may have something to do with Assamese mārai.

From the aforesaid discussion it may be said that the term māre or mārai may come from the Assamese phrase māri-maraka, i.e.,

151. H. Whitehead : The village Gods of South India, pp. 29, 31, 116-117
152. N.O. Sarma : Asamiya Loka-Sanskritir Abhās, p. 94
155. Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, No. 28, p. 281
156. M. Neog : A Note on the Etymology of certain words in connection with Manasa worship (Journal of University of Gauhati) p. 58
epidemic diseases. It is a folk belief that there is a presiding deity over epidemic diseases and she is called mārē or mārai devī.157

The worship of goddess Manasa or a god of serpent is associated with gīta-vādyā-nṛtya and some kind of abhinaya. Vogel states:

"In the south Kanara district on one of the highest mountain of the western Ghātas, named Subrahomanya, there is one of the most famous serpent-temples of India. ... The temple .... contains the idol Subbaraya (=serpent king) said to be a shapeless block ... The annual festival takes place on the sixth day of the bright half on the month of Mārgaśīrṣa (November-December) ... Numerous devotees who have made a vow roll and wriggle serpent-fashion round the temple, and some will even roll up to it from the foot of the mountain, a mile distant. A person supposed to be possessed by the spirit of Subrahmanya, dances at the temple and is believed to have the power of foretelling the future."158

The Nāga is supposed to be the tutelar deity of the houses of the Malabar coast. The serpent deity is periodically propitiated there with songs and dances called "Nāgam-Pattu.159
In the South Kanara also the snake-god is usually worshipped with gīta-vādyā-nṛtya and abhinaya. "In the evening bruised

\[\text{158. J.Ph. Vogel: op. cit., pp. 272-73}\]
\[\text{159. J.Ph. Vogel: op. cit., p. 274}\]
rice is scattered over a spot previously selected and the figure of a great serpent traced out in it. The figure is then worshipped, and a band of musicians summoned and well primed with toddy to sustain them in their work. They dressed themselves in women's clothes and put on jewels, drumming and piping on furiously, and the leader, imitates the deity reeling and writhing about frantically, and at times uttering words, which are devoutly attended to as though spoken by the deity; yet the musicians are low-caste people. The wild discordant music is often prolonged through the night.

In some parts of Uttar Pradesh it is a custom that a legend is told which is an amplification of the sage of Janmejaya and the Nagas. In Garhwal the Nāga Pañcami worship is followed by listening to stories in praise of the Nagas in the night. Gita-vādyā-nṛtya and abhinava are also associated with the worship of the snake goddess Manasā in Bengal. The Manasā-story is represented by different art forms such as bhāsān-gaṇ, jagarana-gaṇ, rayānī-gaṇ, and putul nāc and so on as a part of the worship of Manasā.

In the Assam context also gita-vādyā-nṛtya and abhinava are associated with the worship of Manasā. According to the scripture goddess Manasā should be propitiated by both Vedic

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160. J. Ph. Vogel: op. cit., p. 275
163. P. K. Maity, op. cit., pp. 312-14
and purānic as well as laukika modes and gīta-vādyā and nrtya.

The Vidhi of Manasā worship states that gīta-vādyā and others related to gīta and vādyā are part and parcel of the worship of Manasā:

"Om tattvam ēka namah namah iti trivajjno- riti viṣṇum smṛtvā tilakṣaṇa kusaphalapuspa sahitam jalapurnatāmarādī pātraṁ grhītvā om viśnuryādi mahāvākya mucarya amuka rai gotrasya ... sahadārā-patyaśva ādhyatmika ādhībhaṭtika ādhitāvīka àpṛapīvām tāpā trayah vimuki parama saubhāgya santati vipula dhana-dhānīya āyurārogyānāpyāt kāmanāya svah kartavyā ganañatyādī devatā pūjā nūrvaka astaṅgāgaṁ saha manasādevī pūjāṅsabhūta gīta vādyādibhih adya gandhādivāsam karma ... /164

The listening to episode of goddess Manasā including the marriage of Lord Siva written in the pavaśa Chanda is included in the śastraic-worship of goddess Manasā:

astāksarimantrena amuka saṁkhyake homa stava-pātha- java-siddhānma-pāyasa-padmakumāryā yathā pavaśa racita śravaṇa kirtana sivāpati vivaḥena... /165

Even Nārāyaṇadeva says that worship of Manasā cannot be completed unless the performance of gīta-vādyā-nrtya is held:

nētakīye nrtya kare gāyane gāwe gīta/
śanandita haliyā pūrṇaya manara bāñchita //166

164. Manasā-Pūjā Vidhi (MS), pp. 4K-5K
Owner late Indrā Nath Sarma, Hazarikapara, Darrang
165. Manasā-pūjā Vidhi, p. 9K
166. Paḍmā-Purāṇa, Pūjā-Khaṇḍa (MS) p. 10
i.e. The female dancer dances and the singer sings songs; Goddess Manasā fulfills the desires of the mind being satisfied fully.

The usual custom is that ojāpāli should be performed at the time of Manasā-pūjā as well as after the end of the Śaśtric mode of pūjā. Hence, it can be said that the ojāpāli performance is very essential in Manasā-pūjā. 167

The non-epic-based ojāpāli may loosely be called manasā Saṅgīta since this type of Saṅgīta is strictly connected with worship of the snake goddess popularly known as Manasā, Bisahāri, Padmā, Brahmāni or Barmāni. The ritualistic songs sung by the ojāpāli art form to invoke the snake goddess are known as manasā-saṅgīta. The non-epic based ojāpāli or manasā-saṅgīta may again be sub-divided into the following heads viewing the thematic differences apparent in the context of performance. e.g.;

(i) Suknāni ojāpāli or Raṅg-gowa ojāpāli,
(ii) Bisahāri gān,
(iii) Māre-pūjār gān or Māre gān,
and (iv) Padda Purānar gān

(i) The Suknāni Ojāpāli or Raṅg-gowa Ojāpāli:

The ojāpāli art form that recites the songs of goddess Manasā from the Padmā-purāṇa composed by sukavi Nārāyanadeva

167. Informants: Sri Nareshwar Sarma Barua, Dipila, Darrang data collected on 7.12.84
Sri Bhadra Kanta Sarma, Baladev Para, Darrang data collected on 6.3.84
(c.17th) a poet of the Manasa-saga and performs ritualistic dances in connection with the worship of Manasa is called the sukñāni ojāpāli or the rang-gowa ojāpāli or marai-gowa ojāpāli. Observes M. Neog: "The ojāpāli institution, performing ritualistic dances on the occasion of the worship of the serpent goddess, Manasa or Marai, is known as marai-gowa, rang-gowa or sukñāni ojāpāli (sukñāni = sukavi nārayani of sukavi Nārayana a poet of the Manasa saga, 17th century)." 168

The word sukñāni or sukñāni is a coined word which is formed by putting the first letter of each word of the sentence: "Sukavi Nārayanadeva nīgadati" i.e.; Sayeth Nārayanadeva, the poet par excellence, e.g., su + ka + nā + ri = sukaṇāni, and due to initial stress, intervocal 'a' is dropped and it is heard as suknāni or suknanni. We may rightly present a remark made by D. Neog in favour of our hypothesis: "The songs of Nārayanadeva are known also a suknāni, probably an abbreviation of Sukavi Nārayani". 169

Secondly, marai-gowa-ojāpāli indicates the ojāpāli form that sung the songs of goddess Marai or Mare (=Manasa). 170

Thirdly, the suknāni ojāpāli is also styled as rang-gowa ojāpāli. The worship of goddess Manasa limited only to one or two days is called rang-pūjā. It is of two kinds: (i) gotā-rang, i.e., Manasa-pūjā, covers only two days and (ii) ek-parīya rang

168. M. Neog: Sankaradeva and His Times, p. 293
170. Infra, pp. 121-122
pūjā, i.e., Manasa pūjā completed within a day. But māre pūjā or mārai pūjā has to be continued for more than three days and it ranges from three to fifteen or twentyone days. The gota-rāṅg is also known as jagowā pūjā (awakening). 171

The use of terms rāṅg or rāṅga is found in the Abhinayadarpana of Nandikesvara. The writer of the Abhinayadarpana directs one to praise the goddess of rāṅga before staging a drama,

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e.g., bharatakulabhāgyakalike bhāvarasānanda paripatākāre / jagadakamohanaakale jaya jaya rāṅgadhidevate devi //172
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i.e. "O goddess of rāṅga! victory to Thee,
Thou art the patron of the actor-class,
The embodiment of the joy accruing from states and sentiments,
Thine is the kala(art) that only can charām
The whole world, victory to Thee".

But the goddess of rāṅga as stated by the Abhinayadarpana has nothing to do with the tradition of rāṅg-gowā ojāpāli. The worship of Manasa itself is called rāṅg-pūjā. We have reasons to believe that the snake-goddess Manasa is highly please by pūjās, hence the worship is also termed as rāṅg-pūjā. 173 In the same manner, the ojāpāli performed in connection with the rāṅg-pūjā is called the rāṅg-gowā ojāpāli. 174

Secondly, the worship of Manasa is invariably associated with dancing, singing and acting (i.e. rāṅga). The term rāṅga

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171. N.C. Sarma: op.cit., pp.96, 98
173. N.C. Sarma, op.cit., p.98
174. Ibid.
also denotes the act of dancing, singing and acting. So, the worship may be styled as raṅg-pūjā, and similarly the ojāpāli art form associated with the raṅg-pūjā may be called raṅg-govā ojāpāli. 175

The suknāni ojāpāli is confined to Darrang and as few localities of eastern and middle Kamrup. However, ojāpālis of this category current in both Darrang and Kamrup bear some dissimilarity in respect of content and styled of music. In Kamrup, the term ojāpāli indicates only the manasa variety. But the term suggests both the biyāh form as well as the manasa form in Darrang. The ojāpāli of the manasa variety of Darrang depends on the Padmā-purāṇa. The Padmā-purāṇa seems to have been transmitted orally from one oja to another oja. It is said that during the reign of the Darrang kings the oral-tradition of the Manasa-saga took the written form only in 17th century A.D. This written form is called the Padmā-purāṇa. The suknāni ojāpālis of Darrang claim that their songs are no doubt based on the Padmā-purāṇa. Even then, the matter of the songs varies from oja to oja and area to area. It is not unlikely that the ojāpāli of suknāni variety very often depends on the oral tradition than on the written tradition. The suknāni ojāpālis prevalent in the district of Kamrup, however, depend on the oral tradition of the Manasa-Saga. Only a few years back these songs of Manasa were collected by late Daiva Chandra Talukdar. 176 The suknāni : Padmāvatī edited by D. Talukdar shows

175. N.C. Sarma, op. cit., p.98
different readings with that of the *Pārava-purāṇa* collected in manuscript form from the royal family of Darrang and preserved in the Manuscript preservation Department of Gauhati University.\(^{177}\) There are variant readings of the same Assamese *Purāṇa* current in Darrang. So, we have sufficient reasons to believe that the Manasā-saga was transmitted orally. This hypothesis is found correct not only in the context of Assam but also in the context of Bengal. Observes P.K. Maity: "... none of the manuscripts as extant were written during the life time of the poet. Some interpolations and alterations in the original composition of the poet are to be expected."\(^{178}\) Referring to the difficulties of using the material of oral tradition T.W. Clark writes: "None of the manuscripts we now possess are originals, for the poems were handed down in oral tradition for many generations, and were not in many cases committed to writing until as late as the 18th or even the 19th century during which interval it is safe to assume that material alteration were made; and ... the authors were not writing of contemporary life and worship, but of periods preceding their own by three, four or even more centuries."\(^{179}\)

The *sukhanāi ojāpāli* current in the district of Darrang is heavily influenced by the biyāh-gōwa form in its musical aspect. So, it is nearer to the classical style to some extent; on the contrary, the *ojāpāli* prevalent in Kamrup is surely pervaded by folk elements.

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177. MS No. 2788(A)
178. P.K. Maity, *op. cit.*, p. 77
Like the biyabar ojāpāli, the suknāni ojāpāli troupe consists of one ojā, a ātrāpallī, two gorgalīs (back pallas) and two āg-palīs (front pallas).

(ii) Bisabarir gān:

The term Bisahari as a synonym of goddess Manasā denotes one who kills or allays venom. Goddess Manasā is also known for her power of allaying venom of snakes. Both Bisahari and Manasā are identical. In Kamakhya, Pachnari, Gerua and Bānum Suālkuchi of the district of Kamrup, Manasā is regarded as Māre-devī or Bisahari. The worship of Manasā is called Bisahari-pūjā in these places. Bisahari is worshipped both privately and publicly in Kamakhya and Bānum Suālkuchi and so on.

Bisabarir-gān or māre-pūjār gān prevalent in the above places obviously bears some differences with the suknāni form of ojāpāli in the context of theme, structure and style of music. Bisabarir-gān or māre-gān does not depend on the padmā-purāṇa but depends on the songs written by Mankar and Durgavara. This ojāpāli form obviously sings the songs of Bisahari or Manasā in sitting position. The ojā is known here as gītal or pāthak. He recites the songs from the manuscript of the Manasā Saga composed by both Mankar and Durgavara. The gītal is followed by another performer known as juri, i.e., helper or pāli. Both the gītal and juri hold the cymbals in the either hand. This form of ojāpāli does not possess stylistic music as we find in the biyāh-gowa and the suknāni ojāpālis respectively.
The deodha or ghora or deula (shaman) associated with the worship of Manasa in Kamakhya, Pachari, Geruwa and Bamun Sualkuchi. The shaman presents shamanistic dances along with the recitation of the songs of Manasa Saga. The Shamans come from men folk. A woman is not allowed to present shamanistic dance at the places mentioned above. But the tradition of shamanistic dance i.e., deodhani-nāc (dances of god-woman) performed by women associated with the sukhāni ojāpali or māre-gān is yet invogue in the district of Darrang and South Goalpara either both in tribal and non tribal areas. There can be no deodha-nāc or deodhani nāc without the recitation of Manasa songs.

(iii) Māre-Pūjār gān or Māre-gōvā ojāpālī:

The tradition of māre-pūjār-gān or māre-gōvā ojāpālī is widely prevalent in south Goalpara among the pāti Rābhās. The worship of the snake-goddess Manasa is known as bisahār(poison killer) puja or Māre-pūjā or Barmāni-pūjā amongst them. From the thematic point of view it can be mentioned that māre-gān or the māre-gōvā ojāpālī neither depends on the writings of Mankar nor Durgāvara and Sukavi Narayanadeva; but depends on the snake-goddess songs handed down traditionally. But surprisingly enough the echo of the songs of both Mankar and Durgāvara and Sukavi Narāyanadeva can be heard. In many cases, these songs are nearer to

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180. M. C. Goswami, op. cit., p. 56
the songs of Manasa-Saga current in the name of Sukavi Narayan-
deva. Mare-gan of South Goalpara is more dramatic than the other
forms of ojapali. Like other forms of ojapali, a mare-gan
troupe consists of one oja and a few palis. The dainapalis
found in other forms of ojapali are never found in this variety
of ojapali. The deodhani (female Shama) is an integral part of
this form. The deodhani dances in harmony with the recitation of
the ojapali. The palis occasionally play roles like Gando Sadagar,
Narada, Yakshini and garo-garowani while the ojapali recite
the songs of the snake-goddess. These characters dress themselves
and put on masks according to the local conventions. They
present some dramatic scene full of crude humour. B.Datta advocates
that the style of pronunciation and tune and the mode of present­
tation of mare-gan are not similar to that of ojapalis prevalent
in Darrang and Kamrup.

(iv) Padda-Puranar-Gan:

The word padda is a corrupt form of the term Padma. The
term Padda-Puran suggests Padma-Puran i.e. the story about the
goddess Padma. Padda-Puranar gan suggests the songs and dances
based on the Padma-Puran. This art form may rightly be called an
ojapali form since, it recites songs and performs dance and some
kind of abhinaya like the other forms of ojapali. The tradition
of Padda-Puranar gan is current in North and West Goalpara. The

182. P.C.Das : Goalparar Jana Jatiya Ojapali
(Prantik, 4th year, 2nd issue, 1984), pp.46-47
183. B.Datta (ed) : Goalpariyā Loka-git Samgraha, Intr.p.2
head of the troupe is called *mul-gāyaka* (chief singer) or *gital* or *gidal*. He may rightly be equated with the *ojā* of the *ojāpāli* art form. The assistants of the *mul-gāyaka* are known as *gāyaka* (singers) or *pāils* or *pālis*. The *bāil* (who beats *Khol* and plays on cymbal) an important member of *Padda-Purāṇar gān* is never found in other forms of *ojāpāli* except the *Paşcālī* form of *ojāpāli*. Very often boys dress themselves in girls' clothes and present dances along with the main performance.

Modern Form of *Ojāpāli*:

The *Āpi Ojāpāli* (female *ojāpāli*)

The term *āpi* denotes girl in the Kamrupi dialect. The tradition of the *āpi ojāpāli* obviously begins very recently as we have not found any old reference to it as in other forms of *ojāpāli*. This form of *ojāpāli* is formed by women folk on the model of the traditional *ojāpālis*. The *āpi-ojāpāli* is confined to only the Nalbari Subdivision of Kamrup district. The structure of *āpi ojāpāli* seems to have similarity with that of the *ojāpāli* formed by men folk. Like the traditional *ojāpāli*, the *āpi-ojāpāli* troupe consists of an *ojā*, a *dāināpāli* and a few *pālis*. From the thematic point of view the *āpi-ojāpāli*
strictly follows the line of the biyah-gowa ojāpalī, i.e.,
the form recites stories of the Epics and the purānas. Hence,
we have reasons to believe that the api-ojā is a modern form of
biyah-gowa-ojāpalī.

Like other forms of ojāpalī, the daināpali of api-ojāpalī
also plays an important role. The daināpali along with the ojā
occasionally compose songs on the spot keeping an eye on the
contemporary society. The ojā explains the verses in prose with
the help of the daināpali which is a very essential component of
other forms of ojāpalī. The api-ojāpalī presents dances in con­
formity with the recitations and occasionally performs dramatic
performances.

The api-ojā puts on a turban in her head, a golden ear-
ing, in her either ear. She decorates her neck by wearing a
galpatā and a dhol-mādali. Her forehead is decorated by a
tilaka of white sandal. She puts on a pair of gāmkharus on her
hands. The api-ojā wears a gown and skirt with long sleeves
and a cāddar and a gāmochā in her waist. She puts on a pair
of anklets on her legs. The daināpali including the pālis dress
with ribā-mekhalā and cāddar. Like the ojā, both daināpali and
pālis put on Kerus or ear-rings in their ears and galpatās
in their necks.

Both the pālis and the daināpali play on small cymbals
held by both hands. The ojā does not play on the cymbal. She

189. R.N. Sarma, op.cit., p.23
maintains rhythm by the anklets of the feet. The dainapali can enchant the audiences by her gestures and movements. The dainapali takes the help of riddles, proverbs and jokes to cater to the audience.

Like other forms of ojapali, the api-ojapali is a professional party and performs in connection with the various rituals.

In the district of Darrang (new) the api-ojapali is known as the likiri or ligiri-ojapali.