

Design Resource

Popular Folk Musical Instruments

An Assamese Folk Festival Instruments

by

Prof. Ravi Mokashi Punekar and Shri. Dijen Gogoi
DoD, IIT Guwahati

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/resource/popular-folk-musical-instruments>



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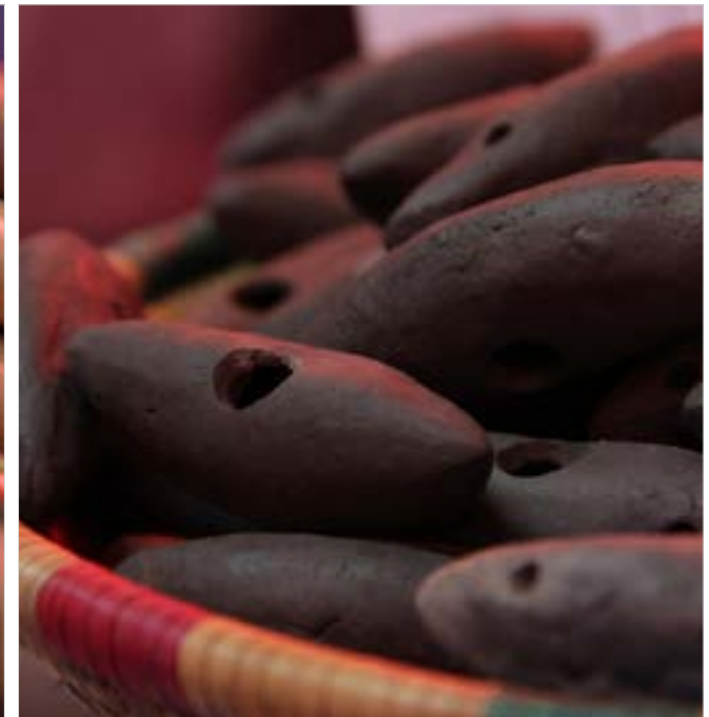
Introduction

Bihu, an Assamese folk festival celebrates the jubilant three seasons that marks the beginning, middle and end of a year in the Assamese calendar. Rongali or Bohag, Kati or Kongali and Boghali or Magh Bihu, namely are celebrated at different times in the year and each one of them has a significant role in telling stories of the agrarian community. The folk songs assume great significance since they reflect the correct sentiment amongst the natives and further narrate the significance of the season.

Of the three Bihu festivals which are secular and non-religious, the Bohag Bihu ushers in the period of greatest enjoyment and marks the arrival of spring. The Folk songs associated with Bohag Bihu are called Bihu Geets or Bihu Songs. The sights of “Mukoli Bihus” are often during the month of April - the month celebrated by all age groups as the arrival of spring. Romance and songs of merriment occupy a central place amongst the young boys and girls as they get together in open spaces dancing and singing to the tunes of Bihu. Songs based on nature and prayers of good harvest are also composed of the tunes of Dhol, Gogona, Pepa and Taal, the major instruments used in Bihu Geets.



Bahi or Bamboo Flute.



Sutuli.

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Pepa.

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Assamese man with Pepa and Dhol.



Bamboo Folk Instrument.

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Folk Musical Instruments

There are five major musical instruments used to compose tunes of Bihu Geet, namely

- Pepa
- Gogona
- Sutuli
- Dhol
- Bihu Taal

Many of these folk instruments of the region draw inspiration from nature.

For example, The instruments Gogona and Hutuli emulate the voice of a frog and kuli a bird.

The Folk instruments of the region mainly draw all their resources from nature and are homemade. Dijen Gogoi, a folk exponent explains the process of preparation and the significance of the five major instruments used to compose tunes of Bihu geet.



Assamese Folk Instruments.

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Assamese air instrument.



Ektara String Instrument.

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The Making



Pepa



Sutuli



Bihu Taal



Gogona



Dhol

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Pepa



Various tools used for the preparation of Pepa.



The other parts of 'Pepa' (unassembled).

The 'Sing' or horn of 'Pepa' is generally known as 'Thola' and is made of buffalo horn. To make the 'Pepa', first, the tip of the horn of the dead buffalo is kept immersed in warm water or cow dung for some time for softening and then cut with a knife or by hollowing with the broken glass. This Sing (Horn) is known as Thola.



Horn of a Buffalo.

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Any brass metal or ring may be fitted onto the broader side of the Thola to avoid damage and also for its beauty. The smaller end of the "Thola" is fitted to a piece of cylindrical reed of bamboo (of about 15cm), also called Nalicha or Garvahala. The Nalicha generally contains four holes. At the other end of the Nalicha, a little Pepa (a little pipe) of about 4cm is pushed into it. This small Pepa is called Thuri. For the convenience of playing this Thuri is kept enclosed in a bamboo Cupahi. This instrument is played by placing the mouth towards the Cupahi.



Man playing Pepa.

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Pepa kept for sale.

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Man playing Pepa in his traditional attire.



Man playing Pepa.

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Pepa - Various designs.

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Gogona

Gogona is the vibrating bamboo reed instrument. Young boys in a circle and the prettiest girl dancing in the centre to the tunes of Bihu geet are a common sight during the month of Rongali Bihu. Females, mostly seen playing Lahori Gogona is a musical instrument carved out of the bamboo stick.

Gogona (Lahori Gogona). In the beginning, as females start dancing to the rhythms of Dhol and Pepa, one can see them donning Gogona as a hairpin. The Gogona is a type of jaw harp, a vibrating reed instrument that is used primarily in the traditional Bihu music in Assam. It is made of a piece of bamboo that has a bifurcation on one end. The solid end is gripped with the teeth and the free ends are then struck repeatedly with the fingers to emit the distinctive sound of Gogona.

“Once an elderly woman so fond of toad strange sound that she realizes that similar sound can be created by bamboo as she once heard it as a piece of thin bamboo flicked in the air as she was pressing it against her feet to cut it for some household purpose in her kitchen”

_Dijen Gogoi, said as he was explaining the origin of Gogona.

The steps involved in the preparation of Gogona:



Bamboo is cut into the required shape.



Markings are done with the help of pencil.

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Strip is cut according to the markings.



Final stage.



Gogona.

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Different shapes of Gogona also used as hairpins.



Gogona Hairpin.

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Gogona kept for sale.



Man playing Gogona.

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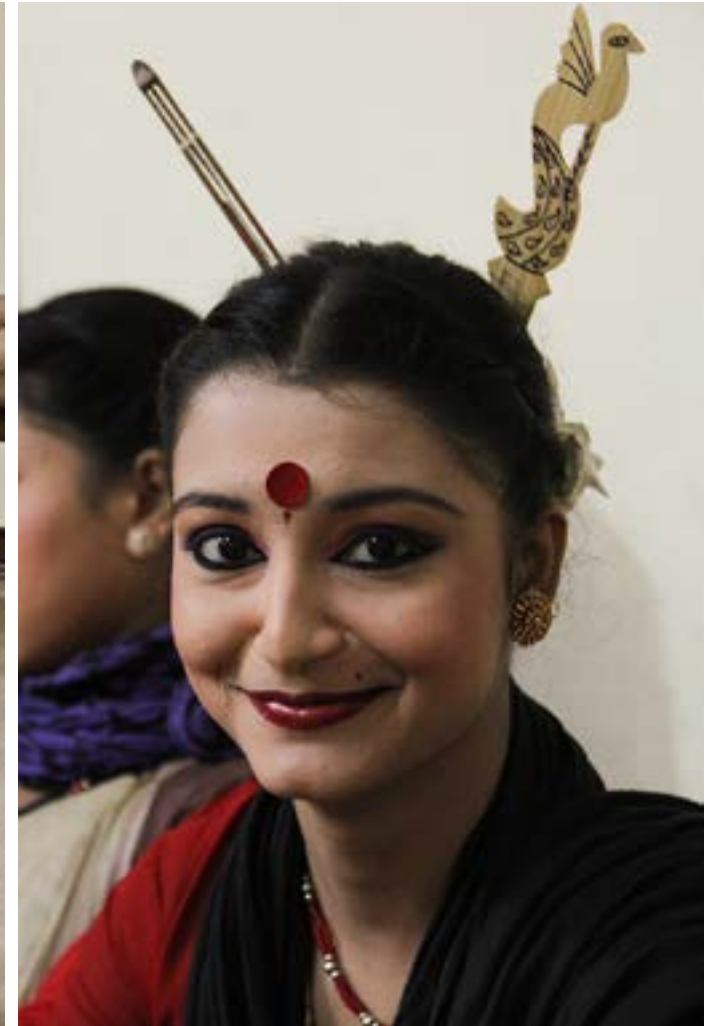
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Woman playing Gogona.



Woman wearing Gogona hairpin.

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Sutuli

Sutuli is a clay-baked wind instrument. This half-moon-shaped, musical instrument falls under the category of Susira Vadya (wind instrument) of Indian musical instruments.

Sutuli, an indigenous folk instrument draws inspiration from nature. It emulates the sound of a wild bird-kuli in Assamese or more popularly known as 'koel' in Hindi. As dance groups gather in open spaces to celebrate the arrival of spring during Rongali Bihu, the sound of kuli, as many folk tales and folk songs suggest is the sound most sought amongst natives.

It is made of one type of special clay. Generally, it is hollow half-moon-shaped part. Its length is about 12 cm. Round-shaped Sutuli (diameter of about 10cm) are also found in some villages. It has a hole in the middle to produce the whistling sound by blowing air into it. There are three holes on its body to control the tune, which the performer uses to manipulate the sound.

Although popularly used in other regions while singing the Bihu songs, its use in the upper Assam region is relatively rare. Its Swara activity is also very limited. The Moran tribe of Assam generally use Sutuli made of bamboo, not clay.

The Steps involved in the preparation of Sutuli are shown below:



Preparation and shaping the riverbed clay.

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Sealing the edges of the boat shaped instrument.



Sheet is bent to make cylindrical shaped container.

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Cutting the hollow for blowing air.



Firing the clay instrument.

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Sutuli.



Sutuli- ready for sale.



Bamboo Sutuli.



Man playing Sutuli.

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Dhol

"I was at the loom when the Dhol player came along, playing on the Dhol. I forgot my meal and Sindur on my forehead when I heard that sound."

A crucial musical instrument of Assamese folk tradition, Dhol seems to be more inseparable when the festival in question is Bihu particularly for the Rangali Bihu dance and songs.



Girls dancing to the rhythm of Dhol during Rongali Bihu.

"Dhuliar dhol", sets the rhythm of every native in Assam to the tune of Bihu geet, especially during the month of Rongali Bihu. Dhol as a percussion instrument is so closely knit with the folk culture of Assam that it assumes the position of an inseparable cultural symbol of the folk tradition of Assam. The performance of Bihu songs and dance is impossible without Dhol. The earliest reference to the origin of Dhol in Assam goes back to the late medieval period of the Ahom and Koch kingdoms. 'Sadhan Dhuliya' deserves a special mention since it is said that he was one of the main Dhuliyas of the courtier of Sukapha of Ahom Kingdom.

It is said in Bihu Naam (Bihu song) how a woman weaver runs to the Bihu tali (a place of performing Bihu songs and dance) leaving behind her work and even forgetting her hunger and thirst.

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Dhol is a cylindrical wooden drum, both sides of which are covered with hiding. The diameter of the left-hand side is bigger than the right-hand side. This instrument is loud and meant to be heard from a distance. The Dhol hangs with a leather strap around the neck of the player who bets with a small bamboo stick in his right hand and by hand on the skin cover on the left side. The size and shape of the dhol however vary from place to place.

In regard to the shape and manner of playing in different regions of Assam, Dhol can be classified into four categories, namely

- Bihu Dhol
- Jay Dhol
- Bar Dhol and
- Dhepa Dhol



Different types of Dhol.

Of course, besides these, there are also Dhols of different shapes among different tribes of Assam. The Name and function of different parts of the Dhol of Assam are as follows:

An illustration of Dhol (All Parts):

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- **Dima:**

The hollow wooden body of the Dhol is called Dima or Khola. The length of the Dima of the Bihu Dhol generally is about 50cm. The diameter of the right-hand side of Dima is about 23 cm. and the left side is about 28cm. Generally Kathal (Jack), and Sham wood are used for the Khola. It is seen that in Assam a Gamocha knitted with designs of flowers is usually used to cover the Khola.

- **Kobani (Daina):**

The right-hand part with a parchment head is called Kobani. Players beat it with a stick of bamboo.

- **Tali (Bewa):**

The left-hand goat skin-covered side is called Tali or Bewa. Tali is played by hand.

- **Chawani (Pudi):**

Leather of Kobani and Tali is called Chawani.

- **Barati:**

The Chawani of Kobani and Tali are tightened by leather thongs. These thongs are called Barati.

- **Maluwa or Bandhani (Gajara):**

Both Chawanies are laced to a ring (usually of bamboo) that fits tightly on the neck. This ring is called Maluwa of Bandhani. Maluwa of Kobani is also called Kuruk.

- **Tikani or Kanari:**

There are a group of very small straps on both sides of the dhol to connect the rope of the leather- strap for hanging around the neck of the player. These small straps are called Tikani or Kanari.

- **Katani- Chal (Cati or Kinar):**

Each side of the Dhol is made from a circular piece of treated goat skin partly covered by a second skin trimmed to form the rim around its circumference. This rim is called Katani-Chal.

- **Puli:**

There are some very small holes towards the side of Chawani for passing Barati through the Chawani. These small holes are called Puli.

- **Kanari-Jari:**

The rope of leather which is connected with the Tikani or Kanari and which is used for hanging the Dhol around the neck of the player is called the Kanari-Jari. Sometimes this Kanari-Jari is used by covering it with a Gamosa to make the Kanari-Jari Soft and comfortable for hanging on the shoulder or around the neck.

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- **Dholar-Mari:**

The small Bamboo Stick by which Kobani of Dhol is struck for playing the Dhol is generally known as Dholar-Mari or Kobani-Mari. There is a small gable (high part) of the Dholar-Mari for easy grasp of the Mari by the player.



Bihu Dhol.



Dhols.

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Bihu Taal

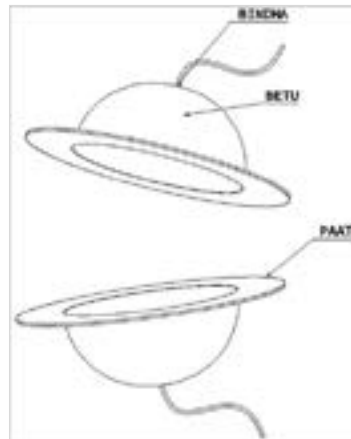
The Brass Cymbals Bihu Taal is one of the five types of Taal Vadya found in Assam and is largely used in Bihu Geet. Taal Vadya in Assam is widely used in Classical as well as many folk musics of Assam. Bhor Taal, a rare of Taal Vadya not found in other parts of India consists of two cymbals generally made of Bronze or Brass. Mostly used in Naam Prasanga (religious recitation), it is also used in puja-Archana, Gaya-Bayan with Khol, Dhuliya- Bhawara etc.

The remaining three types of Taal -Vadya are found in Assam.

The instrument Taal is a pair of metallic cymbals made out of Bell metal and is used for the rhythmic purpose. Generally, the musical term of the word Taal means rhythm; hence the name of this musical instrument Taal is obviously related to rhythm or time measure. It is found in two pieces and a sound is produced either by rubbing or striking two discs. The sound can also be produced in various other ways according to the necessity of the music. These various types of sounds can be produced by striking the discs, by its flat side face to face, by the striking rim to rim or by one side of the circular rim to the flat face of the other disc. The centre portions of the disc are raised into a bowl. The disc is normally played by means of grasping a cord fixed through a hole made at the centre of the boss of the instrument.

The main parts of Taal -Vadya can be classified in Assamese as:

- Betu
- Bindha
- Paat



Betu, Bindha and Paat.

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Cymbals, known as Taal are of all sizes and are used for different purposes according to their sweetness and depth of tone. The instrument Taal of Assam can be classified into five categories.

These are:

- Bhor Taal
- Pati- Taal (or kherengital)
- Bihu- Taal
- Khuti- Taal
- Mandira (or Manjira)



Bhor-Taal.

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Taal and Dhol.

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