

## ***Vyah-gowa Ojapali*** – A unique, rare and endanger traditional triple symphony of Assam

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Assam was known as ***Pragjyotish*** in the ancient times, where the calculations of the different stars of the zodiac were done in the ancient period. At that period, this subject was correlated with the pronunciation and pronoun time measurement of the Sanskrit syllable. The Vedic culture and the ***Sama-Gayan*** developed here only. Once upon a time, the surname of the some people of ***Pragjyotish*** was “*Sama-Gayan*”. It is described that the ***Pravandha Geet*** evolved from ***Sama-Geet***. But, it is most interesting facts that up to the early period of the independent era, the lower Assam Brahmin community had performed *Bhagavat, Geeta-Govinda, Epics, Purans* & others Sanskrit literature in the village to village as their profession. Due to resistance in the society, the Brahmin (and other Hindus) adopted some basic elements from different ethnic traditions as well as religious beliefs in their livelihood and the rituals; for which, there was a development of uniqueness of the tradition, custom and culture. In this situation, the oral tradition had followed the rule & regulation of the classic text and as well as adopt the local elements viz, the language, the accent, the lyric, the song, the body language and others. In the process of the evolution & development of the culture, the school of the ***Vyah-Gowa Ojapali*** was born and developed under the royal patronization.

***Tourzyatrika*** means the union of song, dance and instrumental music; triple symphony. These components are song, instrumental music and dance, all performed in one platform. There are many traditional performing communities in North East India who perform the triple symphony (choral) as a unit. In Assam, one such type of traditional performance is known as ***Ojapali***. There is a particular school of the ***Ojapali*** in the North Bank of the mighty Brahmaputra (***Vyah-para, Sipajhar***) called ***Vyah-gowa Ojapali***. This is also known as ***Shabha-gowa Ojapali***. They perform the stories from *epics, Puran, Bhagawat* & others in the Assamese language. Sanskrit verses are

also used in a different segment of their performance. The musical elements of this performance are much close to the **Pravandha Geet**. Scholars are divided in opinion whether this traditional art form has continued from on or before the 7th century. This practice is always tied up with the occult ceremony; viz, *Vasudeva Puja, Durga Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Shiva Puja* & others.

Creation of flavour & entertainment is the basic rule of the **Vyah-gowa Ojapali**. The worship of **Vasudeva** is reflected in the fully white colour and his possessing eight arms are reflected in eight assistants (Pali). As like the ancient **Pravandha Geet** related to *Meen-Nath, Gorukh-Nath* and others, the ritual of the **Jagar** also celebrated by this school when their performance in the royal court. As similar as the **Vajra, Tibetan Dorje**, the *Oja*, that is, the master performer used one such article called **Touzyatrika Mudra** or **Mudura** in the right hand particularly in the presentation period (**Jagar**) at the Royal Court.



Fig: Use of **Mudura** (Dorje or Vajra) in **Jagar** song  
(Courtesy of Shri Barun Sarma Oja, Ganesh-para Chuburi, Sipajhar)

The musical instrument used in this performance is the bell metal cymbal (**Kar-tal**) in the shape of the teenager girl breast. The pair of cymbals is performed

by both hands. Most of the hand gestures used by them are similar to the hand gestures described in Natya-sastra or Nandikesvara's Abhinaya-darpana. *Chab-Tala* or *Ektala* (1), *Jikari-Tala* (2), *Chau-Tala* (3), *Lechari-Tala* (4), *Thoka-Tala* (5) and *Dulori-Tala* (6) are the rhythm (or *Tala*) used in this form of music. *Malava*, *Saranga*, *Vasanta*, *Pahadi*, *Varadi*, *Ahira*, *Kalyana*, *Ramagiri*, *Dekhaja*, *Gandhara* & others, a total of 27 *ragas* employed in this school of the choral singing. *Hasti-Bulan*, *Mayur-Bulan*, *Sankha-Bulan*, *Dhupuni-Bulan* & others are some major footsteps used in this Choral singing. Moreover, there are various body movement exist in this performance.

Choral with ***Katha*** means 'storytelling' is the most popular media of Rural India. ***Ojapali*** of Assam is such type of performance art. On the other hand, ***Vyah-Gowa Ojapali*** is the most ancient one. It is a unique art with the great musical value of its performance style and capacity to attract the rural audience. Moreover, this unique school has an ancient tradition with minimum evolution & impression of foreign elements. On the other hand, as this form derived from original Sanskrit literature & music, it consists of lots of classic value. Also, the rule & regulation belongs to it are as per the text describes. In short, this is a universal performing art having the power to integrate the community.



Fig: **Vyah Gowa Ojapali at Modern Stage Performance**  
(Courtesy of Shri Barun Sarma Oja, Ganesh-para Chuburi, Sipajhar)

**Practising community :**

- (a) **Who are they :** The *Brahmin* community of *Sipajhar* area of *Darrang* District of Assam is the main practitioner of this tradition. The village *Vyah-para* (26° 25' 17.3604" N, 91° 54' 6.7068" E) is the original royal village where the *Oja*, the chief priest of this community dwell. Some of them are - Shri Barun Sarma, Ganesh-para Chuburi, Sipajhar (Contact No – +91 766 402 4420); Shri Abani Sarma, Ojapara Chuburi, Sipajhar; Shri Harichandra Sarma, Saru Vyah Chuburi, Sipajhar.
- (b) **Where and how do they practice :** This practice is related to the spiritualism and occult ceremony; mainly in the *Vasudeva Puja*, *Durga Puja*, *Lakshmi Puja*, *Shiva Puja* & others. Hence, these are performed during this particular season of the worshipping period. The complete performances have been done only in the Royal Palace, the residence of the *Oja*, *Pati-Darrang Ardhanariswar Shiva Mandir* and *Mahoripara Jagara Puja* as per the Royal order.
- (c) **Are there threats and viability of this form :** There are lots of treats and viabilities observed in this practising community, they are –
1. This performing art was patronized by the Royal Family of Darrang province. Presently, due to non-patronization from any organization, the practising communities are mainly involved in the cultivation, carpentry & others in the off period. They practice this tradition only in the season. The lack of practice for majority time leads to the most difficult & rare portions getting lost from the memories.
  2. The taste of the audience change day-by-day, for which the invitation to the Practising community has practically become negligible. Consequently the remuneration received by a performer is so negligible that they can buy their bread & butter only from an alternative livelihood. Hence, the Practising community changes their profession as a cultivator or carpenter.

(i) Source :

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAGCTIglEm4>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAWNhlwoEpQ>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cn3sgK2V2is>
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBhIPi2eEG0>
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNQi0fakIx8>
6. Vasudeva Pujar Adhibash aru Jagar Pujar Geet; Sarma, Dr Bijoy Kumar
7. Shri Mukut Sarma; Journalist, Vyah-para, Sipajhar (Contact No – 789 682 4322)
8. Shabha-Gowat Samay Jokha Paddhati – Ati Prachin Parampara; Changkakoty, Dilip; Ajir Asom, December 20, 1992
9. Kal-Dashan: Volume –I; Changkakoty, Dilip; 1<sup>st</sup> Publication; May 16, 1992

**RHYTHM USED IN THE VYAH-GOWA OJAPALI**

***Chab-Tala or Ektala 4/4***

4 Matras, 3 Main beats, 3 Divisions  $\eta\theta\theta$

$\eta$		$\theta$	$\theta$
1	2	3	4
x		2	3

Or :

4 Matras, 1 Main beat. 1 Empty beat, 2 Divisions  $\eta \angle$   
(Moderate speed)

	$\eta$		$\angle$	
1	2	3	4	
X		0		

**Jikari-Tala** 5/4

5 Matras, 2 Main beats, 2 Divisions  $\eta \eta$ .

	$\eta$		$\eta$ .	
1	2	3	4	5
X		2		

**Chau-Tala** 5/4

5 Matras, 2 Main beats, 2 Divisions  $\eta \cdot \eta$

	$\eta$ .		$\eta$	
1	2	3	4	5
X			2	

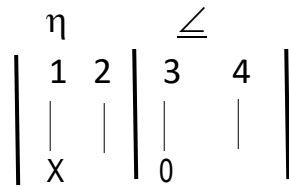
**Lechari-Tala** 5/4

5 Matras, 3 Main beats, 3 Divisions  $\theta \eta \eta$

	$\theta$	$\eta$		$\eta$	
1	2	3	4	5	
X	2		3		

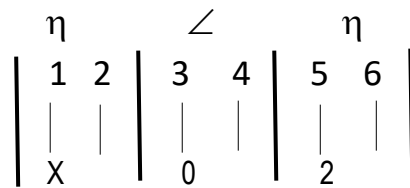
**Thoka-Tala 4/4**

4 Matras, 1 Main beat. 1 Empty beat, 2 Divisions  $\eta \angle$   
(High speed)



**Dulori-Tala 6/4**

6 Matras, 2 Main beats, 1 Empty beat, 3 Divisions  $\eta \angle \eta$   
(First Variation)



Or :

6 Matras, 2 Main beats, 1 Empty beat, 3 Divisions  $\eta \eta \angle$   
(Second Variation)

