

Chapter - 9

Music, Dance and Games

The Molsoms are rich with indigenous music, musical instruments and dances. In the process of socialisation, along with other culture-trait, an individual Molsom learns these music and dances. It is rare to find a Molsom without some skill, at least, in vocal music. Almost for all ceremonies, rites and rituals, song and dance form an integral part. The words of a Molsom song may vary from place to place, person to person or group to group, but there are always some basic similarities. The tune of a particular type of song remains more or less the same. Variation in lyric-composition occurs due to the fact that in most of the cases these are composed then and there by the singer or singers in the frame of a particular tune. And the basic similarity which can be found in such compositions results from the fact that the content and the environment are common for a particular type of song. However, the words of the Molsoms songs are very similar, simple and in most of the cases the verses do not maintain rhyme and rhythm. A particular subject, in such songs, is highlighted through some allegorical examples drawn and cited from the surrounding environment and every day experiences regarding nature and life.

The songs of the Molsoms may broadly be categorised in four major types. These are the songs sung during work, love songs, religious songs and songs related to some other activities, rituals, ceremonies etc. The songs sung during work, in most cases, are related to some work-activities like seed-sowing, weeding, harvesting etc. In *jhum* cultivation, such sorts of

work-activities are done in group and the speed and unity of the team-work are maintained by the rhythm of music and songs. These songs are *jhum*-songs locally known as *haihaklo*. A person from a team, in *jhum*-song, composes a few lines based on a particular tune-structure and then sings those lines loudly which the other members of the team repeat in chorus maintaining some musical time-beat, that is, *tala*. The subject matter of such composition is based on and related to the system or process of the concerning activities. The lyric of a *jhum*-song which is sung during the seed sowing activities, for instance, is usually composed describing the process of seed sowing such as how to dig a hole, how to put seeds in the hole, from which corner of the field sowing is to be started, or any other instructions required to be conveyed to any person of the team and so on. In most cases no drum-like instrument is played on to accompany such *jhum* songs. Love songs are also sung in the *jhum*-field especially when growing crops are kept under watch by the youngsters.

When the cornstalks grow the youths of a Molsom village shift temporarily to their watch house to facilitate constant vigil. This period of watching is also the time for mate selection among the Molsoms and other tribes of the state. In the *jhum*- field the love songs are generally sung by two parties—a boys' party and a girls' party. At a time, one person from each of the parties sings. Some puzzles, questions or proposals related to love and romance are put through songs to the other party which the latter replies through song sung by one of the members. In most cases, a boy and a girl from each of the parties lead the respective teams. Sometimes a competitive spirit develops between the parties when each of the parties tries to defeat other through a tough puzzle or question.

Also, during religious rites and ceremonies songs are invariably sung. The lyric of a religious song, in most cases, is related to various activities of the respective rite, ritual etc. or, sometimes a song is composed to sing the glory of a deity or spirit. Besides the type of song mentioned above,

some songs are also sung during some everyday activities or during some other rituals and ceremonies related to birth, puberty, marriage etc. The lyric of such songs are also composed and performed during the observance of respective rituals and ceremonies.

Some traditional Molsom songs and their English version

1. Love song locally known as *ro owl* :

A boy sings following a girl :

Ho ho ho ho

Kunaunu dum doinu nangma le kuma

Ma le koima ei mulung

A roi nung dumderta

Maisher ugan mangaiti

(Love me o beautiful girl ! If you love me, I shall solve all problems of our life - however tough they may be. I shall collect fire from firefly and light lamp for our use).

The girl replies and sings :

Ohaipa rukum kokidik kadak

roimi rangoi asu

Lau ponkul kunte thingbu kurung oampa

Kaichu noming roimi

Aio noming do roimi.

(Your lips are as odd looking as lips of pelican, your voice is as rude as the voice of owl and you look like a half burnt tree of *jhum*. I don't love you).

The boy makes more protestations of love and sings :

Kunaunu vaidumnu

Nangma le keima ei molung aroimung

kongmui ta khrom mangeiti

Jeokoma uitang ngan mangeiti

Thakpui nom mulung mangeiti

Laiphang kung meiphum mangeiti

(O my dear, love me. I entreat you. If you love me, nothing of this world I shall care for. I shall make shoe with thorn, treat tiger as if they were pet dogs, sleep on a mat made of a poisonous leaf locally known as *thakpui* and set fire on banana plant).

Another girl from the girl's team sings to convince the girl:

O roimioi O roimioi

Kha kha khom timrao

Thui thui khom timrao

Abuisu dina chu

Nidan nongchulat

O roimioi.

(O my friend, O my friend. Don't refuse him in such a rough way. You will not remain unmarried for ever. So, it is better that you accept his proposal for you may get all sorts of help from this boy in future.)

The girl replies :

Thing thing timaro O roimioi

Kemil munu cheno

Nunga risirnong kemil khom aisu

Khomlung khom aisu.

(Don't tell me to love him, my friend. I don't feel any such urge within me now. My heart is not dictating me to love now. So, don't tell me to love now).

Another person from the boy's party sings to convince the girl :

Kikham osut khum khum osut

Roaknin aiomsin

O roimioi hakan timaro

(Days are not so short, and years too are not fleeing away. You should think for your future. Please don't refuse him outright. He loves you so much, so you shall also love him).

The girl replies :

roimioi O roimioi

Kokopal aisu borok kohoipek omak

Kehe bauka rongo aisu

Chong bau kete nangma ket

Khomokon chinin omket

(O my friend, O my friend. Please try to understand me. And listen to me for the last time that I want to live like a free bird).

2. A religious song is sung during the worship of goddess *Lihki*. This song is locally known as *Likhi thak lo*.

This is accompanied by a dance. This song is sung solo or duet.

Adunpu khuri khomhongma

Uong khomhongma

Ainu likhi tau berai ohong

Chilo khomhongma, jaklam khomhongma

Chatrai huluin

In kaihai mohongnin panther

Phonin einu Likhirang

Hailam nin haisokhgo

(Halo householder, please open your door. Don't be afraid. No ghost or ghoul has come, but our mother *Likhi* has come. So light the lamp, burn *dhup* and spread a new piece of cloth on the floor and place our mother on it).

3. A lullaby :

E le le le le kosapo zung bong te

Tangoal nchang nung nungak ngoi le

Nurlumrang laulampo uganhore rang

Oapoul zong joulou

Oahazong jou lau ngathan rang

Basapang dondrai nu mu tang rang

E le le le le eno oaisen.

(O my dear child, you sleep, sleep now. You will soon grow young and will go to the *jhum* field with many young girls. You will cultivate *jhum* and participate in mutual exchange of labour. You will cultivate such a big plot of land that a big bird, *oapoul*, will fail to cross it. Your crop-store will be so big that you have to use a ladder to take crop out of it. My little child, you sleep, sleep now).

4. A song of frustration :

A girl, rejected by a boy to whom she offered her love sings :

Hoia hoia hoia hoia

kaimato kopol kopol rephana

Janaitau kochampic do

Komar baniom komar saritei

Retaino kochampic do

Hoia hoia kaimato kopal rephna.

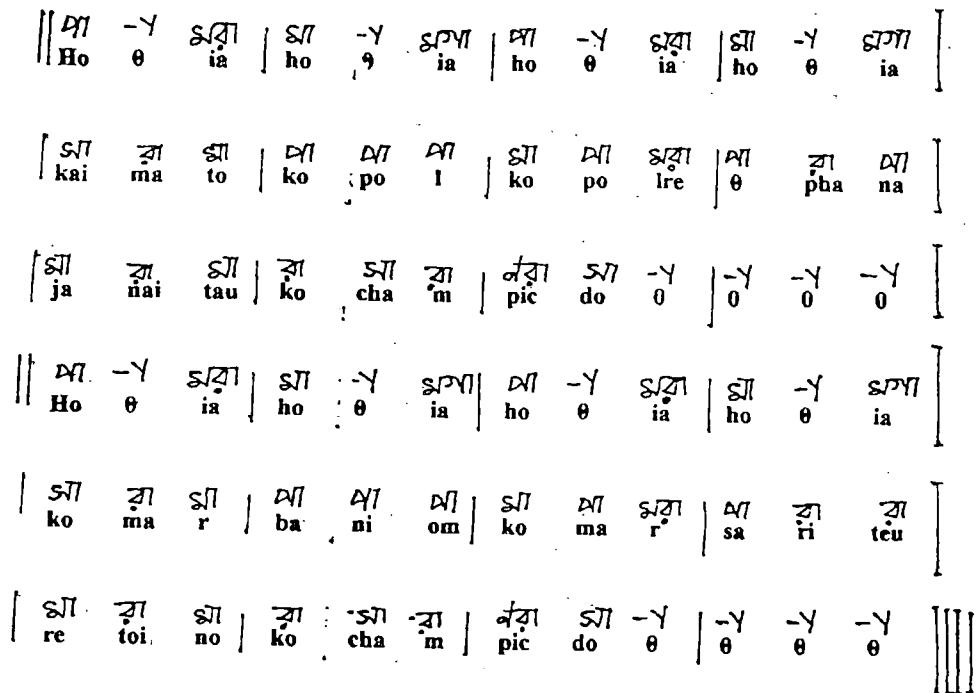
(Alas ! It seems my fate is full of misery. I am so ugly looking that nobody looks at me).

The notation of fourth song, a song of frustration's first paragraph :

The tune of every paragraph of the first song is the same, therefore we have produced only the tune of first paragraph. The notation is done based on *Aker Matrik Swaralipi* system. The notation is written in Bengali and wordings of lyric are written in English.

Notation

(Hoia hoia)



Note: For our convenience, in lieu of 'O' of Aker Matrik Swaralipi system we have used '0'

Musical instruments

A variety of indigenous musical instruments are in used in musical pursuits of the Molsoms. Almost all of these musical instruments are made of indigenous materials and are played generally in accompaniment with songs and dances and sometimes independently. The Molsoms knows the technique of preparing these musical instruments.

According to the purpose of use and the nature of sound, the Molsom musical instruments may be categorised, broadly, into two types, namely,

tala (musical time beat) producing and tune producing instruments. *Tala* producing instruments are used to mark and maintain the rhythm and *laya* of the music and dance. *Khong*, *dhakri*, *dhelki* etc. are such instruments. Brief description of the *tala* producing instruments of the Molsoms is given below:

Khong

It is made of a piece of hollow log and dry skin of goat or cow. This is played with hand or bamboo or wooden sticks. It can be played on both sides. A *khong* is generally used as an accompanying instrument with song, dances and other musical instruments or, in a few cases, independently. The size and shape of a *khong* is more or less similar to the *dholak* used in the neighboring plain society.

Dhakri

A *dakri* can be played on only one side and is made of wooden log and animal skin. Traditionally a *dakri* is used for making public announcements—to invite people for a mass gathering, to proclaim a war etc. Different specific symbolic sounds are produced on the *dhekri* to announce publicly particular occurrences like death, mass gathering, war etc. Besides being used for public announcements, a *dhakri* is, sometimes, used as an accompanying musical instrument with songs and dances.

Dhelki

A *dhelki* is also played on only one side and is made of small, hollow wooden log and animal skin. This small conical shaped *dhelki* is used as an accompanying instrument with song, dance or other musical instruments.

There are mainly two to three types of tune producing instruments used by the Molsoms. These are string instruments such as *chongpreng*, *sarinda*, *ditra* etc., and flute, locally known as *sukmul*. In the string instruments, tune is produced through vibration of a string or strings. Some of the tune producing instruments which are found among the Molsom are described in the following pages.

Chongpreng

It is a four stringed musical instrument made of wood and bamboo. Four iron or steel strings, in *chongpreng*, are set on a hollow structure, the length of which varies from about fourteen to eighteen inches. The base of the structure is more or less oval in shape and is connected to a semicircular platform, the upper surface of which is flat. Strings are set on the plain surface of the wooden structure by fixing each of the two ends of the strings to the corresponding extreme of the structure, each string being separate from the other strings by equal distance. At the base, strings are fixed over a bamboo bridge so that they do not touch the body of the wooden structure and at the other end, these are fixed to the structure through four bamboo rods which are inserted into four holes made at two sides of the platform. These rods can be twisted clockwise or anticlockwise making the strings tight or loose. Tune is produced by the rubbing of a bow made of bamboo and tree-fibers. The intensity of the tune is regulated by controlling the working-length (length of string between two closed ends) of the strings and by working on their base by the fingers of the left hand. Shorter the working-length of the string higher is the intensity of sound produced. Tuning of the string may be done by twisting the rods. *Chongpreng* is played independently or in the company of other musical instruments, or with dance or a song. The structure and playing mechanism of a *chongpreng* is, more or less, similar to those of a violin.

Sarinda

The *sarinda* is also a four stringed musical instrument made of wood and bamboo. The structure, playing mechanism and tune controlling system of a *sarinda* are almost similar to those of a *chongpreng*. But in size and shape it is larger than a *chongpreng*.

Ditra

It is a two stringed instrument. The structure and tune producing and controlling mechanism are almost the same as those of a *chongpreng* with a little difference in the structure. The upper surface of the base of a *ditra* is covered with a piece of animal skin. Sound is produced, unlike from *chongpreng* and *sarinda*, by stroking on the strings at base with a small and sharp piece of wood or bamboo. *Ditra* is played solo or in company of other musical instruments, songs or dance. The structure and playing mechanism of a *ditra* are similar to those of a *dotara* used by the neighboring Bengalis. The name *ditra* might be the corrupted from the Bengali name of *dotara*.

Flute

Among the Molsoms flutes are found in various sizes. The intensity of the tune of a flute varies according to its size. Shorter the length and breadth of a flute, higher is the intensity of tune produced. The length of a Molsom flute generally varies from about ten to twenty-five inches. It is made of a special variety of bamboo. For making a flute, the portion between two nodes of a piece of bamboo is cut and separated from the main body to obtain an open-end tube like structure. On the bamboo-tube seven small and round holes are made in a straight-line row. Of these seven holes, one, made near one end of the tube, is treated as upper part. The other six holes are made on the middle part of the tube. The space between the holes remains equal in length. Air is blown, for playing a flute, through the uppermost holes and the range of the tune is regulated by closing or

opening the holes, through which air is allowed to pass out, by the use of fingers of both the hands. Generally thumbs are not used. When air is allowed to pass out through the upper holes of the row, the intensity of tune becomes high and vice versa. A flute is played solo or as an accompanying instrument with other musical instruments, songs and dances.

Dance

A Molsom dance may be performed solo, duet or in group. The males as well as females take part in dance. In various social and cultural activities of the Molsom dances are performed. Dance in Molsom is known as *lam*. Some of the Mlsom dance forms are described below.

Haihak lam

This form of dance is gegerally performed during the customary ceremony when the new *jhum* crops are, for the first time, cooked and taken. The ceremony is locally known as *sarbing*. In *haihak lam* or *jhum* dance, the male and female members of a village dance in a group imitating the movement and activities of *jhum* cultivation, such as *jhum* cutting, seed sowing, weeding, harvesting etc. A *haihak lam* is generally accompanied by a *haihak lo*. A *haihak lam* is also performed during a galaday gathering.

Likhithak lam

This is also a group dance performed by three persons—one female and two male. This is performed during the worship of *likhi*. Through this dance sacred paddy of *likhi* worship is distributed among all the households of a village. The girl of the dancing team carries the sacred paddy in a bamboo basket from door to door, moving her body in a style as if she is the

goddess *likhi*. The two male members of the team sing *likhithak lo* and follow the girl. They go to every house of the village and the girl distribute the sacred paddy.

Chongpreng lam

This dance is performed in accompaniment of only the tune of *chongpreng* and therefore the dance is known as *chongpreng lam*. In a gala day like that of a social marriage, a community feast, or a feast after a group hunting the adult members, both male and female, of a Molsom village take part in this dance. After drinking *zukola* or country liquor they jump, hop, shake and move their bodies as they like without following any fixed rhythm or style. The dance does not seem to have a set style for itself. Generally no beating instrument accompanies this dance.

Muroi lam

This dance is based on a Molsom folklore related to a pregnant women who become a ghoul for violating the norms and customs followed by the pregnant women in the Molsom society. In Molsom society a pregnant women is called *muroi*, after whom the dance is named. Three men are involved in this dance. Two men dance in the role of two vultures and the third dances in the role of a ghoul. During the dance, at first, two persons move their bodies and make gestures as if two vultures are eating a dead body. After that the third man appears and moves his body in a manner as if he is chasing away the vultures. He then plays a ghoul eating the flesh of that dead body after having succeeded in driving away the vultures. No music or song accompanies this dance. *Muroi lam* is, thus, a dance based on acting.

Sarhil lam

This is a group dance performed mainly by the females. It is performed in a gala day of a ceremonial gathering. Two pastels, for this dance, are kept side by side on the ground having an open space of about fourteen to sixteen inches between them. Two more pastels are then kept crosswise on the first set making a square in the open space between the four pastels. Four boys hold the tips of each set of pastels with their hand—each set of pastels are held by the two boys who sit face to face. The boys then start closing and spreading their pastel-set in a set rhythm -- both pairs closing and spreading their pastels in a rhythmic movement, maintaining a tempo. Thus in course of closing and spreading the pastels an open square space is formed alternately between the pastels. Some girls are made to stand in a row in that open space between the pastels. They start dancing in such a way that in course of spreading the pastels they step in the open space and before the pastels are closed they step out. the process continues in a cyclic way. The dance starts with a slow rhythm but ends in a high tempo.

The music and dance form an essential part of the Molsom culture. In fact, these are functionally related to their way of life. The dance and music are used as the special mode of communication, expressing the mind of the group or an individual, which helps in maintaining social solidarity. The *haihak lam*, for instance, facilitates team-work during *jhum* operation; love song helps in selecting mate; Muroilam is used as a means of social control especially over the pregnant woman as it threatens them against breaking the norms and other expected behaviour to be followed by them. The group songs and group dances reproduce, time and again, the social , group-solidarity, symbolically, despite tendencies towards greater social differentiation.

Games and Sports

A number of indigenous games are played by the Molsoms, especially by the children and youths. In most cases these out-door games are played between two parties. Some of the Molsom games are detailed out in the pages to follow.

Laisdi pardi

This game is played between two parties with the seeds of a local plant used as striker or pawns locally known as *poi*. The number of members for both the parties has to be equal and it varies from four to eight persons for a team. On the ground two parallel straight lines are drawn at about fifteen feet distance from each other. The game starts with one of the teams winning the toss for choosing its line and getting first strike. The toss is done with a piece of bamboo-split. The winner of the toss chooses a line on which they stand side by side each with a striker in his hand. The members of the other team keep their striker on the opposite line in front of every member of the toss winning team. The members of the toss-winning team try to dislodge the strikers of the opposite party from the line by striking at them with their own strikers in one chance. The players who can strike the striker of the opposite party and throw them out of the line get another chance to hit at the striker in the second round and a failure is treated as disqualification. In the second round, they go over to the line of their opponents and stand facing their own line, behind the respective striker which they dislodge in the first round. They are now to send the striker out side the line on which they stood at the start of the game. They have to do this within five strokes. The number of strikers which cross the line is taken to be the number of points in favour of the striking team. The game continues for an equal number of rounds for both the teams and the team which gathers the highest number of points is declared as the winner.

Apangte

Apangte is played by two teams having equal number of players. It is played with two *pois*. Here also two straight lines are drawn the same way as in the case of *laisdi pardi* and the game starts with the toss-winning team making the first strike. It takes six successive rounds for the completion of the game. A player of the striking party, in the first round, stands on a line and throws a *poi* towards the second line but drops on the ground as near as possible to the second line. If the *poi* crosses or touches the second line, the player who throws the *poi* is treated as disqualified and in such a case another player of the team has to play. In the second round the player takes another *poi*, which is used as a striker, and he places the *poi* on his toes. He then goes and stands on the second line. He has to touch the first *poi* with the striker-*poi* on his toes and as soon as the two *pois* come in contact he lifts one of his legs from the ground and picks up the striker-*poi* with one of his hands. He then comes back to the first line by leaping with one leg. In the third round the player takes the striker-*poi* in between first and second toes of his right leg. He then goes to the second line and stands on it. He has to touch the first *poi* with the striker-*poi* held between his toes. If he succeeds, he returns to the first line. In the fourth round he takes the striker-*poi* in between his lips, starts clapping, goes to the second line and stands on it. He then drops the *poi* from his lips on the second *poi* and as soon as the striker-*poi* touches the second one, as in case of the former round, he lifts up one of his legs from the ground and comes back to the first line by leaping. In the fifth round the player keeps the *poi* on his head, starts clapping, goes over the second line and stands on it. He then drops the *poi* from his head on the second *poi* and as in the previous cases, comes back to the first line by leaping. He then, in the sixth round, stands on the first line with his leg spread and head bent between the legs. He throws the striker-*poi* towards the second line in such a way that it encircles his body longitudinally.

before it drops on the ground, and at the same time, it must not touch or cross the second line. In this case special credit is given to the player if he can hit the second *poi* and in such a case the player is exempted from doing other activities of his round. The player then, in case he has failed to hit the second *poi*, goes and stand near the second *poi* and throws his striker-*poi* in such a way that it encircles his body longitudinally before it strikes the second one lying on the ground. In this case also he has to stand with his legs apart and head bent between his legs. If he succeeds in hitting the second *poi*, he takes both the *pois* on his head and goes back to the first line. The successful completion of all the six stages is treated as a score in favour of the respective team. Failure of any player in any of the rounds is treated as disqualification of the respective player and in such a case another player of the team gets the chance and he has to start from the stage in which the previous player failed. In case all the players of a team fail to complete all the stages of a round, the other team gets the chance and, in such a case, no point is awarded to the former team.

On successful completion of all the six stages by the teams in an equal number of chances the team which scores the highest number of points is declared the winner.

Format

This is also played by two teams having equal number of players on both sides. Each team takes a coloured *poi*. *Pois* of two different colours are taken so that a team can identify its own *poi*. Two parallel straight lines, having forty to fifty cubit distance from each other, are drawn on the ground and of these two lines, one is used as the starting line and other as the finishing line. The distance between the lines differ depending on the strength of the number of the team. The more the number of members

in the team the grater is the distance kept between the lines. Here also, the winner of the toss starts playing first. The *poi* of the opponent team is kept at about three cubit distance from the starting line and a player of the opponent team hits the *poi* of the other team with the *poi* of his own team which is used as striker—to make the latter advance towards the finishing line. A player gets five successive chances and with the endeavour of every player of a team the total number of times the second *poi* takes to cross the finishing line is treated as the number of points scored by the respective team.

Poi rukap

This game is played by two players with *pois* of two different colours. In the field two straight lines are drawn in the same way, as in the case of *formit* game described above. But the distance between the two lines, in this case, is ten to fifteen cubits. Here also the winner of the toss begins the game. The beginner stands on the straight starting line and throws a *poi* towards the second line in such a way that it would not touch or cross the second line. He tries to keep the *poi* as near as possible to the second line. He then hits the first *poi* with the second one by dropping the latter successively from the various parts of his body namely, toes, feet, in between two knees, in between two thighs, arm pit, shoulder, in between two lips, nose, eyes, forehead and head. For this, he keeps the *poi* on the respective part of body, goes and stands on the second line. He drops it on the second *poi* and if it hits the latter, he collects the striker-*poi* and goes back to the starting line. A player continues playing until he fails to hit the second *poi* by the striker-*poi* in any of the stage of the game. In case of a failure, the opponent gets a chance and the unsuccessful player, in his next chance, is to start from the stage where he failed during previous chance. In the equal number of chances the player who scores the highest point is declared as the winner.

In the games and sports of the Molsoms it may be observed that balance, aim and the patience are the essential qualities which are required for a player to be successful. These qualities, in fact, are most essential ones which help a person to cope with the hill-entourage and life-style. Thus, through the practice of indigenous games and sports the Molsom youth can prepare themselves for activities like hunting, fishing, climbing etc., where balance, aim, patience are especially needed. Apart from their 'essence' games and sports are good source of entertainment and therefore form an essential part of Molsoms life and culture.

Indigenous songs and dance forms, games and sports are universally present among all the tribes of the country and the state, and the Molsoms too bear a rich tradition of these cultural forms. This reflects a natural tendency in man and groups to make life as good as possible. These cultural forms may have been developed in the long past as a byproduct of the productive activities of their forefathers and refined over generations, or there may be some diffusion from one community to another. But now these cultural forms survive without having any economic significance although with a function to reaffirm collective solidarity and close-range community interaction.