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## An Analytical Study of Basic Postures in Manipuri Dance: Tradition, Technique, and Practice

Tharanga Disanayaka

University of the Visual and Performing Arts

Correspondence: [tharangadissanayake86@gmail.com](mailto:tharangadissanayake86@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** Manipuri dance, a classical form rich in tradition, places significant emphasis on the mastery of basic postures that serve as the foundation for the art form. These postures are crucial in maintaining body balance, fluidity of movement, and flexibility. However, a detailed technical analysis of these foundational postures and their broader implications in dance practice remains relatively unexplored in academic research. This paper offers a unique contribution by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the fundamental postures and exercises of Manipuri dance. It not only focuses on the technical aspects of these movements but also explores their cultural significance and their role in shaping both the physical and mental discipline of dancers. The primary objective of this research is to examine and document the core postures of Manipuri dance and their impact on a dancer's overall performance. It aims to explore how these postures influence body alignment, flexibility, and the seamless coordination of movement, contributing to both technical proficiency and the expression of devotion within the dance. The study employs a qualitative approach, analyzing key postures such as Chumna Leppa, Sagol Firep, and Pheinamba through direct observation, textual analysis of dance manuals, and interviews with practitioners. Detailed descriptions of the postures and exercises are provided, alongside an examination of their practical applications in performance. The research reveals that consistent practice of these fundamental postures not only enhances physical strength, flexibility, and movement efficiency but also serves as a means of connecting the dancer's body and mind. The

postures contribute significantly to the aesthetic and emotional expression of Manipuri dance, particularly in terms of Prem Bhakti (devotion). This study underscores the importance of mastering basic postures in Manipuri dance as a key to achieving technical excellence and spiritual expression. The integration of traditional postures with modern practice highlights the enduring relevance of these movements in both preserving cultural heritage and shaping the future of the art form.

**Key Words:** Manipuri dance, Fundamental postures, Body alignment, Flexibility, Technical proficiency

### 01. Introduction:

Manipuri dance, one of the classical dance traditions of India, encapsulates the cultural and spiritual heritage of the northeastern state of Manipur. As a prominent classical dance form, its origins are deeply intertwined with the Vaishnavite traditions, particularly linked to the worship of Vishnu and Krishna, through the *bhakti* (devotion) movement (Kothari, 2002). Manipuri dance is more than a performance; it is an integral expression of the region's religious devotion, particularly evident in the *Ras Leela*, which narrates the divine love between Krishna and Radha. The dance is recognized for its gentle, fluid movements and the intricate coordination between grace and restraint, making it distinct among Indian classical dances.

The cultural significance of Manipuri dance extends far beyond its aesthetic appeal. It plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting the region's spiritual and cultural values. Every aspect of the dance, including the costume,

music, and expressions, contributes to the transmission of *bhakti rasa* (the sentiment of devotion) (Banerjee, 2014). It reflects the profound meditative state of the performer, who uses the dance as a medium to connect with the divine. According to Kothari (2002), the dance form's beauty lies in its combination of physical discipline and spiritual expression, emphasizing its meditative essence over mere performance.

At the heart of Manipuri dance is its set of fundamental postures, which provide the technical foundation essential for the dancer's performance. Mastering these postures is critical as they ensure the body's balance and alignment, allowing dancers to move gracefully while maintaining control and poise. The basic postures, such as *Chumna Leppa* (the primary standing position), *Sagol Firep* (a preparatory stance), and *Pheinamba* (squatting), are integral to maintaining physical equilibrium and emotional expression during performance. These postures, when executed correctly, facilitate fluid movement and ensure minimal strain on the body. As per the *Natyashastra*, the ancient treatise on performing arts, the codification of these postures reflects their importance in classical Indian dance (Gosh, 1995).

The significance of these postures extends beyond their technical utility. They are critical for setting the emotional tone of a dance performance, particularly in expressing devotion (*bhakti rasa*), which is central to Manipuri dance (Banerjee, 2014). The mastery of these postures is not only about physical precision but also about harmonizing the mind and body, allowing the dancer to convey deeper spiritual and emotional meanings. Scholars have emphasized that proper posture in classical Indian dance forms like Manipuri is essential for achieving a holistic connection between the mind, body, and spirit (Shankar, 2017). This is especially true for Manipuri dance, where subtlety and inner expression are more important than outward spectacle.

The study of Manipuri dance postures offers insight into how they contribute to both the technical and emotional dimensions of the dance. Key postures like *Khong Thinba* (foot beating) and *Khong Kaothokpa* (kicking out of the foot) play an essential role in the dance's dynamic quality. These movements, derived from the guidelines in the *Natyashastra*,

enable dancers to perform with both agility and grace (Bose, 1991). Furthermore, regular practice of these postures enhances flexibility and body control, essential for executing the complex sequences of Manipuri dance.

Objectives of the Study:

This paper aims to explore the technical and cultural significance of key postures and exercises in Manipuri dance, emphasizing their importance in the development of the dancer's proficiency. Specifically, the paper will:

1. Examine the technical aspects of the basic postures in Manipuri dance, including their role in shaping movement efficiency and performance quality.
2. Explore the cultural and spiritual significance of these postures, focusing on how they contribute to expressing *bhakti rasa* (devotion).
3. Investigate the importance of daily practice and warm-up exercises in mastering these postures, emphasizing their role in achieving physical readiness and mental focus.

By analyzing the fundamental postures of Manipuri dance, this study aims to highlight how these movements contribute to the overall art form, ensuring both technical precision and spiritual depth in performance. The insights gained from this research will contribute to the broader understanding of Manipuri dance and its place in the classical Indian dance tradition.

## 02. Literature Review:

The study of Manipuri dance, especially its postures and movements, draws heavily from classical texts and previous research that have documented the evolution of Indian classical dance forms. One of the foundational texts for Indian dance theory, the *Natyashastra*, written by Bharata Muni, provides an exhaustive guide on the technical aspects of dance, including body postures (*karanas*), movements (*angas*), and expressions (*abhinaya*) (Bose, 1991). While the *Natyashastra* primarily provides guidelines for all Indian classical dance forms, its influence on Manipuri dance is apparent in the structured movements and emphasis on grace and devotion.

Scholars have often discussed how Manipuri dance deviates from other Indian classical dances, such as Bharatanatyam and Kathak, in its subtlety and emphasis on smooth, flowing

movements. This fluidity is rooted in the tradition's spiritual background, where dance is not just an art form but a form of worship (Banerjee, 2014). The fundamental postures in Manipuri dance, such as Chumna Leppa and Sagol Firep, align with the spiritual ethos of the region, focusing more on inner expression than external display. In comparison to other classical forms, where postures may be sharp and geometrically aligned, Manipuri dance focuses on soft, circular movements, which reflect its connection to the bhakti (devotion) tradition.

Previous research has noted that, despite the codification in ancient texts, the understanding of postures and movement in Manipuri dance has evolved with time. Banerjee (2014) explains that while the ancient guidelines, particularly from the *Natyashastra*, continue to shape the dance's structure, the practice of Manipuri dance has incorporated regional and cultural influences, adapting to the local context. These changes are evident in how dancers interpret and perform key postures, blending tradition with individual expression. The interpretation of spiritual devotion through dance has remained constant, but the stylistic execution of movements has evolved with different generations of practitioners.

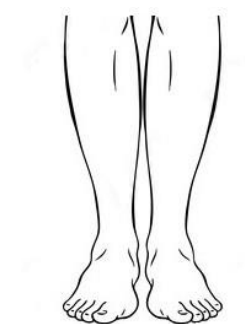
In recent years, scholars have also begun to explore the importance of daily exercises and warm-up routines, which, though not extensively mentioned in traditional texts, have become integral to mastering Manipuri dance. Research by Shankar (2017) highlights how contemporary practitioners emphasize the need for physical conditioning to achieve the balance and control necessary for performing the intricate postures of Manipuri dance. This aligns with the modern understanding of dance as not only a cultural practice but also a physically demanding discipline.

This paper builds on previous studies by focusing specifically on the technical aspects of Manipuri dance postures and their cultural significance. While many scholars have explored the spiritual aspects of the dance, there is a gap in literature that delves deeply into the practical, everyday exercises that dancers undertake to master these postures. By connecting ancient texts like the *Natyashastra* with contemporary practice, this research offers a unique perspective on how traditional dance forms can be both preserved and adapted in

a modern context. Furthermore, the focus on postures as a medium for expressing bhakti rasa highlights the ongoing relevance of these movements in maintaining the spiritual core of Manipuri dance.

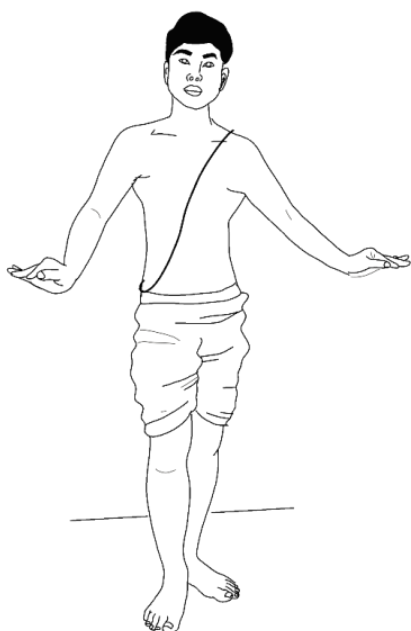
### 03. Basic Postures of Manipuri Dance

In the analysis of Manipuri dance movements, several basic postures of Manipuri dance can be identified. By studying these basic postures, it can be recognized that Manipuri dance is a well-founded dance art. These basic postures have the ability to maintain the balance of the body, which is especially essential for dance. A dancer must maintain these basic postures correctly throughout the dance. Accepted rules regarding how to handle the body including limbs during dance can also be identified in the Manipuri dance tradition. Achieving perfect posture is the primary objective for students. Perfect posture plays a crucial role in harmonizing the connection between the body and mind, a fundamental aspect of dance. Dancers must develop the ability to sense and manage the distribution of body weight on their feet according to various movements. Exact posture and foot positioning contribute to fluid and efficient motion. Consistent daily practice is essential to mastering good posture, aiming to move with minimal strain on the limbs while maximizing flexibility and efficiency. Engaging in warm-up exercises not only readies the body but also cultivates a positive mental attitude, promoting ease and confidence. It strongly influenced the creation of dynamic qualities of Manipuri dance. Some of the basic postures and important exercises of Manipuri Dance are given below:



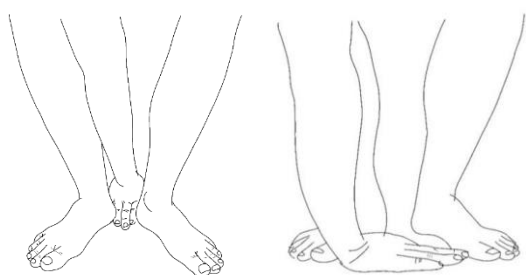
**Figure 1: Chumna Leppa**

Manipuri dance always started teaching on how to stand. (*Chumna Leppa*) (Figure 1). According to *Natyashastra* to stand properly known as *Samapada* (Gosh, The *Natyashastra*, Bharathi-Muni, Vol. I, 1995).



**Figure 2: Sagol Firep**

*Sagol Firep* is a kind of standing position. Before starting the Manipuri dance, the performers should stand in the *Sagol Firep*. While standing as the *Sagol Firep*, the right heel should be kept aside by the sole of the left foot. It should be kept in 45 degree (Devi A. R., Basics postures Manipuri Dance, 2023) (Figure 2).



**Figure 3: Standing Poes/ Jagoigi Ahanba Phirep**

The distance of the right heel and the sole of the left foot should be two or three fingers apart and the distance of the front of the feet must be a length of palm of the hand (Devi A. R., Basics postures Manipuri Dance, 2023) (Figure 3).



**Figure 4: Khujeng Nounabagi Exercise**

One should stand upright and extend their arms horizontally, aligning them parallel to the ground, and then clench their fingers into a fist. This action is aimed at sculpting the upper body's form. Subsequently, the individual should gradually rotate their wrists toward the body. Repeat this exercise consistently until it becomes a routine. This specific routine contributes to enhancing flexibility and elasticity in the wrists (Figure 4).

**Pushing of the chest:** Positioning the hands on the waist with a slight touch of the right toes to the ground creates this stance. Following this, the right chest is advanced forward, and the flexor part of the left leg slightly elevates while the right toes maintain contact with the ground. Simultaneously, the flexor part of the right leg ascends as the left toes touch the ground, and the chest moves towards the left in a coordinated manner



**Figure 5: Khut Thampham (The basic way of keeping hands)**

*Khut Thampham* is basic way of keeping hands. In Manipuri Dance form, there is a fix hand position. Hands should not be kept at very high or very low. It should be kept in the fix position (*Lengjum Mapada*). The hands should not be kept above the shoulder. It should be kept in front of the body at the level of the shoulder. The distance of the two hands should be equal to the length of the shoulder making a square length of the shoulder (Singh P. I., 2023) (Figure 5).



**Figure 6: Measurement of hand position**

The arms should always be in freely position. The armpit could not be squeezed. The armpit should be in the distance of a fist. The arms should be kept at a distance of golden mark from the end of the rib bone to the elbow (Figure 6).



**Figure 7: Mityengfam**

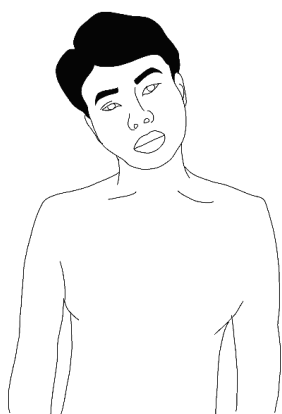
*Mityengfam* is the position of eyes. In Manipuri dance form, the eyes should look at the tips of the fingers,

humbly. This position of the eyes clearly shows that Manipuri dance is full of *Prem Bhakti* (Singh Y. B., Basic Postures of Manipuri Dance, 2022) (Figure 7).



**Figure 8: Pheinamba (Squatting position)**

*Pheinamba* is squatting position of Manipuri dance. While squatting, back part of the body should keep in straight, the buttock should not be pushed on the back or sides and the palms are kept in the thigh then shall start sitting till the tips of the fingers touch the knees. Manipuri dance the knees are mostly little bit concise (Singh M. T., Basic Postures Of Manipuri Dance, 2022) (Figure 8).



**Figure 9: Ngak Ki Thampham (Neck position)**

*Ngakki Thampham* is the neck position of Manipuri dance. Neck could not be moved in any way in the Manipuri dance. Neck should be slightly bent to the left or right side

with 45 degrees (Singh Y. B., Basic Postures Of Manipuri dancer, 2022) (Figure 9).



**Figure 10: Neck distance from the beauty bone to chin**

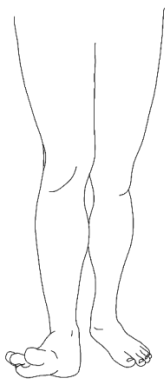
Neck distance from the beauty bone to chin should be a fist. Even if the dancer stands properly at that time also neck could not take in high and low position it could be same position which is given above (Devi P. L., 2022) (Figure 10).



**Figure 11: Khong Thinba (Foot beating)**

*Khong Thinba* means Foot Beating of Manipuri dance. Mainly *Khong Thinba* i.e., foot beating is used in both the male and the female dance form in Manipuri dance. When the right foot beating, the left foot keep in flat the heel of the right foot lifted up and the toes beating aside the left hallux. In the same way, when the left foot beating the right foot keeps in flat and the heel of the left foot lifted upward and the toes beating aside the right hallux. Both Knees are slightly bending. (Devi P. L., 2022) (Figure 11). According to

*Natyashastra* beating of feet is known as *Agratala Sanchar* (Gosh, The *Natyashastra*, Bharathi-Muni, Vol. I, 1995).



**Figure 12: Khong Kaothokpa (Kicking out of foot)**

*Khong Kaothokpa* is kicking out of foot. Mainly *Khong Kaothokpa* i.e., kicking out of foot is performed in male dances of Manipuri dance but sometimes it is also performed in female dances. When kicking out of foot, one of the feet should keep in flat. Aside of the hallux of the foot which keeps in flat another foot should kick out by the heel (Devi N. H., 2022). (Figure 12). According to *Natyashastra* beating of feet is known as *Anchitam* (Gosh, The *Natyashastra*, Bharathi-Muni, Vol. I, 1995).



**Figure 13: Khong Thangatpa (Lifting of foot)**

*Khong Thangatpa* is lifting up of foot. In Manipuri dance, male should lift up their foot high but it has a level of lifting the foot. Male should lift their foot up to the knee level with both knees are slightly bent. The lifted foot keeps in flat with parallel to the thigh of the same foot but female could not lift up the foot like the male. If the foot is lifting up it

should be lifting up to the part of the leg above the foot and below the ankle. When female take the role of male, female also performed in such a way that male performed (Figure 13) (Singh S. S., 2023).

#### 04. Discussion:

The foundational postures and techniques of Manipuri dance play a crucial role in maintaining the integrity and essence of this traditional art form. Each posture, such as Chumna Leppa (standing posture), Sagol Firep (45-degree stance), and Pheinamba (squatting position), is designed not only for aesthetic grace but also for achieving balance, alignment, and fluidity in movement. These postures form the backbone of Manipuri dance, enabling dancers to execute complex movements with precision and control. Proper posture helps in maintaining the body's equilibrium, a key element in sustaining the fluid, circular movements characteristic of Manipuri dance.

Mastering these postures significantly enhances a dancer's overall performance, as they promote physical stability, flexibility, and coordination. Additionally, correct posture fosters mental focus, which is essential in a dance form that blends physicality with spiritual expression. Dancers must develop the ability to sense and manage the distribution of their body weight while moving seamlessly between positions. This harmonious connection between body and mind is fundamental to Manipuri dance's expressive quality, elevating the dancer's presence on stage.

However, achieving perfection in these postures is not without challenges. One of the primary difficulties dancers face is the physical endurance required to maintain the precise alignment of the body for extended periods. Maintaining postural accuracy while executing dynamic movements demands continuous practice and strength conditioning. Furthermore, there is a mental challenge in developing the awareness and sensitivity needed to control subtle movements, such as the positioning of the neck or the precise angle of the feet. Overcoming these challenges requires

discipline, dedication, and an in-depth understanding of the dance's technical and spiritual aspects.

## 05. Conclusion:

In conclusion, this analytical study highlights the pivotal role that basic postures play in the practice, technique, and tradition of Manipuri dance. These foundational postures, such as Chumna Leppa, Sagol Firep, and Pheinamba, not only provide the structural basis for a dancer's physical alignment and movement efficiency but also serve as vital conduits for expressing the spiritual and emotional essence of the art form. The research demonstrates that mastering these postures requires a blend of physical discipline and mental focus, fostering a harmonious connection between the dancer's body and mind.

Furthermore, the integration of these postures into daily practice and their continued emphasis in contemporary training ensure that Manipuri dance remains deeply connected to its cultural roots while evolving in modern contexts. The study underscores the importance of these postures in enhancing flexibility, balance, and control, thereby enabling dancers to achieve both technical precision and spiritual depth. By exploring the intersection of tradition and modernity, this research not only contributes to the academic understanding of Manipuri dance but also affirms the enduring relevance of its postural foundation in both preserving cultural heritage and shaping the future of the art.

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