

## PRESERVATION OF CLASSICAL MANIPURI DANCING

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*I recollect the rare occasion in our life in 1956 when we four Jhaveri Sisters (Late Nayana and Ranjana, Suverna, Darshana) performed 5 traditional Bhangi Parengs learnt from Guru Pipin Singh, in front of three great Gurus – Ojha Amubi Singh, Ojha Atomba Singh, Ayga Amudon Sharma in Johnnton High School at the premise of Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy founded in Imphal in 1954. We were blessed with individual certificates from them as well as Diploma from JNMDA.*

Jhaveri Sisters and their Guru, Guru Bipin Singh, during their vast exposure to Manipuri Dance form realized the need for preserving, perpetuating and promoting Manipuri Dance as a Classical Dance form along with other established styles. Darshana Jhaveri is venturing to recapitulate this urge that has inspired them all these years.

During 60 years of Jhaveri Sisters' Manipuri Dance Career they had to undergo upheavals. To establish Manipuri Dance outside Manipur as one of the four major Classical Dance Styles, to propagate it through teaching, performances touring, articles, lecture Demonstrations, books, radio, TV interviews etc. was a great challenge.

As traditional and classical dancers they were conscious of the problems, difficulties and responsibilities to bring the night long Rasleelas having rich, beautiful, traditional, classical Manipuri dances performed in the temples to 2 hour recital for the proscenium stage.

In the temples the most outstanding Choreographic pattern of the Rasleela performance is the circulatory movements around the central figures of Krishna and Radha – Gopies sing and dance in a circle facing the image of Krishna & Radha and not the audience. The audiences of Krishna devotees sit on three sides outside the Rasmandal experiencing

ecstatic joy of Bhaktiras. Whereas in the theatre dancers dance on the proscenium stage, where audience sit only on front side. the audience not necessarily religious, witnesses the performance with expectations of beautiful and technically rich presentation, awaiting an aesthetic experience (Rasanubhava). This was a serious limitation which was overcome by various research oriented innovative, creative efforts reviewed herein.

Jhaveri Sisters were fortunate to have Guru Bipin Singh as their Guru for over 50 years who had vast knowledge of the Classical tradition of Ras and Sankirtan, in-depth study of the Shastras, keen aesthetic sensibility and creative ability. He delved deep into the study of ancient Indian texts on dance and music and Vaishnavite Sangeet Shastras. He guided Jhaveri Sisters to look for rare and old books on dance and music for research. He inspired them to study ancient and Vaishnavite Shastras and manuscripts of Manipur.

Jhaveri Sisters and Guru Bipin Singh realized that the rich oral tradition of Manipur Dance, preserved and insulated, will fade away in course of time under the impact and influences of modern day living with the demise of great Gurus.

With fear in mind, they started compiling through writings and recordings the oral tradition of dance and music of Rasleelas, 5 of them having stories of Krishna & Radha and 2 of Rasas having stories of childhood pranks of Krishna as also Sankirtana Bol compositions of Mridang Ragas, Sancharas, talas, tal Prabandhas and other compositions, from innumerable Gurus, each specialized in different aspects.

Guruji approached the great masters in Manipur, Cachar, Tripura and convinced them to part with the rare and hidden knowledge with them. He realized that Gurus were aware of some of the classical