

# The Music and Musical Instruments of North Eastern India



A MITTAL PUBLICATION

Dilip Ranjan Barthakur

The North-Eastern region of India which is composed of seven States (Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura) possesses a variety of cultural treasures. It is a meeting place of different ethnic groups since time immemorial.

The book is a treatise which comprehensively deals with music of North-Eastern India with special emphasis on musical instruments of Assam. The material presented in the book is the product of indepth and extensive research conducted into the origins, sequences of development and cultural practices of music of the different ethnic groups living in this part of the world.

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**DILIP RANJAN BARTHAKUR** (b. 1947) (son of Padmanath Barthakur, freedom fighter and a noted litterateur) of Dibrugarh, Assam, is an M.Sc. in Statistics, who is better known as a noted Tabla exponent with a Master of Music degree in Tabla. Dibrugarh University awarded the Degree of Ph.D. in 1997 for his work on 'The Musical Instruments of Assam with a Statistical Note'.

He had his early education in music from Khogen Das, a disciple of Pandit Anukhelal Mishra of Banaras, a noted Tabla exponent of India and later took his higher education from Ustad Munne Khan, a renowned Tabla exponent of Farukhabad Gharana at Lucknow for about 25 years. Dr. Barthakur's wife Nilima Barthakur is also a Sitar exponent of renown.

Dr. Barthakur is the founder Principal & Secretary of Chaulkhowa Music College, a reputed institute of Music and Dance, in an area inhabited by the rural and the tea-tribe population. He is recognised as one of the eminent experts on music.

Dr. Barthakur also authored authoritative and informative books like *Tabla Vigyan* (now in its 9th edition), *Bharatiya Sangit Sadhak*, *Khol Vigyan*, *Dibaru Parar Sangit*, *Sangit Vigyan* besides a number of articles on music and musical instruments.

He also made a remarkable contribution by introducing 'Sura-bandhan Khol' (Tuning Khol), a modification of the original Khol of Assam the 'Sura' (tune) of which can easily be regulated to the desired finer pitch (like in Tabla or Pakhawaj) at the time of accompaniment.

That Dr. Barthakur is a devout musicologist is also reflected in this interesting and informative book.

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**THE MUSIC AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF  
NORTH EASTERN INDIA**

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## THE AUTHOR

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**DILIP RANJAN BARTHAKUR**



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## APPRECIATION

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North eastern region with seven states is not only representative of mini India but also at the same time it has the distinction of being the place of cultural integration from the prehistoric days.

The book "The Music and Musical Instruments of North Eastern India" has certainly brought out a glimpse of rich heritage of this region. Dr. Dilip Ranjan Barthakur, the author of this book is a noted Musician and a Musicologist. A teacher per excellence and a good propagator of Music, Dr. Barthakur is known to me for the last many years. His wife Nilima and his talented daughter Murchana is my student also and I was the co-guide of his thesis. Mrs. Nilima is widely known in the region as a Sitar player and so her daughter Murchana, who is gradually stepping in to the domain of Indian Classical Music as a brilliant young and talented Sitar player.

The book is the result of a detailed documented research work by Dr. Barthakur and I am positive this book will help the serious students of music to know more about the instruments of our country and instruments of the eastern region in particular. The book, because of its detailed illustrations and information, will be a landmark in the publication World.

I wish the lifetime work of Dr. Barthakur will, in due course, attract wide popularity and appreciation among the scholars and lovers of Indian Music.

PROF. DEBU CHAUDHURI

Padma Bhushan

Former Dean & Head, Faculty of Music & Fine Arts,  
University of Delhi, Delhi.

## FOREWORD

---

Assam, since time immemorial, has been carrying her cultural heritage of a colourfully rich variety in the broad Indian perspective. Being a melting pot of a good number of ethnic communities, the present North-East region which was once within the political boundaries of Assam, is rich in her musical properties also. The Indian music and the musical components of the South East Asia too found some meeting points in the musical heritage of Assam. Therefore, the study of the music and the musical instruments of Assam is equally important from the point of Socio-Anthropological study and from the point of the study of one of the aspects of the Assamese culture, more broadly the culture of the North-East region. Of course, both the aspects are interwoven.

It is a point to be noted that though some studies in parts were made, nobody before Dr. Barthakur came forward to study the subject in whole in a methodical way to find out the characteristics of the components of the music of Assam in general, and the musical instruments that are in use in the region, in particular.

This work of Dr. Barthakur is based not only on library works though he has surveyed all the available literatures on music rather, he took much pain and strain to collect data through field study. It is evident that he visited most of the places, obtained photographs or drawings of the instruments, took the help of more than three hundred informants and tried to explore all possible sources, and by making all efforts Dr. Barthakur has broken a new ground of the study in music and musical instruments. The work shows that amongst the different communities of the region, musical instruments of all the four categories, i.e., *Avanaddha*, *Ghana*, *Suṣir* and *Tata* are available, and these instruments form a varied part of the Indian musical instruments. It is a comprehensive historical and critical study made on the subject. The work presents evidences how much the Assamese music and musical instruments are identical with the North and South Indian music and musical instruments in spirit and in form with some distinctive characteristics received from the South East Asian region. The work of Dr. Barthakur is an addition to the study of music and musical instruments of India too. I congratulate Dr. Dilip Ranjan Barthakur for this scholarly work.

Nagen Saikia  
Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbaroa Professor,  
Dibrugarh University.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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No word is enough to acknowledge my indebtedness and gratitude to Prof. Nagen Saikia Ph.D. Dibrugarh University, Ex-Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Ex-President of "Assam Sahitya Sabha" and an eminent litterateur, who has always inspired me in all my pursuits from its beginning until it has seen the light of the day, in the midst of his extremely busy life. It was under his guidance I did my Ph.D. thesis. I am indebted to him and also take pride for the fact that he has been so kind as to write the very foreword of this book also.

I am immensely grateful also to Padmabhushan Devabrata (Debu) Choudhuri, former Dean and Head of Faculty of Music and fine Arts, University of Delhi, a musicologist and Sitar Maestro of high repute. While I worked on my Ph.D. thesis Debuda was my Co-guide. At that time he tendered his invaluable advice and suggestions very liberally whenever I approached him for knowledgeable ideas and information. Prof. D. Choudhuri is the person who after going through my Book "Tabla Vigyan" instilled the inspiration in me to undertake the research work on music, particularly musical instruments of North East India and who infused in me the inspiration and vigour, later also, in my effort of writing this book. I am also grateful for his writing a few lines as blessings for the book.

I also wish to express my profound gratitude to Dr. Mukunda Madhava Sharma Ph.D., D. Litt. Kavyatirtha, a Scholar of high repute and former Vice Chancellor of Dibrugarh University for encouraging me to start the work.

I acknowledge my gratefulness also to the noted educationist Dr. Amareish Dutta (former Professor and Head, Deptt. of English, Gauhati University & also Dibrugarh University), Dr. A.N. Ziauddin Ahmed Hazarika Ph. D. (Former Professor, Kanoi College), Prof. Birendra Chandra Bhattacharyya (Former Principal, M.D.K. Girls' College) and my elder brother Buddha Ranjan Barthakur for their valuable instructions and constructive suggestions.

I offer my thanks and gratitude to my respected Guruji Ustad Munne Khan (Eminent Tabla Maestro of India), Senior Advocate S.K. Bordoloi, Dr. J. Mahanta (Director, Regional Medical Research Centre, North East Region, ICMR), Dr. P.C. Sharma Ph.D. (Former Deputy Director, Directorate Archaeology, Assam), noted musician Pradeep Chaliha, my cousin Harendra Nath Barthakur, Dr. Pratash Lata Buragohain Ph.D., Prof. Tilottama Misra Ph.D. my nephews Dr. Ranjit Barthakur, Sukumar Barthakur (Tabla Artist) and Dr. Anjan Kumar Phukan Ph.D. my friends - Pradeep Kumar Bhuyan,

Phatik Bora, Gopi Nath Phukan, Dhiren Moran, Jatin Gohain, J.M. Konwar, Dr. Moheswar Hazarika Ph.D. and Musician Sarat Chetia, Artists K. Abheypuriya & Arun Bora and Bedo Bordoloi who sincerely helped and inspired me in various ways to complete the work. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all of them. Artist Goutam Roy and his wife Ashima Roy helped me at the time of my thesis work. It would be unwise on my part if I do not remember some of my students of music Dilip Das, Rubul Sharma, Moloy Chakravartty, Manik Das, Subhas Sonowal, Rajib Phukan Sarangapani Bordoloi, Hemanta Kumar Saikia and Niranjan Bora who gave me their co-operation in data collection.

I would like to keep in record here that my wife Nilima Barthakur (a Sitar Artist) extended all sorts of support to me during the whole period of my work. My daughter Murchana who is a Sitar student by herself following her mother's trait and my son Madhurjya, a student of Tabla, teamed up with me and helped me in bringing my writings to light.

I do not find word to express my gratitude to Krishan M. Rai Mittal of MITTAL PUBLICATION, New Delhi with whom I had the occasion of developing an intimate friendship while in the process of getting this book published. Undeniably, it is his honest assistance with encouragement and initiative which has enabled me to bring this book into print and publication.

In preparing the work, I took the help of good number of informants from different corners of this region. I extend my deepest gratitude to all these informants for their co-operation in this work.

I also offer my thanks and gratitude to the authorities of the Libraries of Dibrugarh University, State Library of Assam, State Museum of Assam, National Museum (Govt. of India), CCRT New Delhi (Govt. of India), Faculty of Music & Arts (University of Delhi) etc. for their help in locating reference materials.

**Dilip Ranjan Barthakur**

## PREFACE

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The North East region of India which now consists of seven states - Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura possesses a variety of Cultural treasures. Once almost the whole region was within the territory of Assam. The boundaries of Assam varied from age to age. After independence Assam's boundary has frequently changed due to the creation of new states.

I carried out an extensive research work on the Musical instruments of Assam under the guidance of Prof. Nagen Saikia of Dibrugarh University and Prof. Debabrata (Debu) Choudhuri of Delhi University and I was awarded the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by the Dibrugarh University in 1997.

Being instilled with the inspirations from many a scholastic institutions and also being desired by persons dedicated to music, I proceeded with further research work and tried to throw more light on the subject. The present book is, therefore, enriched with more new materials of music and musical instruments of North-East India.

The subject is so vast that it was not possible for me to cover all the aspects of music and musical instruments within the limited scope. There is still ample scope to work independently on each and every musical instrument with different dimensions like "Laya-Layakāri", 'Swara' - combination etc. I am sure that future research scholars would take up such projects to study with minute details. Future work should cover more wide and detailed study on each aspect of the subject.

It is perhaps the maiden work on the subject, and it would be a matter of great pleasure for me if this work can create inquisitiveness in the mind of the reader to know about the subject more and more. Any suggestion made for improvement of my work would be welcome.

**Dilip Ranjan Barthakur**

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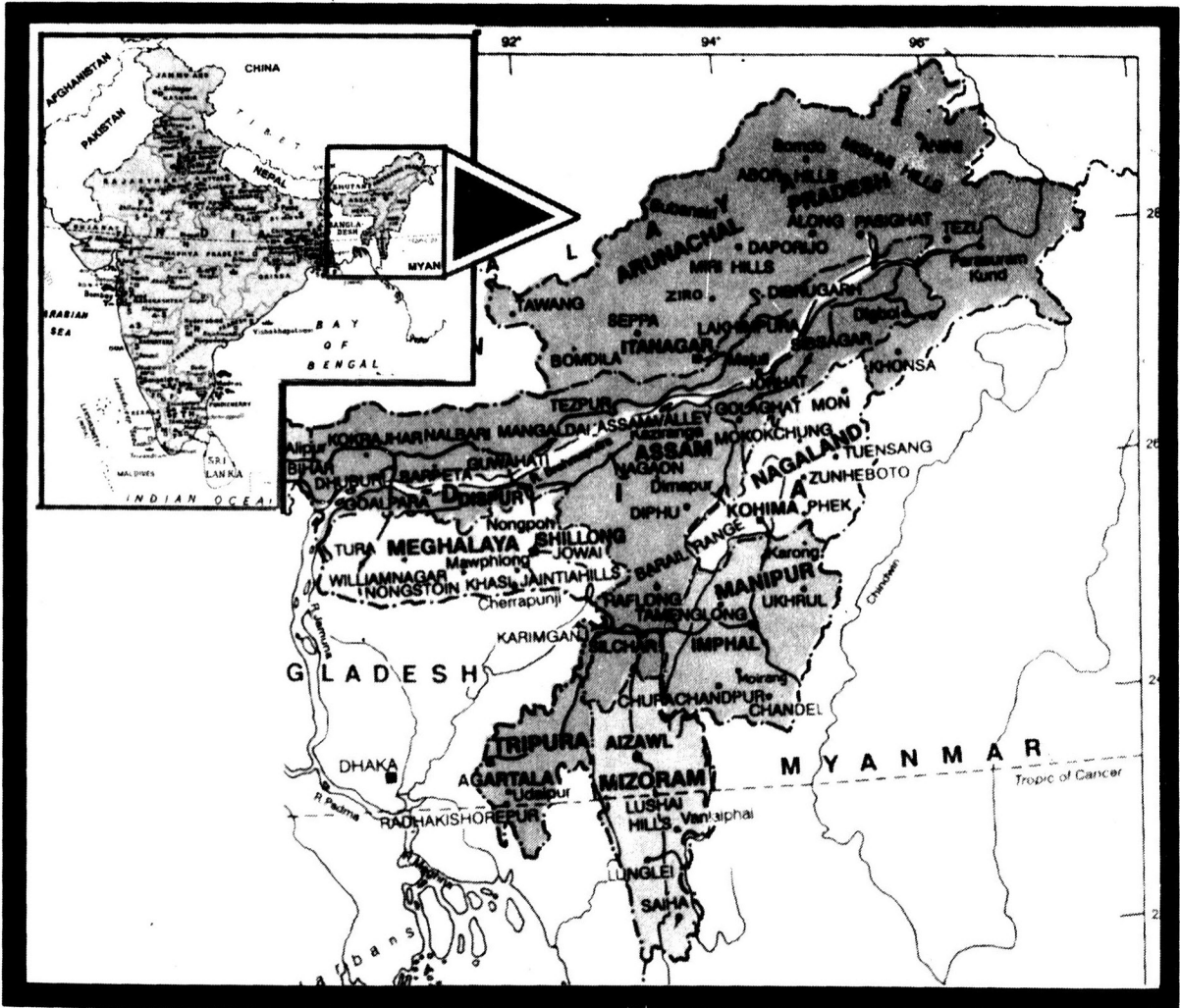
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#### ABBREVIATIONS

Pad Number	-	P.N.
Sloka Number	-	S.N.
Skandha	-	S.K.
North Eastern India	-	N.E.



**BASE MAP OF STUDY AREA**  
**North Eastern India (2001)**

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

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Since the days of yore the culture of present day Assam has been inextricably linked with the different regions which today constitute India's North-East. Therefore, any attempt, made for understanding and analysing the different musical instruments of Assam also needs to take within its ambit of studying the musical instruments and the overall cultural tradition of the neighbouring states of North-Eastern Region of India comprising Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. While making such an attempt, the norms of classical and traditional music, as prevalent in India, are also to be taken as base for the study.

Music, which may be summed up briefly as a combination of sounds to please the human ear, has always played a vital role in human society. It is an art with endless ramifications and innumerable psychological and cultural affiliation.<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Brace states that since the primitive age the simple shouts, claps, chest-beating, foot-stamping of early tribes had the power, it was believed, to bring rain, cure sickness and make crops grow.<sup>2</sup> These methods of simple rhythms might have been the first pointers to the evolution of drum. Peter B. Hammond states: "Analysis in the anthropological study of music, or ethnomusicology, begins, reasonably enough, with the instruments used to make music and with differences in the structure of the music itself in scaling, rhythm, melody, vocal technique and song style, harmony and polyphony".<sup>3</sup> B.C. Deva observes that the first instrument is the body itself and is used for keeping rhythm; stamping, clapping and beating the thighs or the buttocks. This was why our ancestors called the human voice the *Gātra Vīṇā* (*Vīṇā* of the body) or the *Daivi Vīṇā* (the God-given *Vīṇā*).<sup>4</sup> Later, man began to devise other ways of making music. They made rattles of dried seeds, drums of stretched skin on hollow logs, Cymbals and gongs from beaten metal, Xylophones from rows of different-sized stones. They made harps from bows (like hunter's bow) with several strings of different lengths. They made pipes from hollow bones or bamboo. Later they discovered how holes in the side would change the notes. In ancient Vedic time the drum known as *Bhūmidunduvi*, was made up of a pit in earthen ground, covered with the skin of animals. The drumstick was the tail of the animals. S. Krishnaswami states: "Another rhythmic instrument used by primitive man was the stamping pit.

This was just a big hole dug in the ground and covered with bark. People stamped on this lid with their feet and thus produced a sound somewhat like the beating of a large drum".<sup>5</sup> This 'earth drum' has been noticed in Indonesia, Malaysia and in some far eastern countries.<sup>6</sup> Discussing the origin of wind instruments, B.C. Deva states:

One very popular belief is that the creation of the first *Suṣira vādyā* might have been suggested to man by the wind whistling through holes in bamboos in the glades.... The first and most natural is the simple common act of whistling which is very primitive; further, it is one indulged in by children and the aged, specially men. It is a bodily act that could have very easily suggested the making of wind instruments.<sup>7</sup>

One instrument made of tree-trunk has been prevalent from ancient time among Nocte, Ao-nagā and some other tribes of earlier Assam (Presently North-East India). The people use this big and long beating instrument (Slit-drum) to announce the advent of a natural calamity or other important news to the villagers by playing the instrument with sticks. This instrument is played by a number of people at a time. The mode of playing the instrument is different on different occasions. This instrument is carved out of a tree-trunk dug out like a canoe.<sup>8</sup> S. Krishnaswami states about the development of Flute in *Musical Instruments of India*:

one of the earliest wind instruments to develop was the flute, called by many popular names like *Bānsuri*, *Veṇu* and *Muruli*. This is an obvious sequel to the phenomenon in nature of the wind humming and whistling through bamboos which have been bored through by the beetles and insects. This is a favourite image of the poet Kalidasa. The idea of producing the necessary current of air through the mouth and then blowing it through a bamboo must have followed naturally and resulted in the development of the flute.<sup>9</sup>

Again S. Krishnaswami maintains that the note produced through the double reed, is as old as the discovery of the bamboo. When a blade of grass is folded together it becomes a 'double reed'.<sup>10</sup> The primitive people while drawing the string of a bow observed that it produced a sound when released after stretching. The idea of producing sweet sounds from the bow string may also be the source of string instruments. Henry Balfour in his *The Natural History of the Musical Bow* and Edward, B. Tylor in his *Anthropologie* state that the Hunter's bow is the source or fore-runner of all stringed instruments.<sup>11</sup> According to Ram Avtar Veer: "The bow which was primarily meant for hunting, formed the first musical instrument. That instrument is still popular with our Musicians particularly, in Bihar, and is known as 'Bhanang'".<sup>12</sup> According to Swami Prajnanananda, "the Primitive shape of the 'Vīṇā' was curved like the body of a bow.... The bow is the origin of all kinds of stringed instruments".<sup>13</sup> Again, the primitive people might have used available pots like pitchers lying beside their furnance and covered the mouth of the potlike

pitcher etc. with skins of hunted animals to produce different musical sounds. *Avanaddha vādya* like *Dabā*, *Nāgārā* etc. may have resulted from such an idea. Thus the folk instruments are generally corresponded to the life style of the ancient people and the instruments were made of easily available and natural materials of the locality or region where they lived in. Musical instruments of our time are assumed to be based on the idea developed from the sounds produced by handling of different kinds of non-musical materials used in day to day life by primitive people. Again it is seen that musical instruments are quite often dual or even multiple in function.

Curt Sachs states in his book the *History of Musical Instruments* that, the history of music usually starts with the account of the mythological invention of the earliest instruments. According to him Myth has since been replaced by history and the invention of musical instruments is no longer attributed to gods and heroes. People are still confused as to which instrument came first. But no early instruments were invented as such. Early man was quite unaware when he stamped on the ground or slapped his body, that his actions were the source of the earliest instruments. It must have been a still longer process before he stamped or struck intentionally to obtain a sound, and through it the idea further quickened. All higher creatures express emotion by motion. But man alone can regulate and co-ordinate his emotional movements. He is alone gifted with conscious rhythm. He produced various effects from such simple movements, as muffled beats with the hollow hands, clear beats with the flat palms, stamping with heels or the toes, hitting either bony or fleshy parts. All these shades contributed to making an actual pre-instrumental music.<sup>14</sup>

Thus we can say that, music is a trait inherent in human beings alone. As such, vocal, instrumental and dance music were born with the very birth of humanity. This by itself does not mean that awareness towards culture of music developed with the advent of man on this planet. The primitive man did not know that he was the possessor of this innate property of aesthetic quality, and so music in its early stage was in the crudest form devoid of any technique and technical medium for expression. In course of intellectual progress in human civilization, man has been able to perceive this finer trait and this perception enabled him to discern its basic forms to instil in him the idea of expressing music in various ways. The processing and development of musical trait, as the outcome of such ideas led human being to invent technique and technical tools for giving finer shapes to musical expressions.

According to sixth and 28th chapters of Bharat's *Nāṭya Śāstra* (between 200 B.C. - 200 A.D.) the *Ātodya* or *Vādyas* (musical instruments) can be classified into four kinds:

- (i) *Tata vādya* (Stringed instrument)
- (ii) *Ānaddha* or *Avanaddha vādya* (Percussion instrument)
- (iii) *Ghana vādya* (Solid instrument)
- (iv) *Suṣira vādya* (Wind instrument)<sup>15</sup>

The classes correspond to the Western Chordophones, Membranophones, Idiophones and Aerophones instruments.

Baburao Joshi and Antsher Lobo opine: "Instrumental music is a song without words".<sup>16</sup> When an instrumentalist plays, he sings, as it were, through his instrument. Instruments enter the field of music in two capacities as 'Solo' and as accompanying instruments.

According to *Saṅgīt Ratnākara* of Śaraṅgadeva, a thirteenth century text, Music is *Gītam, Vādyam tathā Nṛtyam*; i.e. music is, the combination of vocal and instrumental music together with dance. Hence, musical instruments, being a part and parcel of music, have always been of great importance in the field of music. Any object which can produce 'music' is a musical instrument: from a piece of stone or a leaf to the most complicated computerised electronic tone synthesizer.<sup>17</sup> So, to have a clear idea of the prevalent musical instruments of a given region, the study of the historical background is very much necessary. In the case of the musical instrument prevalent in N.E. also the background study helps a lot to find out the origins and developments of those instruments. In N.E., the four classes of musical instruments such as -*Tata vādyā* (String instruments like *Ṭokārī, Vīnā, Dotārā, Rabāb, Sārindā, etc.*), *Avanaddha vādyā* (Percussion instruments like *Ḍhol, Khol, Dabā, Mṛdaṅga, Nāgārā, Dagar, etc.*) *Suṣira vādyā* (Wind instruments like *Mahar-śingar-pēpā, Bāhī, Kāli, Sutulī, Śaimkha* etc.) and *Ghana vādyā* (Idiophonic or Solid instruments like *Tāl, Khanjuri, Ghaṅṭā, Ṭakā, Repañī, Kāh* etc.) are very much there in different names and in different shapes also. The nature of the present study is a historical in general and descriptive in particular.

## II

A correct assessment of the evolution of different musical instruments used by different ethnic groups and sub-groups of this region with their different social and cultural backgrounds is yet to be made. Generally each group with its sub-group in N.E. has been found to have its own tradition, of making musical instruments and own technique of playing them.

So, it is necessary to investigate and study the development of various musical instruments of this region. Some of the folk musical instruments of this region have lost their identity because of contacts with other similar but advanced type of instruments. In this way, it has been found that some of the folk musical instruments are on the verge of extinction. So, by studying such instruments of N.E. we can obtain an idea of the origin, evolution and development of these instruments in North Eastern India.

A comparative study of musical instruments of Assam with those of Hindusthani music can also be a subject of serious investigation.

Another aspect in such a work of research could be the examination of the ways and means for the upliftment of the quality and mode of performance of certain local instruments to attain an all India standard.

The focus of such an attempt would be on the contribution of this region to the world of music and on the status of musicians in this region and on the

ways and means of improving the quality of music specially on the instrumental music.

The cultural traditions inherited by different tribes of Assam, such as Bodo, Beite, Dimasa, Deori, Hajong, Hmār, Kārbi, Kuki, Rābhā, Tiwā, Mishing etc. as well as their folk instruments and the impact on them of the various parts of India is also a matter of considerable significance.

An idea of musical instruments in use in different ages can also be obtained from the fables, religious rites, ancient sculptures, old-sayings available amongst groups and sub-groups of the various communities of Assam. The development and evolution of these musical instruments can also be gauged from it. The ancient temples, scriptures, sculptures, books and paintings stand as distinct evidence of the use and development of musical instrument in this region.

History of cultural evolution of all places and various people speaks that art forms and styles are not stable. They are remoulded by the tastes of people in different places, different times, living conditions and social environments. Changes in style of instrumental music as in any other art, reflect changes of social patterns. It goes without saying that this is applicable also to the instrumental music of North Eastern India.

Natural transmission of style, shape and size of different musical instruments of N.E. occur according to the tastes and temperament of the people in different times. But there may be some communities who had been making use of a few of those instruments from ancient times till today.

It may be said that, the roots of some sophisticated and specialised musical instruments of N.E. of the present day could be traced back to the folk instruments used by the primitive cultural communities. From the point of view of the likeness of structural design and the manner of use, one may reasonably infer that some of the musical instruments of the present age in India might have also originated from some folk musical instruments of N.E. in course of an evolutionary development. B.C. Deva states : "As we sit and listen to a programme of the 'Vichitra Veena' or even the 'Rudra Veena', does it ever occur to us that these complicated and ancient instruments might have had their humble origins in the 'ronza' gontam' of Andhra or the *gintang* of Assam: a zither made of a short length of bamboo with one or two strips of the bark raised to form 'Strings' beaten with small stick".<sup>18</sup> In this connection, *Sāngitiki*, written by Birendra Kumar Phukan can be mentioned, where he states : when we hear the sweet sound of 'Sārengī', an accompanying stringed instrument in the Classical music of North India, it can hardly be imagined that it is a modified form of *Serzā* or *Sārindā*, a traditional instrument of Assam. In this way it has come to our mind that the sophisticated Classical Instruments bearing sweet music of *Shāhnāi* might have originated from *Kālīā* or *Maharī* available in the folk music of Assam.<sup>19</sup>

Among the different tribes the influence of Mongoloid traits is noticeable in the culture of Assam. Inhabitants of Assam are mainly from the vast hive of

the Mongoloid race. The use of bamboo is remarkable in the Mongoloid civilization. So, this culture is called the "Bamboo Culture".<sup>20</sup> A major portion of musical instruments of Assam are made from bamboo. As for example, instruments like *Gaganā*, *Ṭakā*, *Bāhī*, *Bamboo-Ṭokārī*, *Dhupchungā*, *Kartāl*, *Dholar-māri* (stick of *Dhol*), *Repaṇī* (*Cawrietal*), *Tharkā*, *Tue-mei-Khubong*, *Siphung* etc. Again, Assam is a land full of different types of agricultural crops, flora and fauna. Many musical instruments of Assam are made of multiple varieties of indigenous raw materials. Largely usable musical instruments such as *Sutuli*, *Khol* etc. are made of clay. Similarly, many folk musical instruments of Assam such as, *Pēpā*, *Dotārā*, *Bīṇ*, *Sārendā*, *Ṭokārī*, *Ḍabā*, *Khol*, *Mṛdaṅga*, *Śhālmara*, *Gabchem*, *Ruchem* etc. are made from available raw materials such as *Sukān-Narā* (Weeds), *Lāo* (Gourd), *Nal-khāgari* (Reeds), *Nārikalar-Kholā* (Copra), *Horns of Buffalos*, *Horns of Bison* (*Methon*), *Goat's skin*, *Cow's skin*, *Deer skin*, *Horse's tuft of hair* (*Fān*) *Gwe* (Iguana) skin, *Bāmunā Frog's skin*, *Leaf of Nāhar tree*, *Mugā* (a type of brown silk made in Assam) etc. Again, other agro-based products too have their influence on the construction of musical instruments. In Assam, the earthen pots are in use since the primitive age. Thus, many musical instruments have been made by the expert hands of potters, carpenters, black-smith, artisans (*Bārhai*), Bell metal workers (*Kāhār*) etc. who usually make non-musical tools for day to day use. Lila Gogoi states in *Āhom Jāti Āru Asamīyā Saṅskṛti*, processing and production of *Mugā* was a popular profession among the Āhoms.<sup>21</sup> So *Mugā* being intimately familiar with them as it was widely used by them. This yarn is used in a string instrument like *Vīṇā*.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that the musical instruments were an inextricable part of the culture of the different ethnic groups of Assam. To understand the musical trends and traditions of the Assamese people and socio-cultural aspect of their life, it is important to study the music and musical instruments of the various ethnic groups which comprise the Assamese nationality.

Hence, this study is mainly an attempt to throw light on the historical background or evolution of the different kinds of musical instruments of North Eastern India and their importance in the field of music.

On the basis of use, the musical instruments in N.E. are divided in the following groups:

- (i) Instruments *commonly used by the general people of this region.*
- (ii) Instruments which are *traditionally used by the different tribes of this region.*

In order to collect the information relating to different types of musical instruments of Assam, the following procedure has been followed:

- (i) Relevant data have been collected through Questionnaires and personal interviews.
- (ii) Interpretations, analyses and graphical presentation done after data collection.

- (iii) Consulted relevant books, both published and unpublished.
- (iv) Consulted reports, documents and journals (Official and unofficial).
- (v) Studied Sculptures and Paintings.
- (vi) Used Tape-recorder, Camera etc.
- (vii) Visited Museum, Archaeology Dept. etc.

Brief statistical notes relating to different types of musical instruments along with the percentage of users of those instruments are given in a separate Chapter.

### III

Through this work an attempt is made to investigate and to study historical background of the musical instruments of the region of Assam comprising Brahmaputra Valley, the Barak Valley and the Hilly areas (Consisting of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hill). Moreover, the North East India is also taken within the purview for the study of the musical instruments of Assam.

Total population of Assam as per 1991 census is 22,414,322 including 11,657,989 males and 10,756,333 females. Total population of India is 8,46,302,688 and the total population of Assam constitutes only 2.65 per cent of the total population of India. The total geographical area of Assam is 78,438 Sq. kms. a mere 2.39 percent of the entire territory of the country. In other words, 2.65 percent of the total population of India have been censused in 1991 in 2.39 percent of the land.

**Population of Assam 1901-1991**  
(as per census report)<sup>23</sup>

Year	Population
1901	3,289,680
1911	3,848,617
1921	4,636,980
1931	5,560,371
1941	6,694,790
1951	8,028,856
1961	10,837,329
1971	14,625,152
1991	22,414,322

**Tribes of Assam<sup>24</sup>**

Tribes	Population as per census report	
	1971	1991
Boro-Kachārī	6,10,459	
Mech	2,570	
Rābhā	1,38,630	Not available
Lālung or Tiwā	95,609	

Sonawāl Kachārī	1,93,619
Deuri	23,080
Mishing	2,59,551
Kārbi	1,77,195
Dimāsā	39,344
Kuki	21,034
Khāsī, Jayantiyā	6,708
Gāro	9,101

### **Population Pattern and Cultural Heritage of Assam:**

Assam may be described as the outpost of Indian civilization and culture in the North-East India. Assam being the gateway of North East India and the corridor for passage of people, commodities and ideas, had been a meeting place of races and cultures from days of yore. Mahammed Taher states : "From the view point of population base, Assam may be called a cauldron, where the peoples of different racial, linguistic and socio-cultural groups have lived since time immemorial."<sup>25</sup> Thus, there grew a peculiarly blended culture in this region, particularly in the field of Art, Craft and Music. This blended culture is noticeable more significantly in the plains of the region than in the hills, where the hill tribes retained their separate racial, linguistic and cultural entities because of living in intractable mountainous region.

Culture, as, E.B. Tylor states, stands for the beliefs, ideas, customs, laws, morals, arts and other capabilities and skills acquired by man as a member of Society.<sup>26</sup> The Assamese community and their culture are a synthesis of various patterns since undated periods of history. In Assam creative dynamism gained momentum as and when ethnical intercommunication occurred amongst them. With the advancement of knowledge and exchange of cultural practices of the earlier races, a new form of culture opened up and with the advancement of knowledge the cultural changes seem to be progressing towards a more prosperous synthesis.

According to Durgeswar Doley, the heterogeneous population of present Assam can be divided into three major categories, viz. the tribals, the non-tribal caste Hindus and the scheduled castes. The tribals consist of different ethnocultural communities such as the Miris, the Kacharis (including the Bodos), the Deories, the Rabhas, etc. The non-tribal group includes mainly the Ahoms, the Brahmins, the Kayasthas, the Kalitas, the Koches, the Morans the Matakas, the Chutias etc. The Basfors, the Baniyas, the Dhubis, the Dholis, the Hiras, the Kaibartras and the Namsudras etc. are included in Scheduled Castes. One of the major groups, who migrated from different parts of India to Assam during the British days was that of Tea Garden Labourers.<sup>27</sup>

During the time of King Bhāskar Varman (7th Century A.D.) of Kāmarūpa, Assamese culture gradually attained an improved level. During this time, Kāmarūpa rose to the height of power, both cultural and political. During his time the famous Chinese traveller and Scholar Hiuentziang visited Kāmarūpa

and the record he left of the Kingdom is still regarded as the most valuable and oldest of all historical records of Assam, barring the references to the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>28</sup> During the stay of Hiuentziang in the Court of king Bhāskara Varman he was frequently entertained and honoured with vocal, instrumental and dance music. Śrīgopal, a courtier of king Vāskara Varman of *Kāmarūpa* states in the *Bhūmidān* document written in the copper plate: *Āgyāśatom Prapayitbā prāptapanchamahāśabdam Śrīgopālah*. Regarding this context Jugal Das observes: "The *Panchamahāśabda* means the five large sound produced by *Śaṁkha*, *Mṛdaṅga*, *Pākhawāj* (*Pāsouja*), *Ḍunduvi* and *Ḍhol* as mentioned in ancient history".<sup>29</sup> He also states that according to some *Panchamahāśabda* also means the sound of five instruments like *Śiṅgā*, *Tanmat* (small *Nāgārā*), *Śaṁkha*, *Bherī*, and *Joy-ghaṅṭā*.<sup>30</sup> Mahapurush Mādhavadeva also mentioned the *Pancha Śavda* in *Bargīt*.<sup>31</sup>

Mādhava Kandali (13th century A.D.) in his Assamese version of the *Rāmāyana* gives an elaborate list of Musical instruments like *Vīṇā*, *Ḍhāka*, *Ḍhol*, *Ḍunduvi*, etc.<sup>32</sup>

The Assamese Hindu religious culture is a compromise of Aryan customs and rites with indigenous Mongoloid customs. In this connection Prafulla Datta Goswami observes: "The tolerant and easy going nature has given to the Assamese a 'national' festival which is not religious in the Hindu sense. The spring time *Bihu* (from Sanskrit, *Vishuvam*) with its house cleaning, wearing of new clothes, social visiting, dances and songs is enjoyed by all sections of the people, tribal or non-tribal. In origin a non Indian fertility festival, it has now been combined in certain cases Hindu religious ideas and cattle worship (bathing, feeding etc.)"<sup>33</sup>

The contribution of Śaṅkaradeva, a socio-cultural re-former and religious preacher of the fifteenth century, towards the development of Assamese culture is worth mentioning: "Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1569) and his associates adopted Vaiṣṇava Scriptures and wrote prose versions of the 'Gītā' and the *Bhāgavata* in Assamese, introduced drama in the local language, taught the people how to dance and sing..... The *Sattra* or Vaiṣṇava establishment initiated by him were democratically run great cultural centres".<sup>34</sup>

The Āhoms adopted the local Assamese culture as their own, by almost giving up their ancestral original customs and rites. Tarun Chandra Sarma maintains:

"..... the greatness of the people lies in their broad mindedness in accepting Assam as the motherland by discarding their own speech, script and religion as well as their relationship with their ancestral homes in Shan State and by allowing themselves to be completely fused into the mainstream of Indian civilization."<sup>35</sup>

The Assamese culture is composite in nature, for it is a synthesis of the Aryan and the non-Aryan cultures. As a result the vocal and instrumental music and dance, customs and rituals, specially in the plain area of Assam acquired distinctive characteristics of their own. It may be noted that during

the rule of King Rudra Singha, the *Bihu* songs and dance with accompanying instruments like *Dhol*, *Tāl*, *Pēpā*, *Gaganā* etc. also occupied a prestigious level due to royal patronage.<sup>36</sup> Rudra Singha formed 'Khels' i.e., different groups of people, for learning and promoting music and musical instruments named *Khuliā*, *Kālīā*, *Mṛdaṅgiā*, *Dhuliā*, *Negeriā*, *Gāyan*, *Bāyan*, *Khuṭitāliā*, *Nācaniyār*, *Tālowā*, *Binowā*, *Biāhgowā*, *Padgowā*, etc. for promoting music and one responsible officer called *Gāyan-Baruā* was appointed to supervise them.<sup>37</sup>

Another very significant feature which distinguished Assam from the rest of India was the absence of any rigid caste system in Assamese Society. B.M. Das observes: "Unlike many parts of India, in Assam the Assamese Hindus and Muslims are living in complete peace and harmony like members of the same family - the Assamese family."<sup>38</sup> Many Socio-cultural elements, more particularly at folk-level, of the Assamese Hindus and Muslims are very similar.<sup>39</sup> In the middle of the seventeenth century a Muslim saint and poet Hazarat Shah Milan by name, but popularly known as *Āzān Fakir* came to Assam. He was a Syed. He promoted Islam in Assam. *Āzān Fakir* popularized as kind of Vaiṣṇavi religious music, namely *Zikir* and *Jāri* in a simple native language and could bring both the communities closer to each other. About the rhythmic steps and musical instruments used for *zikir* Tafazaul Ali notes:

*Zikirs* were sung, and are still sung in groups with rhythmic steps keeping time by clapping of hands. Solo singers are also not uncommon. There is no indication of the use of musical instruments in group singing; but there is mention of the 'Tokāri' in some *zikirs*. Now-a-days some groups of *zikir* singers have introduced the 'Dotārā' and the flute as accompaniments of their songs. Such innovations have not corrupted the *Zikir* in any way, but have enriched their musical appeal.<sup>40</sup>

The compositions of *Zikirs* resemble the "Bargīt" or "Aṅkiyā gīt" of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva.

M.K. Saikia observes:

But unlike the 'Bargīts' in the literary Brajabali idiom, they are couched in colloquial homely Assamese, and in their form and expression they are in line with 'Deh-Vichārar gīt', a variety of philosophical songs of the Assamese village minstrels, and some other folk songs.<sup>41</sup>

The use of musical instruments like *Nāgārā* or *Negerā* and *Rabāb* by the Assamese Vaiṣṇava musician can be cited as a good evidence of the Indo-Islamic music in Assam. Bhāskara Vipra one of the followers of Śaṅkaradeva was reputed to be a skilled player of the *Rabāb*, the fine Mahammadan instrument. *Rabāb* is known to have been a popular musical instrument of Persia and Central Asia. Miya Tansen of Akbar's Court' (1542-1605 A.D.) might have developed it to perfection.<sup>42</sup>

The colourful fairs and festivals held in different parts of Assam reflect the people's love for music. *Bihu* is the national festival of Assamese people and it

could be held up as the finest example of assimilation of varied cultural practice, and social consolidation of diverse ethnic groups settled in North-Eastern part of India in general and Assam in particular. There are three *Bihus*, the *Bahāg*, the *Māgh* and the *Kāti*, celebrated at different periods of the year, *Bahāg Bihu* or *Rangāli Bihu* is the main and most important of the three *Bihus*. *Bahāg Bihu* is celebrated with ardour and vivacity with the advent of the Assamese new year, which synchronizes with mid-April. Hem Barua notes, "This is the time when the winter veil of fog and mist is lifted and the dry bones of the earth quicken under a mystic touch. The touch is that of buoyant Spring gliding into the naked bones of trees, into empty fields and the hearts of men with music and joy. The *Bihu* festival is an enactment of the primitive urge in man for expression through rites and rituals, songs and dances, of a natural fact.<sup>43</sup> Folk dances, to the accompaniment of folk songs (like *Bihu gīt*) and instrumental music provided by *Ḍhol*, *Pēpā*, *Ṭokā*, *Gaganā*, flute and community feasting, social visits amongst households are an integral part of the *Bihu* festival. The cattle are also taken to the river and are bathed through rituals. *Bihu* songs play an intrinsically intimate part in the life of Assamese Society. The songs are mostly composed in couplets and the themes of the songs are love and nature. The rhythm of the music of *Ḍhol*, *Tāl* etc. inspires mirth and joviality amongst the participants involved directly or indirectly in the performance. The dances are performed with songs, which are essential.

The tribal people of Assam have a large number of festivals in which their distinctive folk dances and folk songs predominate and are performed to the accompaniment of their indigenous musical instruments like - *Khām*, *Khrām*, *Khrām-Dobong*, *Chiphung*, *Taktak*, *Serjā*, *Muree*, *Ghang*, *Dumdum* etc.

The *Bhāonā*, which is an important theatrical item of mass entertainment was introduced by the great vaiṣṇava saint-poet-artist Śaṅkaradeva and it has been playing a great role in giving Assamese dance, drama and music, showing distinct characters of their own. This powerful medium used by the two gurus, Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, for propagating vaiṣṇava religion is traditionally practised in the *Sattras* and among general vaiṣṇava followers. At the same time, it has created a new class of music called *Aṅkiyānātar gīt*, i.e. the song of the *Aṅkiyā* drama. The musicians (*Gāyana* - *Bāyana*) play a very important role in a *Bhāonā*. These songs are devotional in character like the *Bargīts*, a cycle of Vaiṣṇavite devotional hymns. Before commencement of the principal theatrical performance, a number of *Khulīās* (*Khol* players) and *Tālīās* (*Tāl* - players) appear on the scene and demonstrate 'Saru Dhemāli', 'Ghosā Dhamāli', 'Bar Dhemāli', 'Guru Dhemāli', the different *Bol* composition. Soon after the conclusion of this item *Sutradhāra* appears on the scene. The *sutradhāra* dance is an integral part of a *Bhāonā*. In *Bhāonā* the *Bols* of different measures and styles of the *Khol* govern the performances according to the nature and spirit of the concerning themes.

The *Ojāpāli* dance is a very common entertainment in the rural areas of lower Assam. It is of non-Vaiṣṇavite origin. The *Ojāpāli* party consists of a band of Singers. The leader of the chorus is called *Ojā* and the few other

singers are known as 'Pālis' assistants or supporters to the *Ojā*. Musical instruments generally used by the *Ojāpālis* are - *Khol*, *Mṛdaṅga*, *Ḍhol*, *Nāgārā*, *Kartāl*, *Khutitāl*, *Khanjuri*, *Manjirā*, *Nūpur*, *Kāli*, *Bīṅ*, *Dotārā*, *Sārendā* etc.

The religious songs of Assam are accompanied by the indigenous musical instruments like *Bīn*, *Ṭokārī*, *Dotārā*, *Nāgārā*, *Khol*, *Mṛdaṅga*, *Khutitāl*, *Ḍabā*, *Bartāl*, *Bhortāl*, etc. *Mṛdaṅga* and *Khol* are the Chief instruments of *Gāyan* - *Bāyan* and *Sattriyā* music. Secular music like *Biyānām* (Marriage songs) flourished side by side with religious music. Besides the *Sattriyā* dance, and the *Ojāpālī* dance, the other dances prevalent in Assam, are *Deodhani*, *Devadāshi*, the *Bihu* dance and large number of Tribal dances. Many indigenous musical instruments are used for accompanying those varieties of dances.

### **Cultural Contact with other Places: Historical Background:**

Assam, which is called the eastern gateway and corridor of India, was the passage for exchanging culture and ideas between China and India, the two great Civilizations of the world.<sup>44</sup> Assam in different periods was known by different names. Once, the whole of the North Eastern region was within the political boundary of Assam. In most ancient time the name of Assam was *Prāgjyotiṣpur* and later its name become *Kāmarūpa* which has been mentioned in the epics the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and in some *Purāṇas* also. Of course, the boundaries of Assam underwent various changes from time to time. In this sense North-East India may be synonymous with the *Bar Asam*. Its boundary varied from time to time but at one time its boundary covered the stupendous hills of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan together with Siam, Ava, Arracan and the bordering Kingdoms as far as China.<sup>45</sup> Rai K.L. Barua Bahadur observes:

The references in the Ramayana, as well as in the Mahabharata, indicate that the country stretched as far as the sea and that it was also, at least partly, a hilly country. In the Ramayana, it is stated that, the city of Pragjyotisha was built on a gold-crested mountain called Varaha, which was 64 yojans in extent and which stood or abutted on fathomless Varunalaya (sea).<sup>46</sup>

The name *Kāmarūpa* continued to be used till the advent of the Āhoms in the Brahmaputra Valley in the 13th century. With the coming of the Āhoms, *Kāmarūpa* came to be known as Assam. After independence (1947) Assam's boundary frequently changed because of the secession of different regions from Assam. As a result of the secession of many territories, Assam has been drastically reduced in size. Of course, many more tribes are still there in the state.

From the ancient time, swarms of people of different religions, culture and beliefs belonging to different linguistic and ethnic groups started entering Assam. B.M. Das assumes that they entered Assam mainly through four directions:

- (a) Assam-Burma on the eastern side, of which one is through the Patkai ranges.
- (b) Northern passes of Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal.

- (c) by Sea, that is, by the Bay of Bengal via Burma or Bengal.
- (d) Western direction, an area formed by the valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Ganges.<sup>47</sup>

References to different races and cultural groups and Sub-groups like Kirāta, Kachāri, Chandāl etc. of ancient Assam was also found in the *Bhāgawat-Purāṇa* by Śankaradeva.<sup>48</sup>

The cultures of different races of Assam, since time immemorial had to pass through many ups and downs and ultimately got mixed up thoroughly giving rise to a new composite culture. This was a natural process of assimilation. The influence of new composite culture did not remain confined only to the four walls of Assam, but also penetrated into the neighbouring states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Jalpaiguri and also into certain parts of present Bangladesh and the Southern part of Bhutan. This type of composite culture is probably not found in other provinces of India. Continuous influx of people having different culture of Negritos, Proto Astroloid, Dravidian, Mongoloid and Caucasian from time immemorial had given rise to a complex but well unified culture in Assam which allows each group to retain its essential cultural identity.<sup>49</sup> Such a gradual growth of this composite culture of the original races of Assam, naturally exerted an influence on their music and musical instruments.

The Mongoloid strain derived from the Indo-Burmese border of Assam, Bengal, Bhutan and Sikkim, contributed some of its features, to the existing cultural texture.<sup>50</sup> The advent of the Āhoms of the mongoloid culture, was an event of great significance for Assam as well as for India.

In the development of certain music and musical instruments of a given society of a given period the royal patronage, religions and cultural movements even political movements also play a great role. Introduction of some North Indian Classical Instruments took place during the reign of the Āhom Kings.<sup>51</sup> Harakanta Sadar Amin states that Rudra Singha (1696-1714) showed high appreciation for the Hindusthani music and that is why he imported and settled a number of them in the country.<sup>52</sup> Again in the same way Gunabhiram Barua says that the *Khaunds* of Assam brought some persons from Hindusthan, who knew music and dance very well.<sup>53</sup> Mohini Kumar Saikia also observes: "It is also learnt from the *Burañjis* (history) that he (Rudra Singha) sent Assamese artists to Delhi and other places to be trained in Indian music as well as in the playing of different musical instruments used there.<sup>54</sup> The word *Pāśauja* (Pākhawāj) is also found in the *Tungkhungiā Burañji*.<sup>55</sup>

The Assamese culture took a new turn in the 19th century A.D. Tarun Chandra Sarma notes, during this period, the wind of Western education, ideas and way of life began to blow over the valley. It enabled Assam along with the rest of India to take part in the renaissance of culture and literature.<sup>56</sup> In this way the beginning of the modern period of Assamese culture took place.

One of the major groups of immigrants during the British days was that of the tea garden labourers. They were recruited mostly from Chotanagpur area,

Bihar, Northern and Western Orissa, East Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Northern Andhra Pradesh to work in the tea gardens of Assam. They have formed a considerable part of the population of Assam and contributed in their own way to enrich the composite culture of the state.

It may be noted that during the reign of the Āhom Kings, skilled hands of different jobs were brought and those people got themselves completely mixed with the native people. But the people, who were brought from Bengal since the early days of the British rule, for diverse official jobs, were of the educated class and they came with their own cultural and linguistic identities. No doubt, the socio-economic and cultural distinctions of the region made a great impact on them; but at the same time, the ethos and elements of Bengal renaissance also contributed new dimensional growth of the Assamese language and culture through them. Since the beginning of the present century the fertile land of Assam attracted the poor farmers of Bangladesh, erstwhile East Pakistan, and they have also formed a part of the population in the state.

After independence, a large number of people from other parts of India having different ethnic and linguistic identities, have also started coming to Assam and settled permanently. Though the Vaiṣṇava is the dominant religion in the State, yet there are people of different sects of Hinduism and of different religious faiths and folds—for example, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity etc. In the formation, growth and development of composite Assamese Culture, the people of different races, cultures and tongues have been contributing since time immemorial. Therefore, the Assamese culture possesses the basic features of the Indian culture and has developed an indigenous character of its own. In the context of the present study this character of the Assamese culture may also be found relevant, because the cultural contact with other parts of India consequently had a great impact on the music and musical instruments of this region.

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Duṁa duma Ḍunduvi Dhole  
Pancha Śavade śubha Milana mahotsava  
Joya joya Rāghava bole."
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Javan Kanka Gowāla  
Asama Muluka Rajaka Turka  
Kubacha Mlecha Chandāl".  
(Śaṅkaradeva)  
Here the words 'Kirāta' and 'Kachāri' both are found to be used in all his writings as bearing the same meaning. The word 'Kubacha' is used to mean 'kouh'. The word 'Mlech' mean 'Mech' and Khasi, Garo, Miri, Asam (Ahom), Chandāl are the other castes of Assam. 'Gowal' and 'Rajak' means 'Waterman', 'Turāka' means Muslim. The word 'Javan', 'Kanka', 'Muluka' are not identified.  
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## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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The north-east part of India is a meeting place of different ethnic groups — both of the Aryan and non-Aryan families, since time immemorial. On the one hand, it was an integral part of cultural India even in the days prior to her independence and it continues to be so; and on the other hand this region has enriched the cultural life with invaluable contributions of the people of south-east Asia too. Therefore, North Eastern India, possesses varieties of cultural treasures.

In music also, it has some distinctive characteristics of her own due to the contributions of the people of different origins; but still the principal note of it is associated with the pan Indian note. Musical instruments used in N.E. varied from place to place and from tribe to tribe due to intermixing of several ethnic groups. State like Manipur has occupied its rightful place in Indian classical Music. However, the groups of tribal people traditionally over the years have been using many instruments; hence instruments used by them are diverse. So, this appears to be an integration, over time of both general and tribal people.

Kinds of instruments in use among the tribal population are more in number in comparison to the kinds of instruments used by the other general groups of people; but the differences are not statistically significant. Whatever may be the difference, it is for the reason that the tribal population are mostly distributed in rural areas whereas there is ready availability of raw materials for making folk musical instruments, and hence the number of the musical instruments found among the tribals are bigger. It is found that the popularity of *Suṣira vādya* is at a higher level among the tribal population of N.E. It is probably due to easy availability of the material such as bamboo, reed, clay etc. as well as for the easy process of making *Suṣira* class of instruments out of those material. Again, the distinctive types and shapes of the musical instruments found in use among the different tribes are keenly associated with the types of music and dance that they perform on different occasions. It is interesting to note that the *Tata* class of instrument is very rare in N.E., particularly among the tribal people. It is probably because of the fact that in folk music of N.E., application of *Swara* is very limited, therefore the *Tata vādya*s prevalent in N.E. cannot make more *swaras* as in the case of the *Tata*

vādyas of the other parts of the country. Again, it is apparent that the varieties of *Avanaddha* types of instruments are most popular among the general population. It is perhaps because of the fact that the *Avanaddha vādya* has been largely used in the folk music as well as in the devotional and *Sattriyā* music of Assam.

Among different types of instruments like *Bihu dhol*, *Ṭakā*, *Bihutāi*, *Gaganā* etc. used in Bihu festival and related function show the dominance in Upper Assam, where as instruments like *Nāgārā*, *Bardhol*, *Kāli*, *Dhepāḍhol* etc. are more dominant in lower Assam.

It is also observed that the percentage of users of musical instruments specially in rural areas is higher. Urban music due to mixed population and exchange of culture donot really reflect the actual picture.

Regarding some musical instruments that are still prevalent in the region, certain references even could be found in old literatures, ancient sculptures and paintings of the medieval period too. In early Assamese literature there are sporadic references of various musical instruments.

It is noticed that during the period approx. A.D. 1696-1780, under the patronage of the kings of Assam, some North Indian classical music and musical instruments, found entry into Assam to grow here in a healthy atmosphere. Since then, classical mode of music has gained a good ground in Assam. It may be observed that the *Sattriyā* music, *Ojāpāli* of Assam, based essentially on the classical rāgas come to being prior to this period. Thus, the classical music and musical instruments were not unfamiliar to this region, but the patronage of the kings gave them a strong and healthy atmosphere to grow. It is also found that the classical instruments made their entry into N.E. since long back and they made impact on the local musical instruments also.

Indian musical instruments belong to four categories: *Avanaddha*, *Ghana*, *Suśira* and *Tata*. All these four different classes of instruments with their interesting variations are found to be played in N.E. Survey of those *Vādyas* in relation to each tribe shows that to make each instrument capable of making sounds to the tunes of their need and desire is the principal motive behind each type. Natural transmission of styles, shapes and sizes of different musical instruments of N.E. came into use in accordance with the tastes and interests of the people of different times. But in some cases the original forms are found to continue till date. From the similarity of structural designs and manner of use, it is observed by some scholars that some of the musical instruments of the present age in India might have originated from a folk music and musical instruments of North Eastern India.

It can be concluded that N.E., though remained politically a sovereign Kingdom till the early part of the 19th century, imbibed the Indian spirit and her cultural traits and also developed her own spirit and form with the ingredients that she obtained from the cultural life of different tribes inhabited in this region. This study on music and musical instruments of this region, therefore embodies the characteristics of culture of North Eastern India which came into being from the confluence of the people of different origins, but still carrying the Indian character.

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