

**TITLE OF THE TOPIC:**

**A STUDY OF VARIOUS ASPECTS OF KHOL, A SATRIYA  
MUSICAL INSTRUMENT**

**INTRODUCTION**

Shrimanta Sankardev, who started the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam with his concept of “Ek Sharan Naam Dharma”, used various branches of literature and culture, like songs, verses, ghoshas, plays and bhaonas etc. to spread his religious belief among people. Though in the pre-Sankardev Assam songs, dances, musical instruments etc. were used in worshipping of God, Mahapurush Sankardev created a new literary-cultural epoch for the purpose of offering prayer to God.

According to various Charit books (biographical sketches of Sankardev and his disciple Madhavdev), Mahapurush Sankardev created the first bhaona (a kind of play initiated by Sankardev) titled ‘Chihnayatra’ in 1390 Shaka (1468 A.D.), when he was only 19. For this purpose, he created various instruments like Khol, Taal etc. There is no doubt that Sankardev first used the musical instrument Khol in his first play ‘Chihnayatra’.

**Creation of Khol**

As already mentioned, Mahapurush Sankardev created the instrument Khol with his own ideas for the purpose of using it in the play ‘Chihnayatra’. Now the question is, Sankardev toured the holy places of India for not less than twelve years; so, why did he not take similar musical instruments like Tabla, Mridanga, Dholak, Pakhowaj etc., which were in use in other places of India at that time? To answer this question, it may be said that as

Sankardev's musical creations had one main purpose, that was to disseminate the feeling of devotion among people, he created his own musical instruments that could suit his purpose the most.

The egg-shaped body of the Khol, like Mridanga, is made of clay. This egg-shaped body is known as Khol or Khola. Nowadays, of course, most of the Khols are made of wood. The making of Khol using clay is mentioned in the biography of Sankardev written by Lakshminath Bezbarua, the doyen of the modern Assamese literature. Another biography, 'Katha Guru Charit' also has similar mention. In both these biographies, it is said that Sankardev got the body of the Khol made by some potter near the Kapili river. Another biography edited by Ram Charan Thakur says that Sankardev got the body of the Khol made by some Jagannath Kumar of Kapilimukh, and the leathered sides by a cobbler of a place named Salmara. Sankardev sent Balaram Atoi to give the measurements of the Khol.

In different Charit books, the measurement of the Daina (right) side of the Khol is given differently – some says it is 9 fingers and some other says it is 7 fingers. But about the measurement of the Baya (left) side (13 fingers), all the Charits agree with one another.

Khol is a percussion instrument. It is made of the skin of cows. In its shape, it is like a myrobalan. If the two sides of a myrobalan are cut, one side more and the other side less, than we get the shape of Khol.

### **A brief description of Satras**

All the cultural creations of Sankardev are known as Satriya culture, because it is through Satra that his cultural creations are disseminated and practiced. Sankardev admitted the importance of establishing Satras to spread the essence of the Bhagavata or the acts of Hari through singing and hearing. Though the word Satra is a very old word, it was Sankardev, who first used this word in a broader sense. The word Satra originated from Sanskrit. Another word with similar sense is Than, which is derived from the word Sthan or place. The holy sites of the Vaishnavite religion and culture are called both Satra and Than. However, all the

institutions established by Srimanta Sankardev, his favourite disciple Madhavdev, and later, different followers of them, are known as Satras or Thans. For

example, Bordowa Satra, Barpeta Satra, Patbaushi Satra, Kamalabari Satra etc. In all these Satras, in prayer-activities of both Nitya (daily) or Naimittik (occasional) kind, Khol is used in various ways according to the fixed rules.

As already mentioned, Mahapurush Sankardev took up music as the medium of spreading religious beliefs and Chihnayatra, first enacted in Bordowa Satra, was the first attempt of his of this kind. Following his examples, his most favourite disciple Madhavdev dedicated himself to the religious, cultural, literary paths trodden by Sankardev, and played a pivotal role in spreading the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. In 1505 Shaka (1583 A.D.), Madhavdev established Barpeta Satra, where his creativity inspired by the examples of his Guru bloomed fully. In the last days of Madhavdev, he brought his use of the Satriya music as a medium to disseminate Sankari religion to its completeness while staying in Barpeta Satra. He sent his disciple Sri Sri Padma Ata to the upper part of Assam to spread the Sankari religion and culture there. Sri Padma Ata, during his stay at Barpeta Satra for one year, learnt Satriya songs and hymns, dances and instruments, plays and bhaonas, besides the religious thoughts of Sankardev in the company of Mathuradas Burha Ata and other devotees. This Padma Ata established the Kamalabari Satra in Majuli in the upper part of Assam.

### **Significance of the study of the three schools of taals of the Khol**

The Satriya culture has been practiced and developed according to the rules of the three Satriya schools – Bordowa, Barpeta and Kamalabari. Now the question is, while the Satriya culture is the creation of one Mahapurush for the purpose of dissemination of one religion, why should there be three schools? As a reply to this question, it can be considered that after the demise of Sankardev and Madhavdev, the devotees and artists of these three Vaishnavite sites used their own expertise and intellect to develop the Satriya culture. Thus, because of the introduction of new elements, some changes have occurred in various forms of Satriya culture of these three schools. But still, even after more than 500 years have passed, the three

schools are connected by more commonness than differences, and the new elements have only enriched the Satriya culture.

Though there are distinctive methods of worship activities in the three Satras, they are guided by one purpose, and that is spread of the Sankari religious belief of Ek Sharan Naam Dharma. In all the daily and occasional worship activities of these three Satras, Khol is used both individually and along with songs, dances etc. In these activities, different taals of Khol is used along with various ghats, choks, maans etc. The taals particularly used in songs are Pari taal, Jati taal, Rupak taal, Bikham taal, Jaman taal, Ek taal, Rassa Ek taal, Dharam Jati taal, Math Jati taal, Rup Jati taal, Kharman taal, Pat Pari taal, Chut Kala taal, Bhangi taal, Chotaali, Domali, Dashbaji, Manchok etc. It is seen that the names of these taals are the same in the three schools, but in the taals bearing the same name, there are differences in respect of their rhythm, structure of taal, division in measurement, taali, khaali, jaati etc. In these respects, there are similarities between a taal of a school and another taal by another name of another school, though there are slight difference in respect of a few bols. For example, the Bikham taal of Barpeta Satra is similar to the Chutkala taal of Kamalabari Satra. On the other hand, the Chutkala taal of Barpeta Satra is similar to the small Bikham taal of Kamalabari Satra. Similarly, in playing taals with the same taali and khali, two taals of the same school or different schools remain the same except for the difference in one or two bols. But sometimes, in same taals with same taali and khali, there appears the difference in the division in measurement, though its structure based on the holy books and marked by their own unique characteristics remains the same. For example, the division of measure of main Jati taal of Barpeta Satra is 28, its bhag is 14, taali 8 and khali 6. On the other hand, the Dharam Jati taal has the same taali and khali, but its division of measurement is a bit different. Some taals are known by different names in different Satras, but their complete structure, taal, maan, maatra etc. are the same. For example, the Pat Pari taal of Barpeta Satra is similar to the Ek Taal used in dances in Kamalabari Satra. If judged by this, the taals of Khol used in the three schools have some similarities and some dissimilarities, but the taals are maintaining their originality by following the complete Satriya style and method. Some people, being unable to realize the essence of these taals, try to compare them with the taals of

Hindustani Music, and thus distort the very foundation of the Satriya taal. It is for this reason that there should be scientific discussion and practice of these Satriya taals, so that they can be preserved with their own uniqueness.

Therefore, it is necessary that the taals of Khol used in the three schools should be systematically and methodically studied and there should also be a comparative study of these taals. It has to be established that like the taals of Hindustani music, the taals of Satriya Khol have their distinctive features and they are not in any way imitation of other musical trends.

### **Objective of work**

1. To gather complete knowledge of the ga-maan, chok, ghat etc. of the taals of the three schools from the prominent gurus by visiting the three Satras -- Barpeta, Bordowa and Kamalabari.
2. To create a table of the taals of Satriya Khol instrument by maintaining the main characteristic features of them in a scientific manner, so that it helps preservation of these taals.
3. To undertake a comparative and analytical study of the taals of the three schools.
4. To publish a book, which will contain the results of the creation of the table as well as the comparative and analytical study.
5. With the experience of the study of the taals of the three schools, preparation of an audio-CD, so that it becomes available to the future learners.

## CHAPTER-1

During the first reporting period I proceeded with my works as per my plan, and took up two tasks mentioned in the plan. One of them was to acquire knowledge of 'Ga-Maan', "Chok", "Ghat" etc. of the main time division (taal) of Khol from the experienced masters and Sattriyas of the Satras belonging to the three main groups. The other task was to prepare the pattern of the time division in a scientific method by maintaining the characteristic features of the Sattriya Khol on the basis of the acquired knowledge. For these two tasks, I first chose Barpeta Satra and the Satras of the Kamalabari group of Majuli, and apart from doing field study there, I acquired knowledge of the Khol from the masters there. In this course I talked to Sri Basistha Dev Sarma, Burha Sattriya of Barpeta Satra, Sri Nabajit Das, Deka Sattriya of Barpeta Satra, Sri Jagannath Barbayan (92 years), the chief 'Bayan' of Barpeta Satra and Sri Akan Chandra Bayan, besides several distinguished Sattriya artists and writers such as Sri Nilkanta Sutradhar, Sri Gunindra Nath Ojah, Dr. Birinchi Kumar Das, Dr. Babul Chandra Das etc. Moreover, I studied various 'Charit Books' (biographies of the Vaishnavite saints), research books etc. and got various data on the Khol practiced in Barpeta Satra.

After completing these works on the Khol of Barpeta Satra, I worked on the time division (taal) of the Khol practiced in the Satras of the Kamalabari group of Majuli. In this course, I met various Satradhikars, masters and Sattriya artists. Among them, the remarkable names are Sri Janardan Dev Goswami, Satradhikar of Uttar Kamalabari Satra, Sangeet Natak Academy award winner artist Sri Gopiram Bargayan, Sri Kamal Bargayan, Satradhikar of Natun Bhogpur Satra and Sangeet Natak Academy award winner artist Sri Manik Barbayan, famous artist of Natun Kamalabari Satra Sri Haricharan Bhuyan Atoi, two young artists of Uttar Kamalabari Sri Bhabananda Barbayan and Sri Naren Barua etc. I talked to them about the cultural tradition of the Satras of the Kamalabari group as well as the Khol practiced in these Satras.

### Barpeta Satra and the Khol

The artistic creations of Mahapurush Sankardev and his favourite disciple Mahapurush Madhavdev are known as Sattriya culture, as they are practiced and developed through the Satras. One of the prominent epitomes of Sattriya culture is Barpeta Satra. This Satra was established in 1505 Shaka (1583 AD) by Mahapurush Madhavdev on the request of his chief disciple Mathuradas Burha Ata and other disciples. With the help of Mathuradas Burha Ata (Gopal Tanti) and other disciples, Sankardev and Madhavdev weaved the amazing 'Brindabani Bastra' (the cloth depicting Brindaban), which was of 120 hands in length and 60 hands in breadth. Barpeta Satra was also established keeping in mind the depiction in this long cloth.

At the beginning, while Madhavdev was present in Barpeta Satra, the worship activities of the Satra were done by the skilled saints collectively. But when Madhavdev made Mathuradas Burha Ata the first Satradhikar of the Satra, and gave him the complete charge of the Satra, the farsighted Mathuradas Burha Ata entrusted the responsibility of various worship activities of the Satra on various families and Hati-units, keeping in mind the contemporary social atmosphere, so that these worship activities continue uninterrupted even in the future. As a result, even today the Sattriya religious-cultural tradition of Barpeta Satra is going on without any break. The families and Hati-units involved in performing the worship activities are Pathak family, the family of Ram Ram Guru, Sutradhar family, Bheema Bayan family, Gandhiya family, Bayan family of Galiya hati, Aghona Bayan family, the devotees of the main Dakshinhati, Ojah family and along with them, the whole devotees.

The worship activities of Barpeta Satra can be divided into daily and occasional activities. The daily worship activities are all those religious customs, rituals and prayers, which are performed daily. The occasional worship activities are those, which are performed particularly on various Tithis, festivals etc. Apart from being used in all the songs and the dances, which are parts of both daily and occasional religious activities of Barpeta Satra, Khol is played also as a single cultural item. The particular places of the Satra where Khol is played are – in front of the Guru Asanas, in the yard of the Math (the residence of Mahapurush Madhavdev) and Jogmohan Griha. There are various taals (time divisions) used in playing of khol both with songs and dances, and as a single item, and in concordance with the taals, various Ghats, Choks and Maans are used. The taals used in playing khol are -- Paritaal, Jatitaal, Rupak taal, Bisham taal, Jaman taal, Ektaal, Rassa ektaal, Dharamjyoti taal, Mathjyoti taal, Rupjyoti taal, Kharman taal, Patparitaal, Chutkala taal, Bhangi jorani taal, Chotaali, Domaali, Dashbaji, Maanchok etc.

**The Satras of Kamalabari group and Khol**

Badula Padma Ata, a disciple of Mahapurush Madhavdev, took the religious lessons from Madhavdev while staying at Bheladogar Than in Coch Behar for seven days and seven nights; and from there, he went to the upper part of Assam to spread the Vaishnavite ideals. Then he came to Barpeta Satra with Haricharan Atoi and other devotees. Here, he stayed for one year, and in company of Mathuradas Burha Ata, Gopal Ata etc., he could master the Sattriya culture. Then, he went to Majuli to disseminate the Vaishnavite religious ideals of Sankardev. Murari Mudoi of Majuli built in his residential campus a house for Padma Ata, houses for the devotees, Naam ghar, Manikut etc., and he along with his family also took initiation to the Vaishnavite religion. Later, on the request of Haricharan Atoi and other devotees to establish a separate Satra, Padma Ata requested Purushottam Barua to allow him to establish the Satra in his orange garden. Purushottam Barua open-heartedly allowed him to establish the Satra in the garden. Then, Kirtan ghar,

Manikut, house of Padma Ata, house of Haricharan Atoi, houses of the devotees etc. were built in the orange garden, and when all these were completed, the Satra was established in 1595 Shaka (1673 AD) in the month of Aghon on the Suhkla Ekadashi Tithi. As the Satra was established in an orange garden (kamala bari), the Satra came to be known as Kamalabari Satra. Later, from this Kamalabari Satra, some other Satras like Natun Kamalabari Satra, Uttar Kamalabari Satra etc. have come into being, but the cultural activities of these new Satras run according to the customs of the main Satra, Kamalabari Satra. Similarly, some other Satras like Bhogpur etc. also belong to the Kamalabari Satra group. In these Satras also the worship activities are divided into daily and occasional activities. In both the daily and the occasional prayer activities that follow fixed rules, Khol is played along with songs, dances etc. and also as a single musical item. The khol is played in various taals (time divisions) accompanied by various ghats, choks, maans etc. Some remarkable taals of the Kamalabari group of Satras are Paritaal, Jatitaal, Rupak taal, Saru Bisham taal, Bar Bisham taal, Chuta taal, Thukuni taal, Jaman taal, Ektaal, Rassa Ektaal, Dharamjyoti taal, Mathjyoti taal, Kharman taal, Chutkala taal, Ektaal (of dance), Domaali taal, Dashabaji taal etc.

#### **Patterns of some remarkable taals of Barpeta and Kamalabari Satras**

Earlier the patterns of the Sattriya taal were established on various organs like Laghu, Guru, Pluta etc., and it was a convention of writing the taal scripts on the basis of the signs of these organs. At present this convention is no longer in vogue. Nowadays the taal scripts are written in the Bhatkhande method. So, while introducing this method briefly, I want to prepare below the patterns of some remarkable taals of Barpeta and Kamalabari Satras. The various branches of a taal as well as the Matras, divisions, Taali, Khaali, Sama etc. used in a taal pattern in the Bhatkhande method are briefly introduced below along with their signs.

**Ga-Maan ( Theka or Mul Bajana) –** The main sound of a taal played in songs, dances etc. is known as Ga-Maan or Mul Bajana (main sound). This is played repeatedly.

**Ghat or Ghata:** The sound created by extending the taal is known as Ghat or Ghata. This sound is not repeated. There are several Ghats or Ghatas, such as Guru Ghat, Mul Ghat, Loyni Ghat, Chora Ghat etc.

**Chok :** At the end of the Ga-Maan or main sound, the increasing rhythmic sound with speedy movement is known as Chok.

**Maan :** Maan is the rhythmic sound created in the middle Ghats of the taal played with songs.

For example, Thaoni Maan.



**Matra:** When the moving tune of a taal is divided equally into small parts of time, each of such part of time is known as matra. Matra is a small part of a taal. The sign of Matra is “U”.

**Taali:** In accordance with the divisions of a taal, the movement of the taal is indicated by making sounds with the help of clapping or similar physical acts. This is known as taali. To show taali, first the sign “X” (sama) is written and then it is marked with numbers like “2”, “3” etc.

**Khali or Phak:** When the movement of a taal is indicated by gestures without making any sound, it is known as Khali or Phak. The sign of Khali or Phak is “O”.

**Sama:** When songs, instrumental music or dances are performed, on the point from which the taal begins, the khol is played with more force than on other points, and thus taali is shown. It is known as Sama, and its sign is “X”.

**Bibhag:** The matras of each taal are divided into some parts according to the differences in rhythm. These small and big parts are known as Bibhag. The sign of bibhag is “I”.

**Avagraha:** The ceasing point of Swar Aghat or Bol Aghat is called Avagraha. In Avaghara, even when there is no ‘Bol Aghat’, the rhythm of the taal is not destroyed, and its matra is also maintained. The sign of Avagraha is “S”.

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### **Patterns of some remarkable taals of Barpeta and Kamalabari Satras**

Earlier the patterns of the Sattriya taal were established on various organs like Laghu, Guru, Pluta etc., and it was a convention of writing the taal scripts on the basis of the signs of these organs. At present this convention is no longer in vogue. Nowadays the taal scripts are written in the Bhatkhande method. So, while introducing this method briefly, I want to prepare below the patterns of some remarkable taals of Barpeta and Kamalabari Satras. The various branches of a taal as well as the Matras, divisions, Taali, Khaali, Sama etc. used in a taal pattern in the Bhatkhande method are briefly introduced below along with their signs.

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taali. To show taali, first the sign “X” (sama) is written and then it is marked with numbers like “2”, “3” etc.

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