

GURU AMUBI SINGH HIS VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION IN ABHINAYA

Darshana Jhaveri

One who ventures to create something new within the framework of a tradition, one who envisages one's work of creation to go on relating to the changing times, needs to have a sound knowledge of the traditional art form and its scientific tenets together with impeccable mastery over its techniques. Only when these pre-requisites are combined with a courageous and broad-minded creative ability, then master pieces are produced which, in their turn, keep the tradition living through the turbulent present and are carried on to the distant future.

Manipuri *Rasa* and Sankirtan are highly developed forms of aesthetic expression of the religious feelings of the people of Manipur. Due to the staunch following of Gaudiya Vaishnavism for the last 200 years or more, people of Manipur have been highly charged with devotional fervour. All the dance and music performances connected with social and religious occasions have been celebrated in the temple courtyard and the devotional people of Manipur shed tears of joy, watching these performances from dusk to dawn.

Innumerable Gurus and artistes under the patronage of various kings have developed dance and music to most dignified and stylised forms. The Gurus used to draw inspiration from the *Vaishnavite shastras* and literature to develop their individual style of dance and music.

In order to evoke *Bhakti rasa* these *shastras* have described the technical elements of dance and music depicting Krishna's various *lilas*. Some of the important Vaishnavite texts followed by Gurus of Manipur are *Govindalilamritam*, *Bhaktiratnakara*, *Sangitsarasangraha*, *Krishnabhavanamritam* and *Gita-chandrodaya*. They have described in detail the technical aspects of *tala*, *vadya*, *abhinaya*, dance and songs essentially used for the *Rasalilas*.

In Manipur, traditionally dance and music have been interwoven with the lives of the people. In *Laiharaoba*, the ancient festival invoking village gods, *Maibis*, the priestesses describe the primitive concept of cosmology through various hand gestures.

Guru Amubi Singh was nurtured in a tradition with Vaishnavite knowledge and practice. His talent flowered when he came in close contact with Uday Shankar. The creative mind of Guru Amubi Singh was quick to appreciate the keen sense of stage presentation and showmanship of Uday Shankar. The impression of the soft and lyrical style of Uday Shankar is also discernible in his own compositions. He composed dance movements and tunes of the songs in accordance with the emotional content and the sweetness of *Vaishnavite Padavali*. His abhinaya was so effective that it immediately touched the hearts of the onlookers.

We (Jhaveri Sisters) were fortunate to come in contact with Guru Amubi Singh. In 1949 my two elder sisters were sent by Guru Bipin Singh specially to Manipur to learn under Guru Amubi Singh in order to imbibe the very spirit of Manipuri dance, to know the culture of the people and their social and religious customs. Again in 1956 Guru Bipin Singh took four of us to Manipur to study the individual styles to the three elderly gurus viz., Guru Amubi Singh, Guru Atomba Singh and Guru Amudon Sharma.

We were deeply impressed by Guru Amubi Singh's broad outlook when he told us that once you master the traditional and most important dance compositions of *Bhangi Parengs* and *Chali*, you are free to innovate new in *punglol jagoi* within the confines of tradition. He also told us to know the work of other Gurus. We still remember his outstanding compositions like हे सखी मोहन (*Krishna Rupa Varnana*), सखीगन घेरी गावत गारी (*Phagukhel* in *Rudra Tala*). Later he composed another *Phagukhel* in *tala Chautala* viz., खेलत राधा माधव ब्रजरमणीगन. श्रीतकमलकुच a song from *Gita Govinda* has an appropriate use of hand gestures and facial expressions composed with great skill on fast and slow rhythm.

कानु कालिन्दी कुलकानने of *Govindadas* in *tala Pancham*, a song from the *rasa*, has very melodious and touching tune as well as stylised body movements. Compared to his contemporary gurus, Guru Amubi Singh was a creative genius. He was all for creative work in *abhinaya*. His creative activities inspired his successors who continued creating new compositions within the classical tradition of Manipur dance, keeping in mind the rapidly changing world around them.

KUMARI DARSHANA JHAVERI is a student of Guru Bipin Singh and is the youngest of the Jhaveri sisters, the renowned Manipuri dancers. She has written a book on Manipuri Nartan (Hindi) alongwith Kalavati Devi. She has contributed many articles on various aspects of Manipuri dance. Besides giving regular performances she teaches at Manipuri Nartan-laya, Calcutta.