

# The Basic Techniques of Playing the Pung: An Analysis

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## **Abstract**

Manipuri Nata-Sankirtana, a performing art form, uses a percussion musical instrument called Pung or Meitei Pung or Nata-Pung which is originated from Manipur state itself. This instrument is the soul of Nata-Sankirtana Performance. It is very much needed to know what Manipuri Pung is, how this musical instrument is played, its historical development, uses and what are the basic techniques and strokes used in playing it. This present paper tries to 1) identify the different strokes of playing Pung Manao (the smaller face playing with the right hand) 2) identify the different strokes of playing Pung Maru (the larger face playing with the left hand) 3) understand the sounds produced by the combination of Pung Maru and Pung Manao playing together simultaneously. It is a content analysis using the punglon notation of Nuwa Raga Ahwba created by Shri Thakur Shyama which tries to find out the basic strokes used in playing Pung. It uses the tools and techniques of observation, both participant and non-participant of the researcher. So, this study will give the basic foundation for playing Pung to those who want to learn this unique percussion musical instrument. It further gives some suggestion to help the learners.

**Keywords:** Nata-Sankirtana; Pung; Punglon; Pung Manao; Pung Maru.

## **Introduction**

Manipur, a north-eastern state of India, is famous for its significant art and culture. Among different performing art forms, Nata-Sankirtana can be considered here. It is a unique type of Manipuri performing art form performed by male artistes only. Manipuri Nata-Sankirtana as a performing art form is included in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Humanity on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2013 as Sankirtana- ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur. A percussion musical instrument called Pung is used

by the Pungyeiba (Pung performing/playing artistes), which is the soul of such performance. Meitei Pung or Manipuri Pung or Nata Pung (Fig. 1 & 2) is a spindle shaped percussion musical instrument which is made up of a hollow wooden body with a rough or somewhat smooth surface inside, the two ends of which are covered with leather caps (Pung Maru and Pung Manao). The two ends are tied together by leather straps called Sawun Maree. This percussion musical instrument falls under the category of Alingya Anaddha or Avanaddha vadya/drum which is played by hands suspending from the neck-shoulder position in horizontal posture. The membranes of animal hides used in making this instrument are from cow, calf, buffalo, bull/ox, etc.



**Fig. 1: The Manipuri Pung in Horizontal Position**



**Fig. 2: The Manipuri Pung in Vertical Position with its names of different parts**

One of the two ends of the Pung is smaller in diameter and the other is bigger in diameter. The smaller face is called Pung Manao (Fig. 3), simply Manao and the bigger face is called Pung Maru (Fig. 4), simply Maru. Generally, the smaller end is played with the right hand and the bigger end is played with the left hand of the percussionist. The two leather caps are called sawun mamai or pung mamai. The two leather caps, the Pung Maru and Pung Manao are held tight by the leather straps called Sawun mare (Fig. 2). Another apparatus named Naothong is placed on the inside portion of pung manao. Sawun maree passes through both the hoops to and fro, over the entire length of the pung along its circumference. It is a general rule that when the pung is kept in the vertical position, the manao is placed at the top position and the maru will occupy the downward side.



**Fig. 3: Pung Manao (the smaller face played with the right hand)**



**Fig. 4: Pung Maru (the bigger face played with the left hand)**

Pung mamai consists of two layers of leather. The inner first layer is the portion in which Kaap (mixture of finely powdered iron and boiled rice, Fig. 4) is to be put layer by layer to produce the required melodious sound effect. The second layer of the leather is called Katta (Fig. 3). The outside wooden hollow body of the pung is painted in black colour.

A white cloth made of cotton is worn on the body of the pung. It is called Pung Mabuk Yomnaba Phi (Fig. 2). Two circular rings made of brass or iron coated with steel is held near the edge of the pung maru and manao. These are called Khudop (Fig. 2). Pung is held suspended from the neck in the horizontal position. A woollen strap red in colour is used to suspend pung from the neck. This is known as Pungli or Thanggang Maree (Fig. 2). The whole of the pung is covered by another cloth. This cloth is called Pungyom Phi.

(T. B. Singh) opined that in Manipur, Pung was understood for knowing time like hours. So, the term Pung percussion musical instrument was used to denote the rhythmic measurement of taala in singing and dancing through its playing of different bols.

According to Bharata's *Natyashastra*, (Gopal 29-31) and (Sengupta 25-29) *Avanaddha Vadya* Percussion musical instruments are classified into three types based on the position in which they are held for playing.

Alingya instruments which are tied to the waist or suspended from the neck. Manipuri Pung, Khol used in Sattriya Dance of Assam, Matri or wooden Khol used in Manorharsai recital in Bengal, etc are suspended from the neck in a horizontal position.

Ankya instruments are the ones which are placed on the lap. Carnatic music percussion instrument Mridangam can be considered here.

Urdhva instruments are those instruments facing upward. One example for this is the Hindustani music percussion instrument Tabla.

So, Manipuri Pung is classified under Alingya percussion musical instrument based on Shastra. A comparative study can be done among Manipuri Pung, Tabla (Hindustani music percussion musical instrument) and Mridangam (Carnatic music percussion musical instrument) regarding names of different parts in making those instruments so that the Manipuri Pung can be understood easily.

	<b>Manipuri Pung</b>	<b>Tabla</b>	<b>Mridangam</b>
1.	Pung Manao (Right face)	Table/Dahina	Valanthalai
2.	Pung Maru (Left face)	Dugga/Bayan	Thoppi thol
3.	Kaap (Mixture of iron dust and flour paste or boiled rice)	Syahi	Karanai or Karini
4.	Katta (Outer layer for both faces)	Kinaar/Chanti	Vettu Thatu
5.	Pung Maru/Manao Mamai (Middle layer)	Luv or Sur for Dahina and Maindan for Bayan	Kottu Thatu
6.	Maril ( Inner layer not visible from outside for both faces)	Gajra	Utkara Thatu
7.	Sawun Mari (Leather straps)	Baddhi	Leather straps

#### Historical Development of Manipuri Pung or Meitei Pung

(O. B. Singh 2-4) and (Singh and Khelchandra 1) clearly indicated the first making and used of Manipuri Pung during the time of King Khuyoi Tompok in 154 A.D. It was first made from the leather of deer. But it did not produce the sound needed. Again, it was made from the tiger skin. In that case too, the required melodious sound was not obtained. Then, it was tried with the hide of cow. This time the needed melodious sound system was achieved. That instrument was given the name Wanglen Pung of Khuyoi Tompok (Amuyaima).

(M. T. Singh, Meitei Pung Amasung Masigi Parampara 43-50) and (R. Danisana) expressed the used of Meitei Pung at different occasions during the reign of different Kings of Manipur. This instrument is associated in many ritualistic cultural performances from birth to death and also for stage performance. But this instrument gets a unique shape with the coming of Vaishnavism in Manipur.

(Sharma, Manipuri Nata Sankirtana Vichar 10-11) stated that during the reign of King Khagemba (1597-1652), Aarti was offered to Vishnu with devotional songs related to sankirtana. It was during the reign of King Charairongba (1697-1709), the king along with renowned Gurus of that time started a new pattern, form and manner for performing sankirtana,

known as Bangdesh Pala singing style. It was an amalgamation of Hindu culture from outside and the original Manipuri culture. Matri Khol from outside also came at this time in Manipur paving a means for developing Manipuri Pung with a definite shape. (E. C. Singh 2-3) indicated that Gaudiya Vaishnavism became the state- religion of Manipur during the reign of King Garibniwaz (1709-1748). The Bangdesh Pala singing style was used in the rituals of dead ceremonies like Asti and Shradha, and also Phiroi (annual death ceremony). The Pung used here is called Ariba Pung which is longer and bigger than the present Meitei Pung. (Danisana) The new Gaudiya Vaishnavite religion in Manipur reached its zenith during the reign of King Meidingu Chingthangkomba (Rajarshi Bheigyachandra), (1759-1798). This was a new era, a golden age in the History of Manipuri culture. He appeared as a new star to guide Manipuri people in this newly reformed art and culture of Manipur. All the past events were assimilated with the charm of new culture and practices. He was not only one of the most elevated Krishna devotees ever born in this land but also a great imaginative cultural reformist.

On 12<sup>th</sup> of Hiyanggei (8<sup>th</sup> month of a Manipuri year), 1776, Friday, the idol of Shree Govinda was installed at the palace of Langthabal in Canchipur. Again, in 1779, King Bheigyachandra introduced Jagoi Ras (Ras Dance). Before the performance of Ras Dance, Manipuri Nata-Sankirtana was first performed. This was the 1<sup>st</sup> ever Nata-Sankirtana which we are witnessing in the present day. Making changes in Pung, Kartal and singing style origin to Manipur, he gave the new name of Sankirtana as Nata-Sankirtana. This Manipuri Pung used here is the present shape which we witness today. The five head performers in that first Nata-Sankirtana performance were:-

1. King Bheigyachandra- Pungyeiba (Head Pung Percussionist)
2. Guru Premananda- Pung Tung-inba (Follower Pung Percussionist)
3. Ngoubram Sai- Eshei Hanba or Eshei Sakpa (Head Vocalist/Singer)
4. Dhara Sai- Duhar (Head Repeater Singer)
5. Guru Sidhanta- Khonpangba (Head Helper Singer)

From that time onwards, Nata-Sankirtana was used in the different services to Gods and Goddesses. Apart from that, it was also used in different ritualistic ceremonies of Manipuri society like birth, ear piercing (jeigyia or

nahutpa), sacred thread introduction (lugun thangba), death (asti,shradha, phiroi), marriage (luhongba), etc .

Basic Strokes of the Pung Maru and Pung Manao, and positions of the fingers for beginners

Four fingers are used while playing a pung. The used fingers are:-

1. The fore finger or index finger
2. The middle finger
3. The ring finger
4. The little finger (M. T. Singh, Meitei Punglon Seikonnabi Tanchap Pareng)



**Fig. 5: Hands showing the different positions of playing Pung Maru and Pung Manao**

At manao, the right hand is placed at the edge of the pung manao. The position of the fingers is between the proximal creases and just below them (Fig. 5).

At maru, the left hand is placed at the edge of the pung maru. The position of the fingers is between the middle creases and proximal creases of the four fingers (Fig. 5).

In order to identify the basic strokes of playing a pung, we need to have a view of the following notation of Raga Macha. Why, because, Raga Macha or Nuwa Ahwbi is the very first lesson to be learnt by a beginner for playing Pung as a guru-shishya parampara sequence. So, we are going to extract or take out the basic strokes from that notation to teach the learners effectively.

There are three different ways of playing pung or producing different sounds. They are: -

1. Sounds produced by playing Pung Manao only (right hand)
2. Sounds produced by playing Pung Maru only (left hand)
3. Sounds produced by playing pung maru and pung manao simultaneously or with some changes (both left and right hands together) (K. K. Singh)

### **Materials and Methods**

The Punglon Notation (the scientific systems of manuscript of the bol-s of the taal-s) of Raga Macha (Anuwa Raga Ahwba) created by Shri Thakur Shyama is used in the present study to analyse the topic. (M. T. Singh, Meitei Punglon Raga 1). Descriptive qualitative method is used in the present study. The tools and techniques of Observation (both participant and non-participant of the researcher) and content analysis of the given data are being used to come up with findings. The description of Raga Macha system of notation is

Matra- 8, Tantha- 1, Haidokpa- 1

### **Symbols used**

+ - Yet Tantha (The right taal)

0 - Oi Tantha (The left taal)

One matra

+

0

Matra 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
-	-	Khara	Khra	Ten	Ta	Thane	-
Dhin	-	Khara	Khra	Ten	Ta	Ten	-
Tak	-	Khara	Khra	Ten	Ta	Thane	-
Dhin	-	Khra	Khra	Ten	Ta	Ten	-
Tak	-	Khara	Khra	Ten	Ta	Thane	-
Dhin	-	Khara	Khra	Ten	Ta	Ten	-
Tak	-	Khra	Khra	Ten	Ta	Thane	-
Dhin	-	Khara	Khra	Ten	Ta	Thane	-
Dhin	-	Khara	Khra	Ten	Ta	Thane	-
Dhin	-	Taang	-	Khit	-	Taang	Khit
Tat	Ta	Khit	Ta	Khit	Tat	Ta	Khit
Tat	Ta	Khit	Ta	Ghin	Tat	Ta	Ghin
Tat	Ta	Ghin	Ta	Thane	-	-	-
Dhin	-	-	-	Ten	-	-	-
Tak	-	-	-	Tang	-	-	-

## Objectives

The following are the objectives of the present study:-

To identify the different strokes of playing Pung Manao

To identify the different strokes of playing Pung Maru

To understand the sound produced by the combination of Pung Maru and Pung Manao playing together simultaneously

## Findings and Analysis

The thorough analysis of the punglon notation used in the present study, the researcher obtains six basic strokes of pung manao i.e. Ta, Taang, Ten, Tak, Tren and Tat; two basic strokes for pung maru i.e. Khit and Ghin; and four basic strokes by combining both pung maru and pung manao i.e. Khara, khra, Thane and Dhin. But first the single strokes of playing pung manao and pung maru needs to be learnt, and then the combination

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playing strokes follow after.

1. Khara is played by combining khit of maru and tren of manao, by playing khit first, with a fraction of second followed by tren
2. Khra is played by combining Khit of maru and Ta of manao, by playing khit first, with a fraction of second followed by ta
3. Thane is played by combining Khit of maru and Ta of manao, playing both hands simultaneously
4. Dhin is played by combining Ghin of maru and Tak of manao, playing both hands simultaneously
5. Other strokes which we get from the above notation are Ten, Taang

### **Basic strokes of playing Pung Manao**

1. Taang- All the four fingers make a free strike at the centre of manao with greater force.
2. Ta- All the four fingers give a free strike at the centre of manao. But here the force of strike is less than that of taang.
3. Ten- The tip of the index finger only makes a free strike at the lower portion of the kaap which is near to the player.
4. Tak- The ring finger is bent to make an angle of 90 degree at the middle crease and the other three fingers are kept straight. A simultaneous strike is made at the lower portion of the kaap near the player.
5. Tat- The four fingers give a strike at the centre of the manao by pressing the tips of the four fingers together after the strike.
6. Tren- It is played at the centre of manao. The tips of all the four fingers starting from the little finger, the ring finger, the middle finger and the index finger make a free simultaneous sound in which the index finger makes the sound of ten at last.

### **Basic strokes of playing Pung Maru**

1. Ghin- All the four finger tips of the left hand give a free strike at the

centre or middle portion of maru.

2. Khit- The tips of all the four fingers of the left hand make a pressing sound at the centre portion of maru.

Sounds produced by the combination of pung maru and pung manao strokes playing together simultaneously

1. Khara- Khit + Tren, by playing khit first, with a fraction of second followed by tren

2. Khra- Khit + Ta, by playing khit first, with a fraction of second followed by ta

3. Thane- Khit + Ta, playing both hands simultaneously

4. Dhin- Ghin + Tak, playing both hands simultaneously

Four out of the five kinds of beats with the palm mentioned in Natyashashtra of Bharata Muni viz, 1. Samapani (level handed), 2. Ardhapani (half handed), 3. Ardhardhapani (quarter of the palm), 4. Pradesini (fore-finger), are used in playing Manipuri Pung. (Ghosh)

Such identification of basic strokes for playing Manipuri Pung is similarly obtained in playing other percussion musical instruments of India like Tabla and Mridangam too. This presentation will make the understanding of Manipuri Pung very easy by making comparison with these two classical percussion musical instruments. For Tabla, Naa, Na, Taa, Tek, Tee, Tita, Tin, Too, Tun, etc. are the basic strokes for Dahina. For Bayan, Ga, Ka, Kat, Ghe, etc. are the foundation strokes. The combination of bols which are played simultaneously in Dahina and Bayan are Dha- Taa+Ga, Dhin-Ga+Tin and which are played one after another successively are TiRiKi-Ta- Ti+Ri+Ki+Ta and Tak- Ta+Ke. Similarly, in Mridangam also, the basic important syllables applied are Tha, Dhi, Thom, Nam and Jham. Further, the syllables Tatha, Tham, Ka, Ki, Ke, Ku, Ra, Ri, Gi, Ge, Gu, Gha, Ghe, La, Me are widely used. Basic strokes on the right face of Mridangam are:-

Chapu stroke is applied to play Tha and Jham

Araichapu stroke is applied to play Tham, Jham and La

Meetu stroke is applied to play Nam, Ta and Tham

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Sampoorna Chapu, a backward movement stroke is applied to play Dheem and Dhi

The basic strokes on the left face of the Mridangam are: -

Tha and Ka are played by striking against the centre of the left face

Thom, Ka, Di, Dhi and Gu are played by striking against the upper part of the left face

Gum is produced by pressing the innerv ring and executing the forward and backward movement of the wrist.

From the above given comparative nature of basic strokes of the three percussion musical instruments, it can be analysed that Manipuri Pung has got its own unique way of playing where different strokes are utilised. From Nuwa Raga, the basic foundation on how to play Manipuri Pung is created considering different aspects to train the pupils effectively.

## **Conclusion**

Manipuri Pung as a Percussion instrument is used in different ritualistic cultural performances in Manipuri society associated from birth to death such as Nata-Sankirtana performance in particular and Sankirtana in general for Karnavedha (jeigya or ear piercing ceremony), Upanaya or taking of sacred threads ceremony (Lugun thangka), marriage ceremony (Luhongba), death related ceremonies like Cremation, Asti Sanchaya, Shraddha, Feroi (first death anniversary), etc. This is also used in performance of Sankirtana related to consecration of temple (Mandir hongba), inauguration of pond (Pukhri hongba), regeneration of trees (U-hongba), etc. It is further used in ritualistic performance of different religious festivals and ceremonies at different seasons of the year like Krishna Janmasthanami, Radha Janmasthanami, Ratha Yatra, Durga Pujah, Saraswati Pujah, etc.

An exact example of using this instrument everyday is at Shree Shree Govindaji Temple situated at King's palace, Imphal where asthakal seva (service) is being performed to the Lord for whole 24 hours dividing it into eight different time intervals as Nishanta, Prata, Purvahna, Madhyahna, Aparahna, Sayang, Pradosh and Nishakal or Ratri in performing Sankirtana. Nowadays, stage performances which are done around the globe have also been created using Manipuri Pung for entertainment purpose

and spreading Manipuri Culture in particular and India in general such as Pung Cholom, accompaniment in Kartal Cholom, Pung Kartal Cholom, etc. Many fusion music performances are also created using this percussion musical instrument.

The present shape of Manipuri Pung and its uses is made famous and more refined during the reign of King Rajarshi Bhagyachandra where he himself was also a Pung performer and also a developer of Manipuri Ras Leela. Along with Guru Thakur Shyama, other renowned Gurus related with the creation of Nuwa Raga Macha were Guru Swarupananda, Guru Langlenhanba, Guru Kitnarupa, Guru Kitnaradha and Guru Tensuba. Raga Macha (Nuwa Raga) is played at the very beginning of any Sankirtana performance. There are seven different compulsory stages for performing a full and complete ritualistic Nata-Sankirtana performance namely 1. Raga 2. Raga Taba 3. Mel 4. Tanchap 5. Menkup 6. Swadhin and 7. Vijaya. Such formality of performance is clearly described in Bhara Muni's Natya Shastra as Purvaranga Pujah by the five Dhruvas viz. 1. Uthapani Dhruva 2. Parivartani Dhruva 3. Abkrishtha 4. Addita Dhruva and 5. Bikshipti Dhruva. They are the preceding formalities for performing a Mahayajna. Raga of Manipuri Pung is under the area of Uthapani Dhruva. Here, Raga Macha is the first part played by Pung player as the beginning sequence in the Raga portion. Again, in all the five different types of Ras Leela, a Classical dance form of India namely, 1. Maharas, 2. Kunjaras, 3. Basantaras, 4. Nityaras and 5. Divaras, they begin with Raga Macha or Nuwa Raga in the very beginning sequence of performance.

The playing and making of Manipuri Pung as a percussion musical instrument has some similarities with Matri or Wooden Khol used in Bengal, Assam and Manipur; Khol instrument used in Sattriya dance of Assam; Kham of Tripura, Khram of Assam; Mridangam used in South India Carnatic music; Tabla used in North India Hindustani music, etc. Outside India too many similarities are found between Sri Lankan percussion musical instrument, Gataberaya and Manipuri Pung. Changgo or Janggo of Korea and Taiko of Japan can also be considered here as Anaddha or Avannaddha Vadya for truly understanding Manipuri Pung in global context.

This paper presents the detailed description of Manipuri Pung as a performing percussion musical instrument taking reference from Natya Shastra of Bharata Muni and other classical percussion musical instruments such as Tabla of Hindustani music and Mridangam of Carnatic music, its historical development, uses, role in Manipuri society and basic techniques of playing Pung which consists of different strokes of Pung

Maru, Pung Manao and combination of both Pung Maru and Manao. The above-mentioned different ways of using hands and fingers will give the very basic foundation of playing Pung for beginners. It can be concluded that the Nuwa Raga Ahwba or Raga Macha of Guru Thakur Shyama is indeed the punglon notation system for creating the very beginning idea of learning Pung and for further learning of other various strokes of playing Pung apart from the obtained strokes in this study. This will gradually help in developing motor skills of artistes who want to play the instrument and in becoming a creative Pung performer.

### Suggestion

Other techniques or stokes like Taat, Trat, Tat-ta, Dhe, Theet, Thaat, Thet, Khrang, Ta-ghin, Ghinnang, Ghinna, etc needs to be studied further from other punglon notations for further development of the percussionist and becoming a famous, efficient and effective performing artistes of Manipuri Pung.

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