

The Significance of the performance of nagara or pachra music after a Devi Puja

Jai Mata Di. All glories to our awesome and merciful Divine Mothers...

We, at Dipika, have received many requests to compile an article on the reasoning behind Nagara and Pachra music being performed after a Devi Puja. The information provided below was procured from the 18th chapter of the Srimad Devi Bhagavatam, since Vaishnavas' (devotees of Lord Vishnu) main shastra is the Srimad Bhagavatam (18 000 verses), the Shaivites' (devotees of Lord Shiva) main shastra is the Shiva Purana (24 000 verses) and the Shaktavites' (devotees of the Mother) main shastra is the Srimad Devi Bhagavatam (18 000 verses).

Firstly, we at Dipika are extremely humbled in acknowledging that our Devis have allowed us to compile an article of this nature and procure information to depths never before reached. Therefore, we humbly dedicate this article to the sacred lotus feet of all our Divine Mothers, especially to Srimati Sheetala Ma & Durga Devi and Srimati Sarasvati Devi. JAI MATA DI.

Extract from the Srimad Devi Bhagavatam - the 11th book, chapter 18 titled "The greatness of Devi Puja", it is mentioned: Lord Narayana said:- "O Devarsi Narada! Next, have music with lovely flutes, mridangas, murajas, dhakas and dundubhis to please Devi. The Vedic mantras are to be recited, the Puranas are to be read and the hymns are to be chanted. Devi is pleased with anybody who remembers Her even once! What wonder then that She will be pleased with all these offerings! The Mother is naturally merciful to Her child. When She is loved with devotion, then She becomes very merciful. There is nothing strange here!"

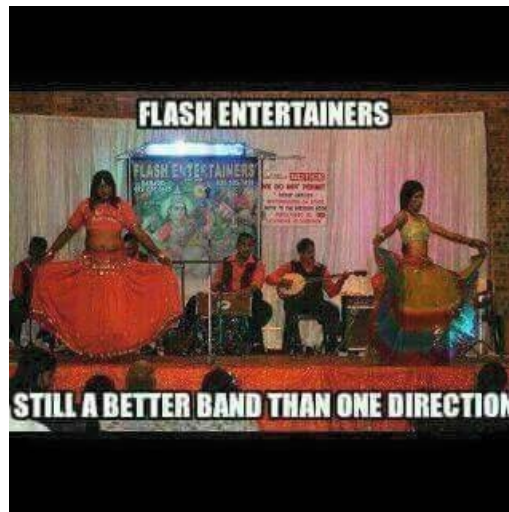
Now, we shall discuss, in detail, each of the instruments in the extract above by Lord Narayana.

Do note:- The instruments listed in this article have also been mentioned in thousands of slokas (verses) in other Puranas. But, due to space constraints, we have only mentioned a few pertinent ones.

NAGARA:- On the completion of a Devi Puja, a music group entertains Mata and the crowd with pachra, nagara or riverside music where the instruments (like the Nagara drum – two drums with two sticks) are played and a person sings songs glorifying the Mother in Her many forms while a person, generally a male dressed as a female, dances to this music. Drum beats are an integral part of a Durga Puja.

The History of Nagara:- Nagara or Naghara is the name of a type of drum. Nagara is one of the oldest musical instruments on record and has been used since ancient times. In those times, it was used for announcing major declarations or decisions from the royal families. The Nagara is capable of producing a number of rhythms, some of which are deep and thunderous, to compliment massive community dances like Raasmandal and Ghoomar. A Nagara is an instrument used predominantly by the people of Rajasthan, India. It is an instrument that is still being used widely even up till now.

The origin of “Flash Entertainers” – the popular group who perform nagara and pachra music in South Africa.- The origin of Nagara can be traced back to Rajasthan. The Nagara that is used by “Flash Entertainers” is more than 200 years old. It was used in Rajasthan for many years before being brought over to South Africa with the 1860 settlers.



What is the significance of the dancers? - In the years of the Raasmandal and Ghoomar dances, females were forbidden from dancing at night, regardless of the venue. Any female that performed such an act was discarded by society because females that performed at night were regarded as “women of the night” (eg. prostitutes). Women like these (“women of the night”) danced for men, exposing their bodies, consuming liquor and engaging in sexual activities. Men who participated in the Raasmandal and Ghoomar community dances would dress up as dancers and participate in these activities till late into the night. The male dancers of today dress up like women. When you view the dancers, you will see that there are a few significant things. Men that dress up and dance, do so in the worship of Srimati Saraswati Devi, the Hindu goddess of Music and Knowledge. The men that dress up as dancers do so in a very respectful manner, they would wear a sari or dancing skirt that is beautifully decorated. A crown (diadem) would be worn and their facial appearance changed just as to impersonate Srimati Saraswati Devi. While many dancers of many different groups have lost this ideal, many people unfairly assume that if a male dresses up as a dancer he is a homosexual. This is an unfortunate misconception with no truth to it.

One may wonder about the difference between a male and a female dancer. A male dancer wears a dancing skirt or sometimes a sari. Granted, a sari is a female clothing item but so too is a dhoti. If a dhoti has been draped differently, it, too, can be used as a sari. Men who are dancers don't parade as females and neither are they homosexuals for doing this. The only time they dress up as dancers is when they are dancing for Mother Saraswati and for Her entertainment and pleasure. Whilst there are some dancers in this day and age who are homosexual and dress up as females at their own leisure, this should not be seen as the case for all dancers as that would be very unfair and judgemental. There are some dancers who are husbands, fathers and even grandfathers. They have been dancing for generations and Srimati Saraswati Devi has blessed them for worshipping Her.

Nagara music has become a music genre here in South Africa. Hailing from Rajasthan, it has become a kind of folk music to us as well - spanning generations, consisting of wonderful beats

and songs too. Many people confuse “chutney” and “bhangra” with nagara music. Chutney is a mixture of music, otherwise known as bhojpuri music, and bhangra is Punjabi music native to the community of Punjab. Nagara music has many followers here in South Africa and is massive in Rajasthan with the Raasmandal and Ghoomar community dances. You will find that in different parts in the world, it is played differently, but the common method is two nagaras (drums). One small drum and one big drum – both played to a rhythm, with two sticks. While it isn't everybody's cup of tea so to speak, it is one of the few traditional musical instruments and genres that we have, which have been around since the 1860 settlers.

Today in South Africa, there are various Nagara groups. Each group has their own style of playing and their own type of songs. One will find that in most cases, there are bands that play at weddings, hurdi (nalengu) ceremonies, bedhaai ceremonies, birthday parties, a baby's naming ceremony, shows, festivals, etc. . Some Nagara bands even perform “kirtan” at religious functions and even sing patchras, which send many people spiralling into a joyous mood and festive state of mind. One may find that, in-between the songs, some groups have short comedy sketches. These are some of the traditions that have been continued for many generations. This brief note was not compiled to raise controversy between people or groups, but merely to create an understanding of the history of nagara music – and that male dancers, dressed as females, worship and represent Mother Saraswati and not females. The above information was researched and compiled by Sriman Yashik Singh and he does not represent any organisation or group in any capacity.

Extract from the Srimad Devi Bhagavatam Book 3, Chapter 26

Verse 23:- “One should place on one's side all the materials of worship in their due places, and then have the music and the other sounding drums playing, for the good fortune and prosperity of the family.”.

Verse 36:- “Daily, thrice, one should worship Devi with various lovely articles and finally make a great festivity with dancing, singing and music”.

Bhojpuri is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in the Bhojpuri regions of India (viz. Uttar Pradesh, Western part of Bihar, North-Western part of Jharkhand), Nepal, Guyana, Fiji, Mauritius, Suriname, South Africa and many other places around the world.

Bihar has it's own, very distinctive music, consisting of old and traditional folk music and songs. The *sohar* is performed during childbirth, while the *sumangali* is associated with weddings, etc. . Forms of bihari folk music include pachra and others. There are many of these music types played and sung during important family occasions such as birth ceremonies, marriage, festivals, etc. . The folk songs are most often sung in groups using dholak, tabla and harmonium, etc. .

What is Pachra music? Pachra *geet* (songs) are special kinds of prayer songs that are generally sung in Bhojpuri, praising the Divine Mother. They are usually sung to please Sheetala mata (an expansion form of Devi Durga) - who is the presiding deity goddess of small-pox (measles, chicken-pox, etc.). This form of *bihari* folk music is sung either as a prayer, or at a time when a person is suffering from one of the abovementioned diseases - it is reserved for special occasions. Neem, which is also an antiseptic, is particularly useful in the treatment of small pox, and is considered very dear to Sheetala mata, with many pachra songs often describing mata near a Neem tree or swinging on such a tree. Devi *geet* (songs) (eg. pachra songs or chatth songs) are sung in the name of traditional deities. In South Africa, pachra

music is combined with the nagara drums, and is therefore called nagara-pachra music.

What is Nagara music? Nagara music consists of prayer songs sung in Bhojpuri or a related dialect, glorying the Divine Mother using the nagara drums, and is therefore called nagara music.

What is Kirtan music? Kirtan music includes prayer songs sung in Bhojpuri or a related dialect glorying the Divine Mother using the nagara drums, similar to nagara music, however, here, the women that take vows all hold the end of a sari that is placed on the ground and then a dancer (a male dressed as a female) dances on this sari for the satisfaction of Mata. In South Africa, this genre of music is called "Kirtan".

What is Chutney music? "Chutney" (literally "spicy relish or sauce") is a colloquial name given to upbeat, short folk songs generally sung in Bhojpuri or a related dialect. This type of music is based on adaptations of folk and religious songs from our motherland India which are in traditional Bhojpuri or a related language (dialect). Diasporic "chutney" songs may include English lyrics as part of that adaptation. In South Africa, the hybrid term "chutney music" exists, and the popularity of "chutney music" has since spread into other dialects as well.

What is River-side music? "River-side music" is a South African term, also used to refer to nagara-pachra music.

A word of Note:- In this day and age, when the music group is engaged by a family to perform nagara or pachra music after a puja, a sari is placed on the floor - on which the dancer dances away (on the sari). In South Africa this genre of music is called *kirtan*. Rice is thrown on the sari and at times money is thrown on the sari as well. Now this is something that gravely concerns me. One of Devi's names is Annapoorna. In Benares (Varanasi), the holy city Kshetrapal deity (protection Deity) is called Annapoorna-Kashi Visvanatha (Parvati-Shiva). Annapoorna Devi is an expansion of Srimati Durga Devi. *Anna* means "food" or "grains" and *Purna* means "full, complete and perfect". So Annapoorna Devi is the Hindu Deity that is the provider of food and nourishment to all humankind and creatures. So, by dancing with one's feet on the rice and money, it is fairly obvious that this is tantamount to maha-aparadha (great sin). The solution to this is rather simple. A bowl or clay lota, filled with rice and money placed on top, can be positioned on either side of the sari, allowing the dancer to dance between the two pots and not on the rice and money.

The naqqaara is a drum with a rounded back and a hide head, usually played in pairs. It is a membranophone of the kettle drum variety. The term naqqaara (a.k.a naqqarat, naqqarah, naqqare, nakkare, nagora) comes from the Arabic verb naqr- that means "to strike, beat". This percussion instrument is often played in pairs, where one naqqara will produce low pitched beats called nar and the other will produce high pitched beats. The instruments are beaten with short wooden sticks bent outward at the upper ends - called damka. The variations of the nagara drums are in Arabic countries like Egypt, Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia, Uzbekistan, and many parts of Europe. The Naqqara are also found in India, where the word is pronounced nagara or nagada. They are paired kettle drums traditionally used in the naubat "nine things", a traditional ensemble of nine instruments. Today, this instrument is usually used to accompany the shehnai or "Indian oboe", an indispensable component of any North Indian wedding. Other popular names of the Nagara drums are Naghara, Doli, Koltuk Davulu, Dhol, Baraban.



The nagara instrument helped Azerbaijani doctors to deal with patients that were suffering from bad moods, melancholy, intellectual and physical exhaustion, as well as low blood pressure. It was considered that the naghara could be substituted for some medicinal plants like spicy cloves. The rhythmic beating of the naghara is believed to lead to the strengthening of the heart. Thus, according to the rich scientific and musical heritage of this instrument in Azerbaijan, it seems that not only did they listen to music for enjoyment and entertainment, but they believed music could be a potent force in the prevention and treatment of various diseases. Amazing, isn't it? :)

Mridanga:



The khol (literal meaning – “open sound”) is also known as a mridanga (lit. “mrit” and “anga” which mean “clay” and “body”) is a terracotta two-sided drum used primarily in Northern and Eastern India for accompaniment with devotional music (bhakti). The drum is played with the palms and fingers of both hands. There have been various devotional songs where the mridanga drum has been properly identified with the word khol. Hence, the words mridanga and khol are interchangeable. The mridanga originates from the Indian states of West Bengal, Assam and Manipur. One of the most revered, enjoyed, and vintage sounds that represents one of the facets of Vaishnava spirituality and East Indian culture is the mridanga drum. The mridanga drum had its advent over five hundred years ago when Shree Krishna Caitanya Mahaprabhu appeared on this Earth. It is said that the mridanga is Lord Krsna’s flute

incarnated, and also an expansion of Lord Balarama, on Earth. When Lord Krsna was preparing for His avatara as Lord Caitanya, His flute wanted to accompany Him. Lord Krsna said that the flute would not be a practical medium of carrying the spiritual vibrations around. Hence, the mridanga came to existence as a drum that is noteworthy for its hearty sounds and ease with which it can be played. Since then, Bengali music and Gaudiya Vaisnava kirtans have been blessed with this avatar of the flute of Shree Krsna. The Hare Krishna Movement (ISKCON) uses this drum for all their kirtans.

The Natya shastras describes how the various mridangas are to be worshipped in detail and by that detailed descriptions it can deduced that the mridanga was held in very high regard.

The great epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, are copious in their mention of the mridanga and such other barrel drums. These were not only marital in use, but were also employed in merrymaking and festivals. In the Ramayana, Valmiki describes the rainy season thus: "The buzz of bhramara (bee) is the hum of strings, the chatter of monkeys the rhythm, the tree tops sing in the wind and the dark clouds play the mridanga." A few jatakas also refer to the mridanga and the muraja. And Jain literature also has extensive references to certain bulging drums. Harivamsa, which is a supplementary to the Mahabharata, describes a group song called cchalikya in which Narada played the veenu, Krishna was the flutist and Arjuna gave tala on the mridanga. Kalidasa in his Raghuvamsa describes the frolics of women bathing and splashing in the river: "The charming mridanga-like sound of the waters accompanies their songs and fills their ears as it is welcomed by the sweet cries of peacocks standing on the bank, their tails expended." In the Srimad Bhagavatam Maha Purana, there is a passage on the ascent of Prince Dhruva: "The time of liberation had come for Dhruva, the son of Uttanapada. Perceiving this, he stepped on the head of death and mounted the divine chariot. Heavenly beings then struck the dundubhi, the mridanga and the panava; gandharvas sang his praises and there was a shower of flowers from the skies."

In the Mahishasura Mardini Stotram:- The Stotras on Durga devi, sloka 9 states "Following the rhythm of the great battle, the celestial dancers are dancing the rhythm of Ta-Tha-Theyi, Ta-Theyi, and expressing the sentiment of the battle with their dramatic acting, Their music has created the tense eagerness with the Talas (musical beats) like Ku-Kutha, Ku-Kutha, Ga-Da-Dha, Ga-Da-Dha and a steady deep sound of Dhu-Dhu-Kuta, Dhu-Kuta, Dhimi-Dhimi in the background from the Mridanga".

The following 3 extracts are from the Srimad Bhagavatam 10th canto:- "The professional reciters like the sutas, magadhas and vandeas, accompanied by the brahmanas, offered their respectful prayers to the Lord. Performing artists like the Gandharvas, as well as the royal jesters, began to play their panava drums, conchshells, kettle drums, veenas, mridangas and bugles, and they exhibited their dancing art to please the Lord"

"While the King was taking the avabhrtha bath, different musical instruments vibrated, such as mridangas, conchshells, panava drums, kettle drums and bugles, and the ankle bells of the dancing girls jingled. Many groups of professional singers sang as veenas, flutes, gongs and cymbals were played, and thus a tumultuous sound vibrated in the sky".

"From the very beginning, my mind was attracted to Lord Krsna, and thus I considered the garlanding of the Lord my great victory. As soon as I placed my garland on the neck of the Lord, there sounded immediately the combined vibration of mridangas, pataha and anaka drums, conchshells, kettle drums and other instruments, causing a tumultuous sound, and

while the music played, expert male and female dancers began to dance, and singers began to sing sweetly”.

Muraja:- This percussion drum is meant to dangle from the left shoulder by means of a strap. The sound of this drum is very refined and sweet sounding. The muraja drum looks almost identical to a mridanga. In the Srimad Bhagavatam {SB} the muraja drum has been mentioned viz. “another kind of drum - SB 8.8.13”, “a kind of drum - SB 8.15.21”, “and of murajas, another kind of drum - SB 10.70.20”. The muraja seems to have had a shape similar to the mridanga and the mardala, but with the heads (beaten surfaces) much smaller. Besides Sanskrit texts, Tamil literature of the Sangam age has references to many kinds of murasu, for example the veeru murasu (a marital drum), the tyaga murasu (a drum beaten to announce a charity or grant) and so on. The muraja eventually migrated to Indonesia where it was known as the murava.

Nandi-keshvara:- In his most prevalent form he is the sacred steed of Lord Shiva and is depicted as a powerful white bull. His white colour is marked as a symbol of purity and devotion. Nandi is said to be Lord Shiva’s main form of transportation and most ardent devotee. Nandi-keshvara sits on a muraja drum and is engaged in playing the muraja drum.



Extract from the Srimad Devi Bhagavatam 13th chapter 10th book verses 121-127

“The various musical instruments, mridangas, murajas, lutes, dhakkas, damarus, sankhas, bells, etc., all sounded and the three worlds were filled with their echoes. All present, with folded palms, chanted various hymns of praise to Devi Durga”.

Extract from the Srimad Bhagavatam 10th canto chapter 70 verses 19-20

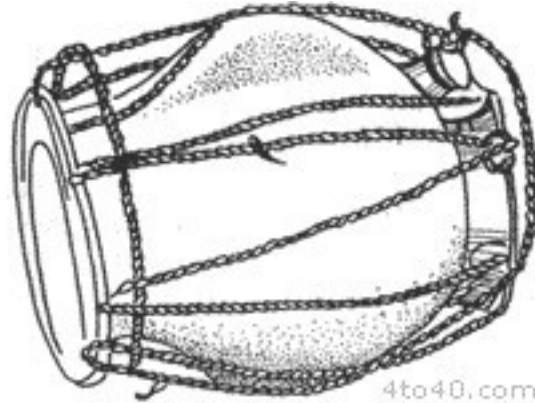
“There the jesters, o King, served the Almighty One with various forms of amusement, just as professional entertainers [like magicians] and women dancing energetic dances did on their turn. They danced to the sounds of vinas, mridangas and muraja drums, flutes, cymbals and conches while the bards and storytellers sang and offered praise.

Extract from the Srimad Bhagavatam 10th canto

“In the midst of all the great heroes of the Yadu dynasty, Lord Krishna resembled the full moon in the sky surrounded by multi-luminaries. In the assembly house, there were professional jesters, dancers, musicians and ballet girls, and as soon as the Lord sat on His throne, they would begin their respective functions to please the Lord and put Him in a happy mood. First of all the jesters would talk in such a way that the Lord and His associates would enjoy their

humour, which would refresh the morning mood. The dramatic actors would then play their parts, and the dancing ballet girls would separately display their artistic movements. All these functions would be accompanied by the beating of mridanga drums and the sounds of the vina, flutes and bells, followed by the sound of the muraja, another type of drum. To these musical vibrations, the auspicious sound of the conchshell would be added. The professional singers called sutas and magadhas would sing, and others would perform their dancing art”.

Dundubhi



Extract from the Srimad Devi Bhagavatam Book 4, Chapter 1, Verses 2-3 (Note 1):- Anakadundubhi is the epithet of Vasudeva, the Earthly father of Lord Krishna, since at Vaasudeva's (Lord Krishna) birth, drums called anakas and dundubhis resounded in the sky. Vedic rituals gave a very prominent place to this special drum. In the Atharva Veda there is a fine eulogy praising it; a part of the long invocation is what follows, "Oh Dundubhi, you who are made of wood (vanaspati) and strident in sound act as a hero. By your high pitched sound, terror is struck in the enemies and, desirous of victory, roar like a lion. As a bull in rut amongst cows, so do you run amuck amongst the enemies. The devas in battle have scared and defeated the enemies with the sounds of the dundubhi covered with deerskin." The drum was not only marital in use but was also of great significance in peace and religious rites. For instance, the dundubhi was played loudly to enthuse chariot racers; seventeen of them were kept round the holy arena and played during the Vajapaya yajna (ritual). The dundubhi players along with the flutist, tala clappers and other instrumentalists were considered sacred and 'sacrificed' in the Mahavrata ceremony of winter solstice, Makara Sankranti (the transition of the Sun from Sagittarius to Capricorn, during the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere is known as Makar Sankranti). The consensus of opinion of numerous scholars both in India and abroad is that this reference to 'sacrifice' was really a symbolic statement of the offering of something sacred to the Celestials at the time of yajnas {havan} and not necessarily taking of a life.

The dundubhi, which is equated to the modern day nagara, is in every likelihood the most ancient of conical drums and finds mention in the Rig-veda, in the Vajasaneya and other Samhitas, in certain Upanishads and Brahmanas, all belonging to what is generally known as the Vedic period. The drum seems to have been popular and venerated as well, as would have been gathered from earlier information. The Dundubhi is also prominent as a marital instrument in the two epics and almost all subsequent literature. The present versions of the dundubhi are the dhumsa, the nissan, the nagara, etc., which are all met with in non-classical music. The tribal dhumsa of the Santals is a huge instrument made of thin metal sheets with a

narrow bottom and a very wide mouth. Yet, in spite of its weight and size, it is sizable from the shoulders and the drummer dances about beating it loudly with a pair of sticks. The nissan (which is as ancient as the Ramayana) is found in Gujarat and Rajasthan, though in very different forms. References to the nissan occur also in ancient Hindi poetry and in a musical work written in the 13th century. In those times, it took the form of a metal bowl of either bronze, copper or iron, covered with buffalo hide and beaten with sticks. Since ancient times it has always been considered a marital drum, the vestiges of this function are seen in the Orissa nissan of the present day. The bowl drum in this region, played during the dalkhai dance, has a pair of antler horns tied to it; the dancers suspend from their necks the nissans and, while keeping the rhythm of the dance, conduct a mock battle thrusting horn against horn. The dundubhi is kept also in temples, to be beaten during worship or to announce prayers. The nagara is a very familiar drum throughout North India and it is quite possible that its name is sourced from West Asia. Usually there are two conical bowl drums struck with sticks, the pair being known as nagara or naqara. The smaller of the two is higher in pitch and is the madi or female; the larger with a deeper tone is called the nar or the male. While the naqara or nagara is used in folk dramas, marriage and religious processions, the traditional place where it is found is the naubatkhana. This, as an institution, does not exist any more, and has gone with the disappearance of the princely states. The naubatkhana or naqarakhana was an apartment especially set apart in the tower of a castle, the gateway of the palace or even near the battle field and housed a number of instruments which were sounded to announce various royal activities and pleasures. The best known of such ensembles was that of Emperor Akbar and Abul Fazl gives a graphic account of it: "of musical instruments used in the nagarakhana, I may mention, 1. the kuwarga, commonly called the damama; there are eighteen pairs of them more or less; and they give a deep sound. 2. The nagara, twenty pairs, more or less. 3. The duhul, of which four are used. 4. The karna is made of gold, silver, brass, and other metals, and they never blow fewer than four. 5. The surna of the Persian and Indian kinds; they blow nine together. 6. The nafir, of the Persian, European, and Indian kinds; they blow some of each kind. 7. The sing is of brass and made in the form of a cow's horn; they blow two together. 8. The sanj or cymbal, of which three pairs are used.

In the Mahishasura Mardini Stotram:- Stotra on Devi Durga. Sloka 6, 3rd line states "Whose victory gives rise to the "dumi-dumi" sound of the dundubhi drum flowing incessantly, like water, which fills all directions with joy".

In the Devi Bhagavatam, Devi Durga sounded her 'Pataha Dhvani (also known as a kettle drum, a war-drum)' as a mark of attack and Bhandasura responded with his 'dundhibhis' or war-drums which deafened the three worlds.

Extract from the Caitanya Caritamrita Adi 1.73-74 "When the cowherd girls and Krishna thus joined together, each girl thought that Krishna was dearly embracing her alone. To behold this wonderful pastime of the Lord's, the denizens of heaven and their wives, all very eager to see the dance, flew in the sky in their hundreds of airplanes. They showered flowers and beat sweetly on drums (dundubhayah—kettle drums)."

The following 5 extracts are from the Srimad Bhagavatam 10th canto "While the bride (Devaki – Lord Krsna's mother) and bridegroom (Vasudeva) were passing along on the chariot, there were different kinds of musical instruments playing to indicate the auspicious moment. There were conchshells, bugles, drums and kettle drums; combined together, they were

vibrating a nice concert”.

“First of all they learned how to sing, how to compose songs and how to recognize the different tunes; they learned the favorable and unfavorable accents and meters, how to sing different kinds of rhythms and melodies, and how to follow them by beating different kinds of drums. They learned how to dance to the rhythm of melody and different songs. They learned how to write dramas, and they learned the various types of painting, beginning from simple village arts up to the highest perfectional stage”.

“Long ago, when Lord Shiva was dancing in his celebrated fashion called tandava-nrtya, for which he is known as Nataraja, Banasura helped Lord Shiva in his dancing by rhythmically beating drums with his one thousand hands. Lord Shiva is well known as Ashutosha ("very easily pleased"), and he is also very affectionate to his devotees”.

“All the citizens joined their friends and relatives to welcome Lord Krishna with great pomp and jubilation, and a tumultuous vibration of conchshells, drums and bugles received the Lord. In this way the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna, entered His capital, Dwaraka”.

“The chariot of Lord Krishna started for Hastinapura (Delhi), accompanied by many other chariots, along with elephants, cavalries, infantry and similar royal paraphernalia. Bugles, drums, trumpets, conchshells and horns all produced a loud auspicious sound which vibrated in all directions”.

Dhaka



The dhak is a huge membranophone instrument from India. The shapes differ from the “almost cylindrical” to the barrel. The manner of stretching the hide over the mouths and lacing also varies. It is suspended from the neck, tied to the waist and kept on the lap or the ground, and usually played with wooden sticks. The left side is coated to give it a heavier sound. Like the art of making a dhak, the nuances of playing the “dhak” is also transferred from one generation to another of the “dhaki”. With changing times and preferences, the rhythm of the Dhak is now fast paced which requires a lot of energy, movement and dancing.

A Durga Puja does not assume the festive aura without the maddening beats of the dhak, the large drum that typically men hang around their necks and play with two thin sticks to infuse the frenzied rhythm into listeners. Those enchanting beats are enough to conjure up the sights, smells and vibrations of a Durga Puja.

The dhak (also known as a daklu) is a folk drum found among the Rathwa people of Gujarat. dhak or daklu belongs to the damaru family. The shape of the daklu is likened to the shape of the damaru, but is sometimes larger in range.

Extract from the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad II.4.8 “As it is when a drum is beaten, the source of the emanating sound cannot be determined until the drum or drummer is revealed .”

In Rajasthan, India, the word “dhak” refers to both an hourglass drum and to a spirit-possession ritual involving the drum. The singular naming is indicative of the cultural significance of both the drum and the ritual. During a Durga Puja, the dhal ritual, a medium (bhopa) is possessed by the spirit of Devi Durga, during the course of a night of drumming and the sound recitation of Her miracles. The widespread existence of this drum can be interpreted through a model based on the idea of reciprocal acculturation. This interpretation is not built on positing an essentialized hierarchy of “great” and/or “little” traditions, but rather on the process by which our Sanatan Dharma culture is transformed and survives in a palimpsestic fashion as an oral, or, in the case of the dhak drum itself, a material iconic record.

Flute:- The flute has several names like bansi, bansari, venu, vamshi, kuzhal, murli etc. . It is one of the earliest instruments of the sushira (wind) variety. The flute consists of a simple cylindrical tube of uniform tire closed at one end. Murlidhara (murali means “flute,” and dhara means “hold”), signifying the one who holds the flute, hence another name for Lord Krishna.



He is never without it, whether He is with His mother, on the grazing grounds with His herd of cows, among His cowherd companions or roaming around on the banks of the river Yamuna. The Flute is the oldest musical instrument known to humankind. The Bamboo flute is the only musical instrument which is completely natural and does not contain any mechanical parts. This is the reason the flute is very close to nature and sounds very melodious when played in an atmosphere surrounded by nature. What, one may wonder, is so special about the music that flowed from the flute of Krishna? There are many musical instruments which produce

sweet and scintillating notes of music. But the music that comes from that small piece of bamboo called the flute, creates an enormous impression in the heart. It creates a positive vibration in the air. It creates great ripples of joy in the heart and it captivates the heart of all because the music that comes from flute is the music of love, the music of peace and the music of God. Srimati Radharani felt very jealous about this flute which became a part of Lord Krishna. Apparently, after placing the flute in a particular place, Lord Krishna had gone somewhere. Finding the flute alone, Shree Radha decided to find out what is the secret of the flute which endeared Her Krishna to it. "Tell me, oh flute, what is that quality in you that attracts My Krishna towards you. What is the quality that I should possess by which My Krishna would also turn towards Me?" "My only quality is," replied the flute, "Nirguna or devoid of any quality. What makes me special is my emptiness". If you look through the flute, you would not find any part; body, mind or ego; it is empty space, the Chith Akasa." Let us all aspire to possess the qualities, or the absence of quality, like that of a bamboo flute.

THE GARBA:- The term “garba” is associated with the Sanskrit word “garbha” meaning ‘womb’, and it also implies gestation or pregnancy - life. Traditionally, the dance is performed around a clay lantern with a light inside, called a *Garbha Deep*. This lantern represents life; the foetus in the womb in particular. The dancers thus honour Srimati Durga Devi, the feminine form of divinity. Garba is performed in a circle as a symbol of the Hindu view of time. The rings of dancers revolve in cycles, as time in Sanatan Dharma is cyclical. As the cycle of time revolves, from birth, to life, to death and again to rebirth, the only thing that is constant is the Goddess, that one unmoving symbol in the midst of all of this unending and infinite movement. The dance symbolises that God, represented in a feminine form in this case, is the only thing that remains unchanging in a constantly changing universe (*jagat*). The dance is performed by women, men and children on all the nine days of Navaratri. The dance is performed at night (Do note that this differs to the nagara-pachra music where women who dance at night are seen as “women of the night”) to the beat of rhythmic music. Apart from Navaratri, the dance is also performed on other hold days, eg. Holi, Sharad Purnima and Vasanth Purnima. The *Garbha Deep* has another symbolic interpretation.



The vessel itself is a symbol of the body, within whom Divinity (in the form of the Goddess) resides. Garba is danced around this symbol to honor the fact that all humans have the Divine energy of Devi within them. Garba is now being appreciated worldwide. Modern garba is also heavily influenced by daandeyaa raas - a dance traditionally performed by men. The merger of these two dances has formed the high-energy dance that is seen today. Both men and women

usually wear colorful costumes while performing garba and daandeeyaa raas. The musical accompaniments that form part of the garba dance and give it a unique identity are drums, eg. damru, ektaro, hattho, jantar, murli, nagara, pavo, pot drum, percussion tabla, ravan, shehani turi and taturi. All these are ancient musical instruments. The songs that accompany the music are sung in praise of Mother Durga – The Supreme Devi. They are sung to invoke Her blessings. This dance form has been associated with the raas leela of Lord Krishna and it was popularized by him. The granddaughter of Lord Krishna, Usha, was instrumental in popularising the lasya nritya. This ancient dance form later came to be known as garba dance. The garba dance starts at a slow pace and as the music starts to increase in tempo, it reaches a feverish pitch. It is usually done in groups of five to fifty. There is no restriction on the number of people who can form part of the group. When the dance is done in a group, it is usually done in a circular way. All the dancers will move in a circle and the big circle can break every now and then into smaller circles. Men and women dance through the night in a never ending celebration of life. The drummer sits in the center of the circle and maintains the rhythm throughout the dance. As the dancers move in circles it is known to represent the cycle of life (life and death). People often get quite engrossed in the rhythm of the music and dance, so much so that even those who have never danced in their entire life may be persuaded to get up and dance.

A popular song that is often sung by South African nagara/pachra groups follows.

Nibiya ka dhariya thare Kali Maiya,
gawela pacharewa khee joole, joolenah
Kali Maiya gawela pacharewa khee joole, joolena

(THE MOTHER IS SITTING ON THE SYRINGABERRY TREE, SWINGING TO AND FRO AND MEDITATING)

Ekhiwariya jooleh thore,
satho baheniya, khee ekhewariyana,
jool Lalechand doolarewa khi jool joolena

(THE SEVEN SISTERS ARE SWINGING ON ONE SIDE AND BROTHER LALECHAND ON THE OTHER SIDE)

Dheere dheere joolewa,
joolawoh baya Lalchand, khee toothie jayena
Moreh nibiya kha dhariya khee toothie jayena

(THE SEVEN MOTHERS ARE ASKING BROTHER LALECHAND TO ROCK THE SWING, BUT NOT TO PUSH TOO FAST OR ELSE THE BRANCH WILL BREAK)

Nibiya ka dhariya maya,
tootie patti jaye, mangahi lebo nah
Thoke reshema khi dhoriya, mangahi lebo nah

(BROTHER LALECHAND EXPLAINS TO THEM, IF THE BRANCH BREAKS, HE WILL BRING SATIN MATERIAL TO RE-INFORCE THE SWING ONTO ANOTHER BRANCH).

This song was kindly provided by BUNTY BHAI OF NAGARA SENSATIONS

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Compiled for the upliftment of Sanathan Dharma
Narottam das, Arjun Nandlal & Yashik Singh.
[Email info@dipika.org.za](mailto:info@dipika.org.za)