

A study on the indigenous dance movements of Rajbanshi's

¹Dr. Jayanta Kumar Barman, ²Riya Roy

¹Assistant Professor, ²Scholar Researcher
Department of Music
Sikkim University
Gangtok, India.

Abstract- The Rajbanshi's have their several rituals, festival, song, theatre, folk band along with their indigenous Folk dance. The dance is played in their daily life and in their life cycle. Now a day it has been extinct by the socio-economical cause day by day. People can get and enjoy it in very scattered way from the society. There is no shape to differ each of other sometime. Today is the right time to collect this rare art form from the rural and urban areas and accommodate it to serve to new generation. It may be making a bridge between the mentioned dance and coming generation.

Keyword: Rajbanshi, Indigenous Dance, Dance movements.

INTRODUCTION

Dance is a branch of art, as per the review of some musicologist which is probably the oldest. Various objects are found as various signs of ancient civilization, but not much of dance is found¹.

Folk dance is a dance that is close to the life of a community. There are many differences between folk dance and classical dance. Folk dances can be either solo or group, but group dances are more prevalent. Song & Music is an essential part of dance. In some cases, the artists themselves sing, in some cases others sing and the artists dance. In this case, it is the job of artists to give shape to the lyrics of the song through dance. Dance is a physical expression, but it is not an expression of everyday life. This expression can be seen in social, religious or entertainment. It has speed, mudra, moderation and rhythm².

The Rajbanshi

The word "Rajbanshi's" literally means "royal community". They have a rich cultural heritage and their own language. Koch and Rajbanshi's are actually two different tribes but united by the great king into one and hence named as Koch-Rajbanshi's.

Rajbanshi is an ethnic group found in North Bengal and neighboring areas. These Rajbanshi's probably belonged to a warrior-cum-ruling community in hoary past; but with time they were excluded from their ruling status for a very long period. They lost their state and went to an exile in disguise. They became simple peasants. There they procreated some substructures by establishing marital ties with local tribal communities like Koch, Kiranti or Kirat, Mech, Rabha, Bodo and others. There might be other groups like Toto, Dhimal, Tharu, Limbu, Rong or Lepcha, Khen or Khengh, Jalda or Jalpa, etc.

Rajbanshi's generally use surname - Singha, Roy, Sarkar, Narayan and Barman that all are surnames of ruling categories among the Hindus. Rajbanshi people belong to scheduled caste category in West Bengal. They thought that at a time they were warrior groups and thence similar to the Kshatriya category of Hindu social structure and They believe that they should have some connections with Kashmiri Brahminism and hence use the Kashyapa clan name. They have their own priest category known as the Adhikari's, associated with Kamrupi Brahmins, Maithili Brahmins, Bengali Brahmins, Vaidic versions, Vaishnava gurus and Muslim Pirs. North Bengal might have Buddhist impact long ago that the Rajbanshi's could not deny from.

Rajbanshi's are traditionally agriculturalists. The fishing instruments are however unique and show resemblance with those of indigenous tribal people of Teesta-Brahmaputra plains and the associated Sub-Himalayas. Rajbanshi's in exclusion might have intermingled with these tribal community practicing food gathering and hunting, fishing, agroforestry, slash-and-burn type of cultivation, shifting cultivation and fallowing, animal husbandry and poultry, etc. They expressed themselves in terms of psychobiological functions and now got associated with certain structural functionalism.



(The Jakoi Dance of Rajbanshi's. Artist of Rural Craft & Cultural Hub, Barokodali Cooch Behar. 1. Hachhna Hena, 2. Minati Rava, 3. Priyanka Barman, 4. Shrabani Barman, 5. Ganga Barman.)

As per concern of the eminent scholar Gurusaday Dutta's and the study of the research paper Rajbanshi's dance in North Bengal and Assam...

Type of Folk Dance of Rajbanshi's are -

1. War Motive
2. Play Motive
3. Social Ceremony and Well-Wishing Motive
4. Joyous Self-Union Motive
5. Spiritual Supplication
6. Representational Motive
7. Fitness-Proving Motive.
8. Work Dance
9. Hunting Dance
10. Ritualistic

Different type of Rajbanshi Indigenous Dance form which has been practicing in their life cycle in the region of North Bengal, Assam and some part of Bangladesh.

Hudum Dance: In order to bring down the rain, the women of the house worship Hudum - Deo or Hudum Deva/Deity in the secluded desert away from the locality. There is an attempt to please the deity by dancing and singing along with worship. The inhabitants of this region are practiced "Hudum Deo" puja system and this puja, dance and song education in the Gaan dynasty, which can be called non-formal or oral education. It's belief that after performing Hudum Puja along with the dance and music rain will come down in the locality³.



(Interview: Binata Sen, Dance Artist of Hudum folk Dance of Rajbanshi, Sen Para, Cooch Behar, WB. Date 14 February 2023 at 12pm.)

Hudum Puja is another cultural tradition and ritual of Koch Rajbanshis through which women worshiped the mother earth when there is no rain. There is no need of any Brahman or priest to perform it, at any time and any place the Puja can be offered when there is scarcity of water by female members only⁴.

Tistaburi or Mecheni Dance: On the other hand, in some parts of Jalpaiguri, when the Teesta River water overflows, the crops are destroyed, it is also a form of suffering.

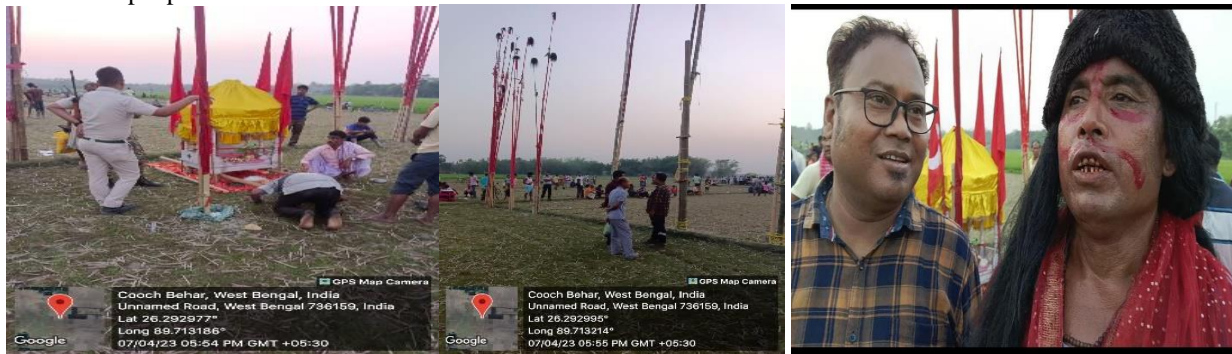


(Interview: Durga Roy, Jalpaiguri, Eminent artist of Teesta Buri (Mecheni) Folk Dance of Rajbanshi, 13 January 2023, at 2.37 pm. Barokodali, WB. India)

It is expressed as a source of Goddess Teesta. Teesta Buri calms down and everyone smiles⁵.

Sona Ray Dance: About 100 150 years ago, the Rajbanshi people of North Bengal were mainly dependent on agriculture, cultivating the land, cutting wood in the forest. Fish was the main source of livelihood. Inside and outside the forest, there were a bunch of houses at a distance. The animals of the forest lived as they wandered, and people also lived⁶.

Kamdev Dance: One family consisted of many people and in the Kushan family, sons and daughters sometimes exceeded more than 20-25 people.



(Interview: “Thalabari”, Barokodali, Cooch Behar, WB. India. Kamdev Dance festival. the place of festival. Madankam a rituals and festival of Rajbanshi Men. Women are not allowed to enjoy the festival. Date of Picture 7 April 2023. Interview – Artist Nikhil Barman. Team “Kaka Bhaista Sampraday”).

There was a gathering of 40-50 people in the house led by workers. If people have more children, it is very important for them to procreate, and to keep this process of procreation, it is necessary to have will power of semen, so they worshiped Kamdev and Madan Kama. And Kamdev used to make him dance and make him evil so that male power does not become weak and male power increases⁷.

Baran Dance: From birth to death in the hall of society's festivals, dancing to the beat of the music and welcoming the guests, the new bride and bridegroom are welcomed as we know. Their participation in dance in other parts of society was very weak as it was spent on childbirth and child rearing.



(Interview: the eminent Baran Dance artist Nirobala Barman, of Baran Dance of Rajbanshi. Date 11 January 2023, at 5.00 pm, Boiragi Para, Cooch Behar. WB.)

Chhukri Dance: When the boys danced with Shukri costumes, the artists were very demanding. The king or the landlords sometimes entertained them. They have been seen dancing to various songs such as Kishori Gaan, Kate Nitya, Chor Pari Gaan in their folk songs.



(Interview: Guneswar Adhikary, Dhalpal, Bhatibari, Alipurduar, WB is the troupe leader of Folk Dance drama 'Maynar Chakhur Jal'. He is knowledgeable about the Chukri Dance of Rajbanshi. Date of Interview 12 April 2023 at 2.00 pm.)

Jakoi Dance: During the rainy season, the river floods and the water from that river flows from village to village, every pond in the village is filled with water, ditches and cultivated land is flooded, roads, land, ponds and rivers all become one. In the time of flood, the fish in the river go to the pond. After some days, the fish in the pond come out and float in the river but some fishes stayed in the pond whose sizes are small comparatively.

Bishahari Dance: Bisahari/Ma Manasa: This deity is the most venerated among the deities in the Rajbanshi family. Bisahari figured in two stories of Debesh Roy⁸.



(Interview: Dinabandhu Dakua ,Shalbari, Nagrur hat, Cooch Behar, an eminent artist of Bishhari Folk Dance Drama of Rajbanshi’s. Date 14 February 2023, 11.11am.)

Bishohari pala gaan eminent artist Dinabandhu Dakua stated that he used to play the pala gaan from 40years .They have a group of 15to 16 members .He is a farmer by profession .He does the pala gaan to preserve the culture .He teaches the pala gaan and he is having 5 students .He explained that the first step of the pala(dance) is they used to go to the convenor house .First they go to the temple of bishahari and place the pot (ghot) in the Mandap .That time the sing the “Ghot bosha gaan .” After that the give marriage of lord shiva in the temple. After that they start the pala gaan. The main season of pala gaan is Bengali month “Magh – Falgun” in the time of marriage ceremony. This is rituals of Rajbangsi’s in marriage. This dance performed by 14 to 15 members⁹.

Kaati Dance: In day-to-day social life Koch Rajbanshis practice many rituals and worship various deities. Kaati puja is one of the oldest rituals of the Koch Rajbanshis in Assam. The god ‘Kati’ is made by clay. Praying ‘Kati’- they get lots of blessing and enjoyment.



(Interview: Parbati barman, Artist of Kati Dance of Rajbanshi. 13 February 2023, at 4.21pm. Bhandijalash, Cooch Behar. WB.)

Gowalini Dance: The Goalini Nritya (Dance) is basically related with agriculture and harvesting through which different stages of harvesting is narrated with the story of Lord Krishna by the women including one man who plays the dhak¹⁰.



(Practicing Gowalini Dance of Rajbanshi by Shibani Barman, Nirupama Barman, Minati Rava, Hachhna Hena, Asha Barman, Nilima Barman, Sunanda Barman, Rina Barman at Bhawaiya Sangeet academy O Parishad, WB. India by the artist 2022)

Dotara Pala Dance Drama: This Dance drama play with dance, acting and music in the reference of present social context. 'Chhukri' also dancing in the play. Sometime the Character 'Doyari' is play the role of comedy.



(Interview - Manabendra Narayan, Jaygeer Chilakhana, Tufanganj, Cooch Behar, WB. Date – 12 April 2023 at 4.46 pm. Dotara pala Dance Drama.)

Kushan Dance: Kushan dance or kushan nritya or kushan gaan is a Rajbongshi folk drama form based on Krittivasi Ramayana. The artistes narrate the story of Ramayan in Kamtapuri or Rajbongshi language through musical verses. The Kushan folk theater is traceable to the 15th century when the Koch dynasty ruled Assam, West Bengal, and the current northern Bangladesh. The name, Kushan, has its sources in the name Kush, the second son of Sita. The men, called as Chhukri or Chokra, sing and dance during the performance. The primary performer is known as Mool or Geedal - he narrates the story and the Doari, the jester, works as an intermediary between the Mool and the audience through commentaries, observations, and jokes. Bena, an instrument made of bamboo is used in the performances apart from Aar banshi (bamboo flute), mondira, sarinja, akhrai and harmonium. The performance starts with Asar Vandana, an auspicious song to seek the blessings of gods and goddesses¹¹.



(Interview: Banshinath Dakua, an eminent artist of Kushan Folk Dance Drama, Date 14 February 2023 at 10.03 am.)

Banshinath Dakua, an eminent artist of Kushan Pala has told that he has learn kushan gone from his Guru, at he stayed at his guru's home in the learning process. He teaches dotora, kushan and bishohara. there are 22 members in his team. His occupation is teaching Kushan . He has taken training kushan gaan from his Guru for 14years.



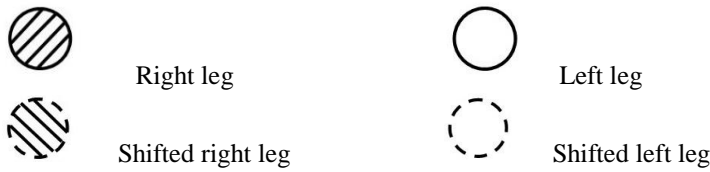
(Interview: Bhuban Roy Kushani, Baniamari, Assam. India. Artist of Ramayana Dance Drama "Kushan". Date of interview 13 April 2023 at 5.30pm)

Bhuban Roy is the eminent artist of Kushan Gaan or Theatre of Assam. Rajbanshi folk dance are used in this Kushan Gaan from Ramayana. He is experienced and more knowledgeable about Kushan Gaan and Dance of Rajbanshi. He has compiled some Bols and figures for the Folk Dances of Rajbanshi. It's used in his performances.

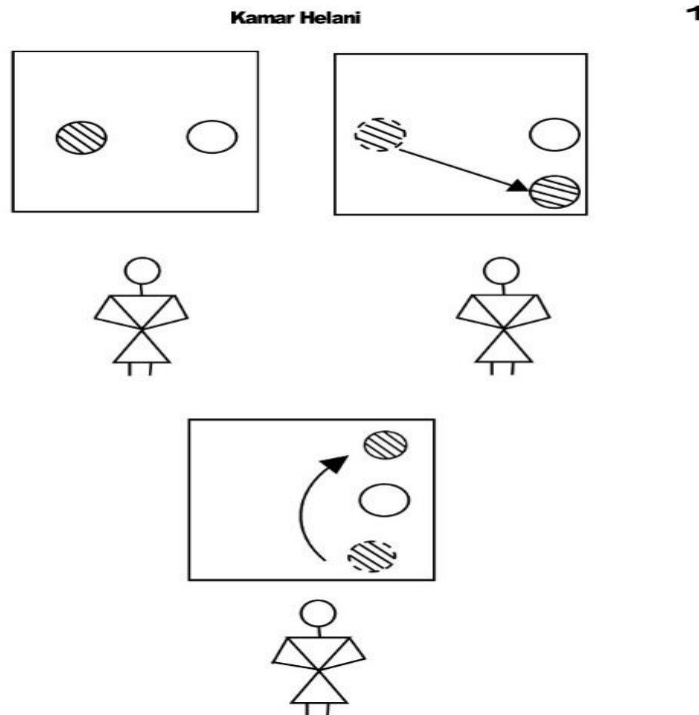
After study, analysis and observation of the interviews on Rajbanshi Folk Dances some movements are found from different sources and it became necessary to specify the name and numbering to learn it easily by using their indigenous language. This historical

initiative (Stepping's of Rajbanshi indigenous Dance) has innovated by Dr. Jayanta Kumar Barman and Riya Roy. Mentioned examples with the sketches are like ...

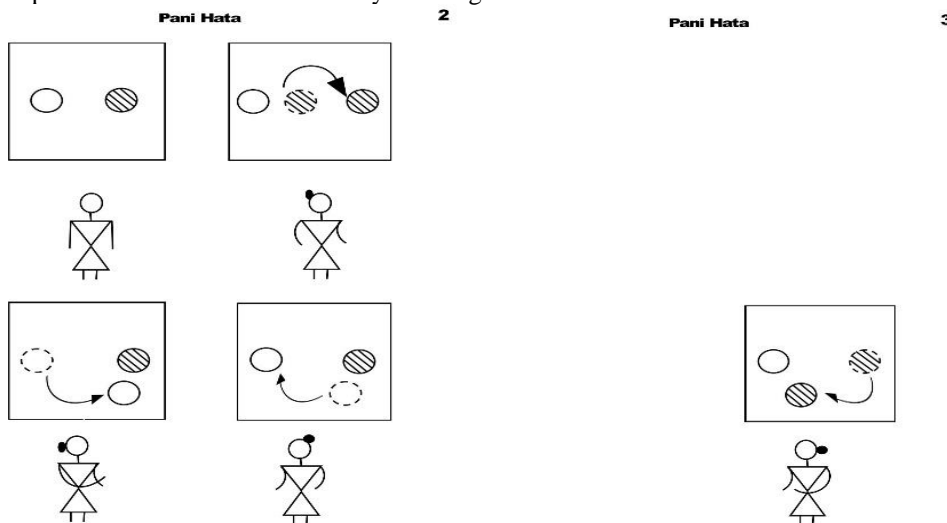
Diagram details



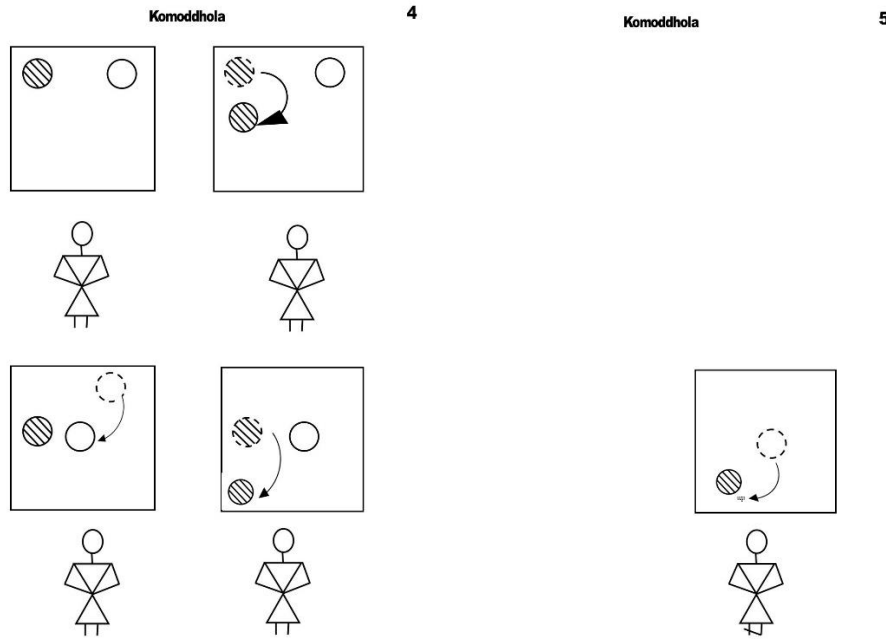
1. **Kamar Helani** / কমর হেলানি (Waste movement): In this step, the dancer will perform the steps with both hands on the waist with the beat, the right leg should be performed forward and backward, at that time there will be no change in the position of the left leg. Dancers should also move their hips to the beat while stepping to the beat.



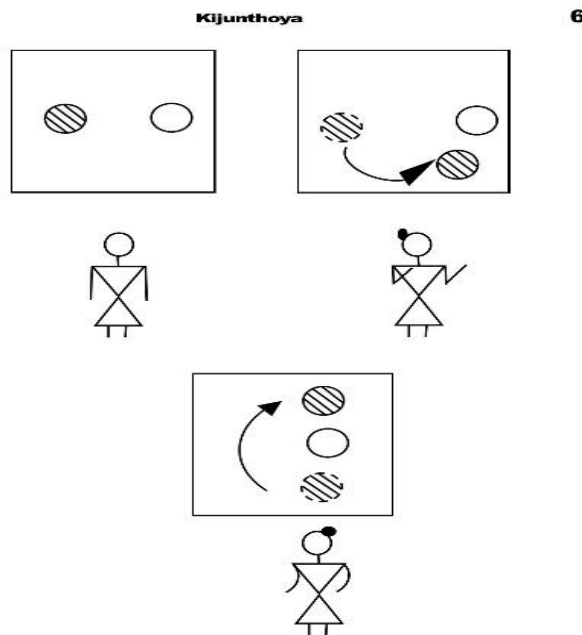
2. **Panihata** / পানিহাটা (To move water by hand in the pond): In this step, the dancer first moves the right foot to the right and then the left foot to the right foot, while the dancer brings his hands from the left side to the right waist. Conversely, the same will apply to the left. Dancers perform this dance movement by standing in circle.



3. **Komddhola** / কমরঢোলা (Shaking of Waste): This particular dance step is divided into 4/4 rhythm. Right (corner) or (corner) Right (corner) or (up) will go forward and backward it will be vice versa. In this step, the dancer will perform the dance with both hands on the waist.



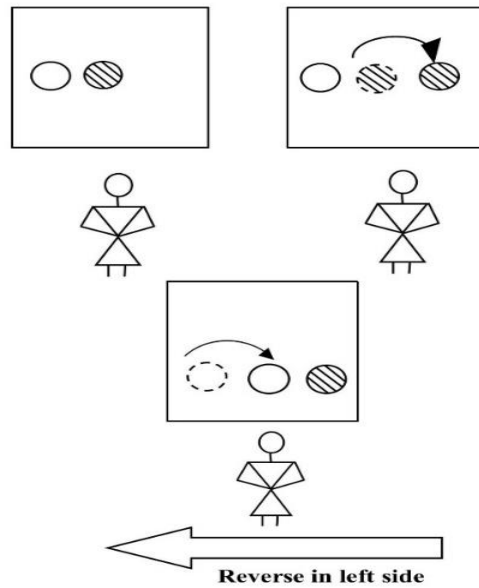
4. Kijunthoya / কিজনথোয়া (A thing from one place to another): In this step the dancer will perform with the beat, the right foot should be moved forward and back, at that time there will be no change in the position of the left foot, the two hands will be moved from above to the waist on the right side (it will look like something is being brought from above and placed next to the waist).



5. Thapthapani / থাপথাপানি (while working in clay the leg movement): In this step the dancers wrap themselves in a circle with their right side facing everyone and the right foot will move to the right side and the foot will follow in two steps. (The foot movement will be right-or-right-or in this order) Next the or foot should be followed and the right foot should follow him. During this time the two hands of the dancers will be on their hips.

Tapping

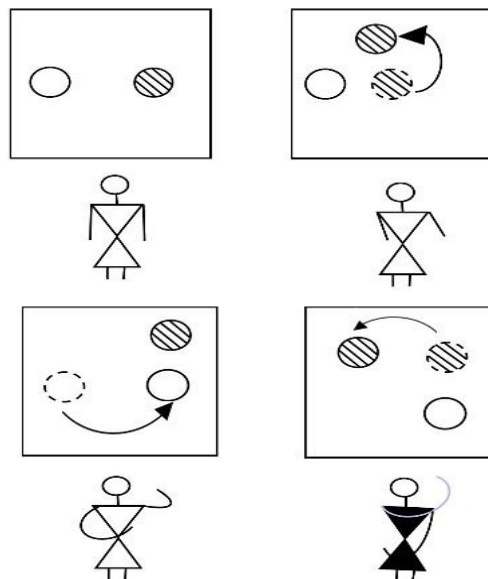
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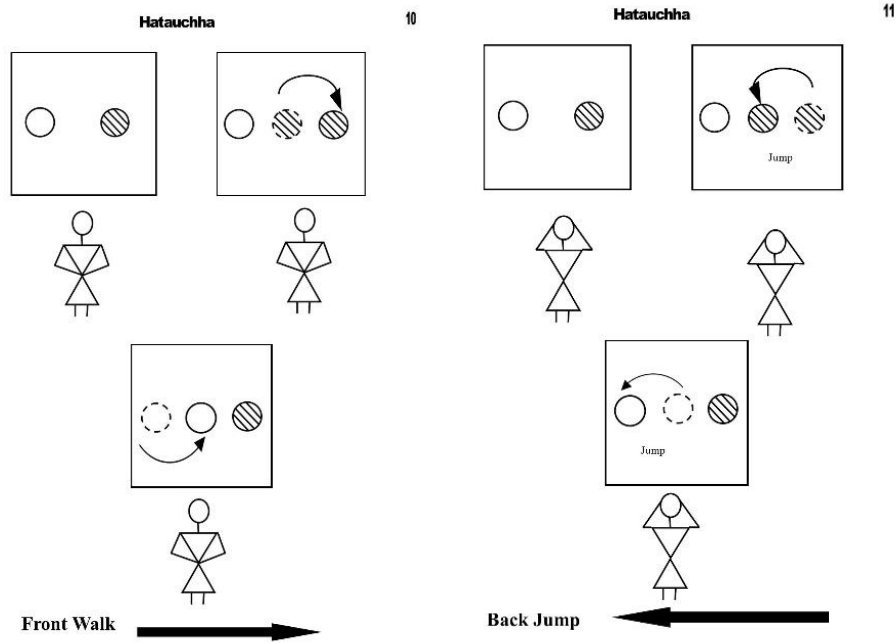
6. **Anaanda** / আনন্দ (Free movement with joyfulness): In this step, the dancers wrap themselves in a circle and turn to the right or right (knees bent up) to the front, bring the right hand from above to the right, and then the right hand to the right. Then again or right or right (knees folded up) will perform the steps and come back to face themselves from the front side along with hand movement or from the right side first left hand and then right hand.

Anand

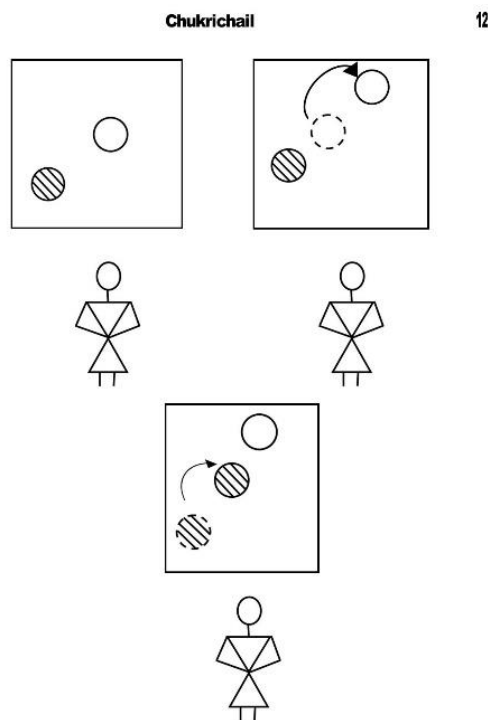
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7. **Hyataunchha**/ হাঁটুউঁচা (Bend in front and back side): Dancers form a circle with both hands on the waist and circle slightly forward, step eight times (right, left, right, left, right, left, right, left) then put their hands in their palms and look up, right left right left right. Either right or backward within the circle.



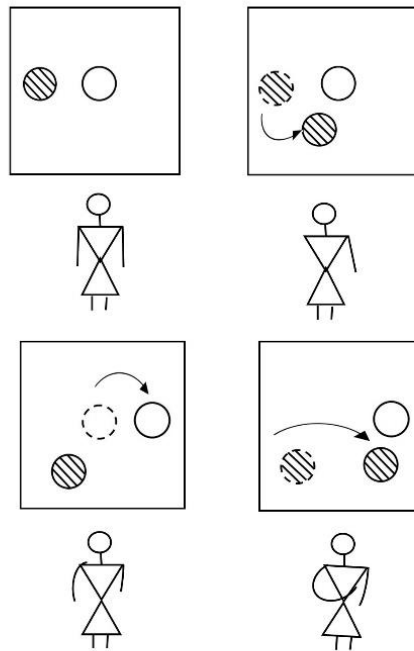
8. **Chukrichail** / ছুকরি চাইল (Stepping Forward): Dancers will step forward with their hands on their hips or feet forward to the beat while moving their hips from side to side. In this different step of the dance, dancers will perform the dance by leaning slightly to the right.



9. **Dheudaria** / ঢেউদরীয়া (movement like wave in river) : Dancers will move first - left right (cross) left to this step, at which time they should rotate the wrist twice (clockwise) with their hands behind the waist and the right hand forward. In the same wago to the right side - right left (cross) right.

Dheudaria

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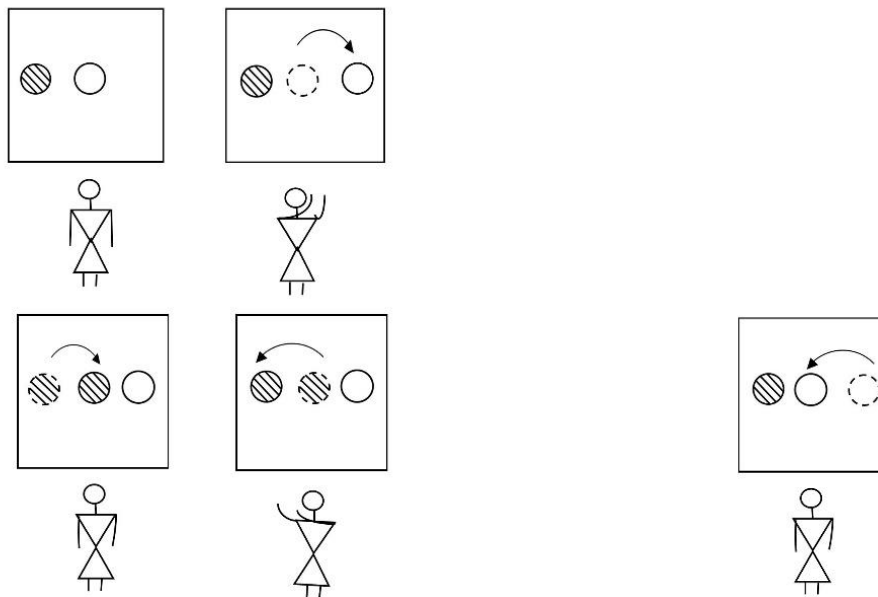
10. **Jhimjhimani** / জিম্জিমনি (Greeting the rain): Standing in one place, the left leg should be moved to the left side and half of the right leg should be placed next to the left leg, while both hands should be on the left side from top to bottom and vice versa.

Jhimjhimani

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Jhimjhimani

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CONCLUSION:

Folk dances of the Rajbanshi community and its Indigenous – constructive forms:

After observing, discussing, analyzing and reviewing Rajbanshi folk dance have taken a small initiative to give a folk constructive form of ‘Rajbanshi Folk Dances’, filling the need for a written formulation with easy sketch of Rhythm, Mudras, Pada movement. As a result of this creative work some nomenclature emerged which are as follows –The practice of imparting dance to the world through education is prevalent throughout India. Today folk dance needs a well-organized structure with specific nomenclature of each subject and a curriculum which was started with this report. Dr. Jayanta Kumar Barman and eminent Kathak & Folk dancer Riya Roy claimed that this report is a historical step through research to depict the circulating mudras in various positions based on native rhythm “Chanda-Laya” which is a historical movement for the new generation of dancers or musicians. it will be beneficial for new learner to learn this art form very easily.

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