

# “PRESENTATION AND PERFORMANCE DYNAMICS OF *DEODHANI* DANCE AND *SUKNANI OJAPALI*”

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## Abstract:

*Ojapali* is a traditional folk-dance form of Assam, India, known for its vibrant and energetic performances that combine music, dance, and storytelling. This dance form is closely connected to the *Deodhani* performance, a ceremonial dance that women perform as a sacrifice to the goddess *Kamakhya*. Both *Ojapali* and *Deodhani* performances share similarities in terms of their rhythmic movements, use of traditional instruments like the *dhol* and *pepa*, and themes that often revolve around mythology and religious narratives. *Ojapali* and *Deodhani* performances have a relationship that demonstrates Assam's rich cultural legacy and the value of these art forms in honouring and conserving the customs and beliefs of the area.

**Key words:** *Ojapali, Performance, Connection, Deodhani*

## INTRODUCTION:

Assam's epic singing culture incorporates both written and oral traditions. *Ojapali* is a traditional Assamese epic singing performance. *Ojapali* is said to have originated with *Arjuna*, the third *Pandava* of the *Mahabharata*. He introduced the art of *Ojapali*, also known as *Gandharba Vidya*, from the *Devas*. The term *Ojapali* comes from the Sanskrit words *Upadhyaya* and *Palita*. The derivations can be noticed as Thus, *Oja* refers to the chief or leader of the *Ojapali* group, whereas *Pali* refers to a group of followers assisting the *Oja* in the performance. *Deodhani* and *Ojapali* are two vibrant and captivating traditional dance forms originating from the northeastern state of Assam, India. The word '*Deo*' denotes '*God*', and *Dhani* denotes a '*woman*'. *Deodhani* is a dance performed by women possessed by evil spirits, predicting future events. The male dancer, *Deodha*, performs the male counterpart, *Deodhani*, derived from *Deva Dhani*, means "sound of God". The dance often depicts mythological stories, spiritual themes, or social issues, using dancers' movements to convey emotions and messages to the audience

In the framework of *Ojapali* tradition, the *Deodhani* performance can be viewed as a ceremonial performance, whether or not the *Ojapali* performers sing in a chorus. The rhythm of the *Deodhani* performance is brought about by the singing of the *Ojapali* choir. As such, the *Deodhani* performance is linked to the different *Ojapali* choirs in various areas of western Assam.

## Aim & Objectives:

The main aim of the study is to analyse the performance style of *deodhani nritya* along with *Ojapali* and its co-relation. In fact, this study contains overall evaluation of the art form *Ojapali* as well as *Deodhani* performance.

## Methodology:

The study is entirely based on content analysis method. The study uses Secondary sources of data which are found in publications like books, journals, magazines etc.

## Presentation style of *Deodhani nritya* along with *ojapali*:

The *Deodhani* dance is a crucial part of the *Sukannani Ojapali* performance, consisting of trance states, hair knot loosening, head rotation, waist twisting, jumping, and faster foot movements. It begins with *Deo Namanir Geet* and *Deo Badi*, incorporating specific postures and incorporating powerful hair movements.

## The dance styles of *Deodhani*:

Here are three primary styles used in *deodhani* dance:

- *Badi Nritya* -Dances are performed with drum beats.
- *Taalari Nritya* -Dances are performed with taal beats.
- *Sangata Nritya*-The dancer uses props to perform.

**Kinds of beats or Badis:**

The ritual in *Sipajhar*, Assam features various types of *Badi* and dance in *Deodhani* dance, along with the *Suknani Ojapali* performance.

**Kinds of beats or Badis:**

1. **Deo Badi** (played at the beginning and end): *Deobadi* is the most essential part in the context of *Manasa ritual*. In the preliminary phase *suknani oja* plays this *Badi* in the *jaydhol* to please all the deities.
2. **Pani or Tola Badi** (water): In this phase *Suknani ojapali* playing this *badi* to please the river god to give fresh water for plunging the body of serpent goddess *Manasa*.
3. **Pradakhin Badi**: After the *Pani tola Badi*, this *badi* is played while the water is placed on the main alter after surrounding three to five times in the performance place.
4. **Jogan Badi** (played during puja): Through this *badi* the *pali* or assistant singer of *suknani ojapali* provided every good or item that essential for worship to satisfied the goddess *Manasa*.
5. **Bali-Kata Badi**: in the ritualistic ceremony of offering animals intended to express gratitude towards the goddess incorporated through the help of Bali Kata Badi.
6. **Gor Mora Badi**: through this *badi*, *palis* welcome the goddess *Manasa* with the help of stamping the feet on the ground.
7. **Sari Kubia Badi**: The *pali* take the *jaydhol* on their shoulder and dance accompanied by the *Deodhani* (girl) to pacify desires the desires of goddess *Manasa*.
8. **Hanumanta Badi**: The *deodhani* dance is performed by the girl along with the *Hanumantia Badi*.
9. **Kasari Badi**: Through this *badi deodhani* dance with the rotation of head in a rapid circular motion.
10. **Dhantola Badi**: A part ritual where money is collected from the people and the whole amount offering to the *Manasa* along with *Dao* (sword). This phase is incorporated with this *badi*.
11. **Keshai Khati Badi**: the ritual of consumption blood by the *deodhas* is accompanied by the this *badi*.
12. **Ranachandi Badi**: To represent the goddess of war *deodhani* depicts the incarnation of *Durga* along with vigorous dance moves accompanied by the *Ranachandi Badi*.
13. **Daktola Badi**: the act of die and regain the life of *lakhinder* with the blessing of *Manasa*, *deodhani* visualize the scene of *lakhinder* with the help of this *badi*.
14. **Arati Badi**: this *badi* indicates the main part of *puja* ritual. In this phase *bhakta* (devotee) come to receives blessings from the ritual.
15. **Donau Badi**: in the end of puja a ritual of carrying a pot of rice used in the puja and placing it where rice is stored, as a form of worship to goddess *Laxmi* for the wellbeing and prosperity of the family. This ritual is done with the *Donau badi*.

**Types of Dances or Nach:**

1. *Deo Namua*
2. *Hari Nason*
3. *Kapili Nason*
4. *Bhavani Nason*
5. *Kartik Nason*
6. *Dhantula Nason*
7. *Apseri Nritya*
8. *Siva Nason*
9. *Ranachandi Nach*
10. *Kesaikhaiti*
11. *Vyanga Nach*
12. *Brahma Nason*
13. *Mesa-Meseni Nach*
14. *Kosari Nach*
15. *Basumati Nach*
16. *Subhasini Nach*
17. *Laxmi Nach*
18. *Dharma Nach*
19. *Mainao Nach*
20. *Ganga Nach*
21. *Beula Nach*

**Instruments:**

Drums are the main instrument used by *Suknani ojalpi*. In Darrang, this drum is called *jaydhol*. The use of *Jaydhol* and *Bhortal* is particularly associated with various processes of *ojapali* rituals associated with *Manasha Puja*. The use of *Jaydhol* and *Bhortals* is essential to the entire process of *deodhani* dance. During *Manasa puja* specific kinds of tunes are played to impress the spirits of different deities that possess the *deodhanis*. *Deodhani* perform various dances to evoke the god with the different beats of *jaydhol*.

**Stages of Deodhani performance along with ojalpi:****(a) Stage-1: Vandana Nritya:**

In this stage the *Deodhani* welcomes various gods such as Lord *Shiva*, Lord *Vishnu* and goddesses *Durga*, *Manasa*, *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati*, etc. She seats over banana leaf and then slowly starts to dance in honour of other minor deities. She performs goddess *Durga*, *Bhabani*, *Kali*, etc., for instance, using a sword. She uses an earthen light on her palms to perform the *Brahma*.

**(b) Stage-2: Badinritya:**

In this stage, the *Deodhani* performs with *Pali*, *Dhulia* and *Kalia*. The *Kali*, a traditional mouth organ or pipe, is played by *Kalia*, the *Dhulia* plays the drum, and the *Pali* plays the cymbals.

**(c) Stage-3: Dak:**

The *Deodhani* of Kamrup area performs four types of *Daks*: *Gohein Dak*, *Durga Dak*, *Chaya Dak*, and *Bardak*. When bitten by a snake, she falls unconscious, covered by a white cloth, and *ojapali* revives her. She can predict future events and performs dances afterward.

**(d) Stage-4: Dharmabandana Nritya:**

In this stage, the *Deodhani* dances over a pottery called as the pottery of *Dharma Devata*. This resembles with the dances of *Beula* when she performs dance over a pot known as *Kacha Patra* in heaven.

**The Deodhani dance as a performance:**

When the *Deodhani* dance is performed, it is seen as a performance text made up of many forms of expression in each individual performance. It consisting of various facial expressions, body movements, eye movements, eye contacts, etc., such as the *Ranachandi Nach*, *Dalibhanga Nach*, *Deonamani Nach*, *Bamun Bamuni Nach*, *Rabha Nritya*, *Kachari Nritya*, *Garo Nritya*, *Jakhini Nritya*, *Langdeo Nritya*, *Ghateswari Nritya*, *Moinapakhir Nritya*, *Saraswati Nritya*, *Chandi Nritya*, *Parua Devir Nritya*. These dances are performed at the end of the ritual and entertainment called *Rangila* or colourful event. These dances are performed with the help of *Ojalpi* songs and musical instruments.

**The movement structure of Deodhani:**

1. **Chuli Ghurua** (hair rotation): This is a preliminary outline of the dance performance's movement structure.

2. **Artistic movements of snakes and animals and birds:**

Some movements are:

- *Sarpili Gati* (movements like snakes)
- *Pakhili Gati* (movements like butterfly)
- *Mayur Gati* (movements like peacock)
- *Lesari Pakani Gati* (A type of dance movement)
- *Salani Gati* (spontaneous movements)

3. **Jumps and Citkeni (Elevation):**

4. **Gesture:**

- *Swastik Mudra*.
- *Ankush Mudra*.
- *Kali Mudra*.
- *Ardhampuspa Mudra*
- *Awahan pushpa parna mudra*
- *Khola mudra*,

- *Pranam mudra*

## 5. Posture:

- *Dhyanmagna* (meditation).
- *Tribhanga* (three-bend position of a body, a posture).
- *Dehobhongi jog* (A static posture)
- *Awahan Puspa Diya* (welcoming with flowers)

## Conclusion:

The study of the presentation and performance dynamics of *Deodhani* Dance and *Suknani Ojapali* shows that there is a close relation between the two traditional folk performance form of Assam. There are a number of commonalities in the ways the traditions are performed, musically supported and expressed. In both, the rhythmic beats of the *Jaydhol* play a big part in creating the atmosphere of the performance. In a similar way, the performances are enriched by the traditional musical instruments being used. It is also revealed from the study that the different moments of *Deodhani* performance are interlinked with the narration and musical structure of *Suknani Ojapali*. The dance movements of *Deodhani* too, such as head movements, hand gestures, jumps, body movements and postures, show an abundance of expression, which goes along with the words and singing of *Ojapali*. In *Deodhani*, various dance sequences and movement phrases are used to enhance the artistic quality and the ritual purpose of the dance. Hence, it could be inferred that *Deodhani* Dance and *Suknani Ojapali* is a cultural tradition which is linked to each other in preserving the folk culture, art form and religion of Assam. They share common rhythm, sequence of performance, accompaniment instruments and movements, which reflect a common cultural base and are important elements of the intangible cultural heritage of Assam.

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