

Creating an Indigenous Aerophone of The Sikkim's Jogis: The Baraat

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Abstract

The Sikkimese Jogis represent an ancient population of people who primarily belong to the Nepali community of Sikkim. Although small in size, this group of people has a unique tradition, culture and cultural patterns of their own. A very important aspect of this culture is represented by the ritualistic practices performed by the Jogis as a daily life activity. An indispensable part of these rituals is constituted by the uncanny sounds produced by a very unique, ancient wind instrument of the Jogis called the "BARAAT". This paper primarily focuses on (a) the making procedure of the baraat (b) the playing style of the baraat and (c) the culture associated with it.

Keywords: Aerophone, Jogi, ritualistic, Music, instrument, Sikkim, baraat.

Introduction:

Sikkim, the beautiful mountainous state located in the Eastern Himalayan region of India, is a land of rich cultural heritage. This hilly state can be considered as a repertoire of marvellous ethnic art and traditions. The amalgamation of a large number of ethnic tribes and communities makes Sikkim a melting-pot of fascinating ethnic cultures. The primary communities residing in the state are the Lepchas, Bhutia and the Nepalis. The Lepchas, according to ancient history, are the original inhabitants of the land. The Bhutias also hold an important position in adding to the cultural diversity of the state and are regarded as the foremost inhabitants of Sikkim. Amidst the pride of these two cultures, the Sikkimese Nepalis add a soothing flavor that further enhances the dynamic cultural ethnicity of Sikkim.

A large part of the population of Sikkim belongs to the Nepali community. During the year 1890, a large number of immigrants from Nepal settled down in Sikkim. Today, 60% of Sikkim's population belongs to the Nepali community sub-divided into numerous classes which include Gurung, Rai, Magar, Brahmins, Chettri, Newar, Kami, Damai, etc.

These people follow Hindu traditions (Joshi, 2004). Accordingly, they stick to a caste system essentially followed by Hindu society. This caste system of the Sikkimese Nepalis is mainly represented by the Bahun (Brahmin), Chettri (Kshatriya), Vaishya and Shudra. There are numerous subcastes of the Nepali community which fall into the above-mentioned four classes (Yishey, 2017)

Music and dance form an indispensable part of these communities. Every sub-caste of the Nepali community has its own set of unique traditions and style of music and art. However, one of the most unconventional musical practices that have been witnessed throughout these

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communities is that of the Sikkimese 'Jogis'. The present paper will primarily focus on the culture, music and style of musical practices led by the Sikkimese Jogis and also shed light on their ancestral origin.

Origin and History of The Jogis of Sikkim:

The term "Jogi" basically refers to a yogi or a person who dedicates his life to the practice of yoga as a daily ritual. After several years of this practice, generation after generation, this group of people finally came together and led to the formation of a larger group known as the "JOGIS". These practitioners of yoga are essentially followers of Lord Shiva and hence worship Guru Gorakhnath from the lineage of Lord Shiva (Jogi K., 2022). Guru Gorkhnath is considered to be the most intelligent devotee among the Navnath Gurus and is believed to be the incarnation of Lord Shiva. The Navnath Gurus here refer to Matsyendranath, Gorakshanath or Gorakhnath, Jalandharnath, Kanifnath, Gahininath, Bhartinath, Revananath, Charpatinath and Naganath or Nageshnath (Jogi R., 2020).

In India, the Jogis registered their presence around the 13th century. As per the reports of the population census conducted by the British Raj in the year 1891, the Jogis were categorized as "vagrants", which referred to a person who moves professionally from one place to another for the amelioration of the society. The population number of the Jogis as reported in this census was somewhere around 2,14,546.

Even in recent times, the Jogi community of Sikkim is quite small in terms of its population. As per the latest survey of the All-Sikkim Gorakhnath Jogi Welfare Association, the Jogi community of Sikkim consists of only 520 persons including both adults as well as children. The Jogis of Sikkim mainly inhabits the areas of Tinik, Jarong, Sadam Suntaley, Bermick, Soreng, Budang Linchong, Kamling, Richenpong, Hatidhunga, Padamchey, Pachak, Rhenok, Aritaar, Nandok, Lossing and Bagaykhola in Sikkim (Yishey, 2017).

Society of the Jogis:

The society of the Jogis is often considered to be both educationally as well as economically backward. A large part of the population engages in terrace cultivation as a means of survival. A kind of social stratification exists amongst the Jogis in the form of Bhoirungs (Jogi R., 2018). A total of 100 Bhoirungs originally existed within the Jogis. However, only 12 Bhoirungs can be found in Sikkim today. These are Kaal Bhoirung, Narsingha Bhoirung, Thingala Bhoirung, Sueta Bhoirung, Baal Bhoirung, Shakti Bhoirung, But or Buttuki Bhoirung, Agni Bhoirung, Panchamukhi Bhoirung, Rudhra Bhoirung, and Akaala Bhoirung (Jogi B., 2021).

Jogi Music: Rituals of The Dark:

Most people living in the hilly areas of Sikkim often experience uncanny sounds during late nights at around 2 a.m. Although the local people are quite familiar with these sounds, it can be a cause of fear or anxiety for anyone new to the place. These uncanny sounds are generally

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followed by high-pitched barks of dogs who are in close vicinity. This entire scenario can seem to be a little scary, however, this marks nothing but the presence of Jogis performing their usual chore in that particular area. Along with the unusual sounds, several indecipherable chants or mantras can also be heard which indicates a ritual in progress.

During this study, the researcher conducted interviews with a few Jogis of Sikkim, which revealed some interesting facts about the process as well as the significance of the rituals performed by the Jogis. The interview also revealed why Jogis perform such a tedious job of roaming about on moonless nights even amidst the extreme cold conditions that normally prevail in Sikkim

The Jogis primarily consider themselves the disciples of Gorakhnath. They are also sometimes addressed as the 'pheriwalas' across Sikkim, Darjeeling and Nepal. The reason behind this is that, although the Jogis have a large number of Bhairungs as discussed earlier, only 12 among these are entitled to perform these rituals and are referred to as the 'pheriwalas'. Thus, all pheriwalas are jogis but all jogis are not pheriwalas. The Jogis believe that it was Lord Shiva who sent them to this planet to eradicate evil powers (Jogi R., 2018). According to them, they must protect and safeguard human beings from evil spirits that reside in this world. The rituals are normally performed late at night primarily because the jogis believe that it is the midnight period when evil spirits and powers are supremely active. As a result, it is the perfect time to come out and eliminate them through ritualistic procedures. The ritualistic procedures carried out by the Jogis during this period are quite intense. During this period, the Jogis select a particular area, for example, a specific village or locality. They roam about in this area at midnight and visit every house. Although, they do not make an entry into the house, however keeping a small distance, they perform the most important part of their ritual. They blow out a high-pitched Dhwani or sound with the help of a unique horn-like wind instrument called the 'BARAT'. This sound is usually quite loud and can be heard from even a distance. The residents of the locality also immediately become aware of the presence of Jogis in their area. The uncanny music of the BARAT is followed by some spiritual mantras which are enchanted by the Jogis in a manner, often difficult to be interpreted by the common people. It is believed that the sounds of the BARAT and the spiritual mantras have a divine power that eliminates the evil spirits and powers encircling the households of the village or the locality in which the rituals are performed by the Jogis (Jogi R., 2020).

Interestingly, the ritualistic procedures of the Jogis do not end merely by visiting the households at night. The very next day, the Jogis come back to the locality which they visited the night before, to complete one last chore. During the day, they visit every family in this locality. People belonging to these families honor the Jogis by providing them with offerings like rice, dal, vegetables, fruits and money. These offerings primarily symbolize the gratefulness of the society towards the Jogis, who relentlessly perform these tedious rituals to free the society from evil powers (Jogi J., 2021).

Although, it is largely believed that the Jogis practice the spiritual activities to eliminate any kind of evil spirits that may prevail in the society, however, there is another belief that highlights the reason behind the ritualistic practices of the Jogis. This belief can be traced back to ancient times when a dynastic rule prevailed in Sikkim as well as Nepal. According

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to this belief, the rulers of those dynasties employed the Jogis to move about in different areas and bring in information regarding the well-being of the common people. They were also instructed to report any kind of problem or issues that emerged in the kingdom. To perform these tasks, the Jogis specifically selected the nighttime as most of the evil activities were thought to occur during these times. This practice persisted over the years and eventually led to the creation of a ritualistic lifestyle of the Jogi people (Jogi B., 2021).

The Baraat:

Baraat, as mentioned earlier, is the traditional wind instrument of the Jogis of Sikkim. Apart from the name 'Baraat', this unique aerophone is also known by the names "Feri" or "Nath". The most distinctive feature of this aerophone is that, in contrast to conventional aerophones, 'Baraat' has just one hole, which is used only for blowing. Due to the absence of finger holes, the texture, as well as tone of the sound produced by this aerophone completely, depends on the blowing technique of the player (Jogi L. B., 2019). Hence, the strength of the sound produced is directly proportional to the blowing pressure applied by the player. Talking about its shape, the 'baraat' resembles a horn. This is because it is made up of an animal horn. The size of the baraat, thus, depends on the size of the animal horn, of which it is made. However, any horned animal cannot be used for this purpose. Baraat is specifically made from the horn of 'Indian Antelope' or blackbuck. The making of baraat is quite a sophisticated process, which involves extensive processing, cutting and sterilizing of the horn to convert it into a playable form (Jogi B., 2021).

Making of the 'Baraat':

The researcher, through extensive interviews and discussions with the Sikkimese Jogis, explored the different processes and steps involved in the making of the Baraat.

The required tools involved in the making process have been listed below:

1. Horn of the appropriate animal
2. Wooden hammer
3. Large water bucket
4. Hacksaw blade
5. Water for boiling purposes
6. Small pieces of bamboo

The steps involved in the making process of Baraat are as follows:

1. The process starts with the procurement of the horn of the Blackbuck or the Indian Antelope. The Indian antelope is locally known as the "*Krushnasar Mriga*". Apart from this, other local names such as "*Kalabautia*" and "*Baliharin*" are also used for it. The Blackbuck is a medium-sized animal with a shoulder measuring around 80 cm and a weight of about 40 kg. The spiral horns of the blackbuck are the most distinguishing feature of it. These horns may grow up to 50 cm in size. But sometimes the horn size may be as large as 60-65 cm. The females generally bear a yellow body coat. In the case of the males, the body coat turns black as they grow older (Panda, 2019). Generally, the Jogis, during ancient times, used to procure the horn of the

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blackbuck from hunters. However, in recent times, poaching and hunting is strictly prohibited and is a punishable offense under the law.

(Note - This article does not aim to encourage activities related to hunting. The researcher has only attempted to highlight the age-old technique involved in the making of baraat).



Fig 1. Blackbuck or the Indian antelope

1. The next step involves the separation of the hard external horn from the inner bony structure. For this, the raw horn has to be buried under a surface consisting of damp soil. This burial will provide conditions which will in turn encourage the raw horn to decay. As the raw horn begins to rot and decay due to the action of different microorganisms, it will slowly initiate its separation from the inner bony structure. Finally, as decaying proceeds, the bony structure gets completely separated leaving behind the outer horn.
2. Another alternative for separation of the outer horn can be boiling. For this processing, the raw horn is put in a large water pot which is kept to boil for about two to three hours. While the boiling continues, the water needs to be stirred every two to three minutes. Apart from this, the condition of the horn should be checked at regular intervals to look for any changes that may occur during this process. The boiling process should be continued till the horn becomes softer in texture. As the horn becomes softer and the boiling process attains completion, the horn should be immediately taken out from the water pot. This soft horn should now be slowly beaten with the help of a wooden hammer in order to separate the outer horn from the inner bony structure. As the bony structure is removed by the beating process, a more refined version of the horn, i.e., the outer horn is received.

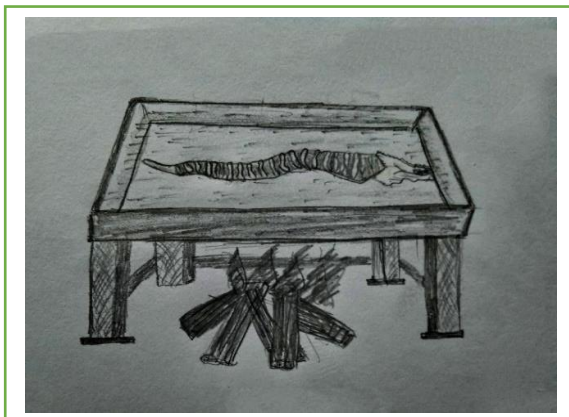
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Fig 2. Boiling process of the raw horn under fire



Fig 3. Hammering of the horn to separate the inner bony structure

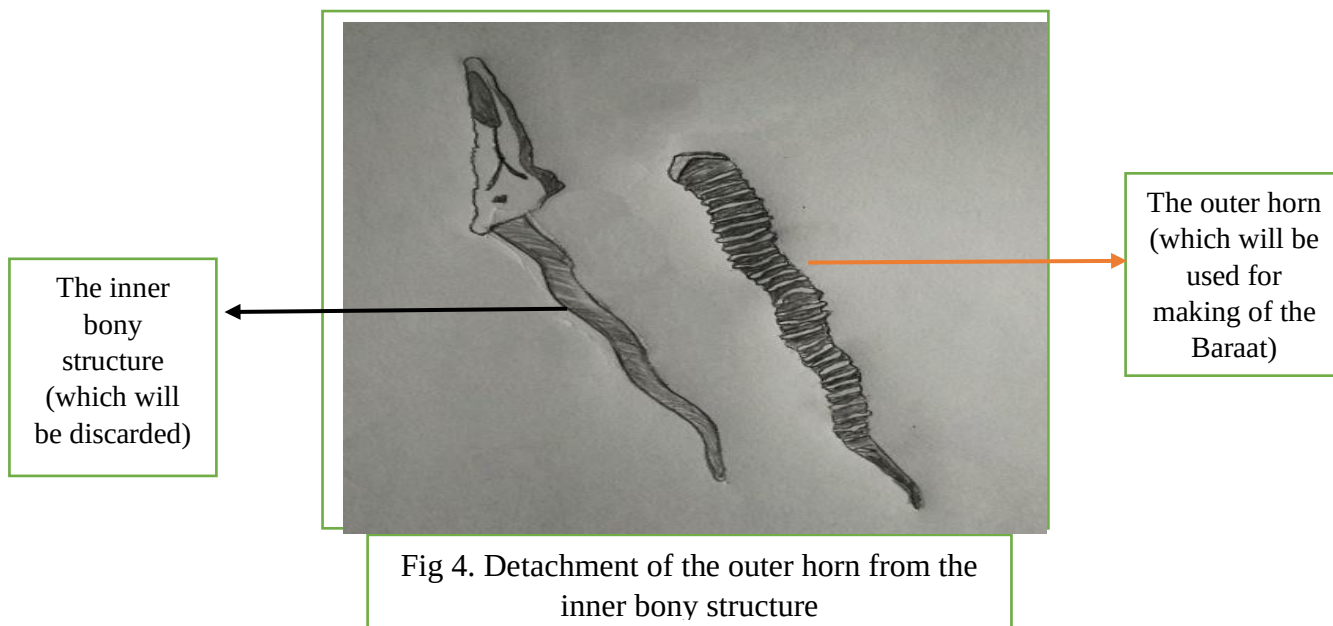


Fig 4. Detachment of the outer horn from the inner bony structure

3. Even after much processing of the horn, it still retains an unpleasant putrid smell. In order to get rid of this, the horn is kept under the sun for about a week. This not only helps the horn to dry but also removes any kind of smell or dirt that may be present in it.

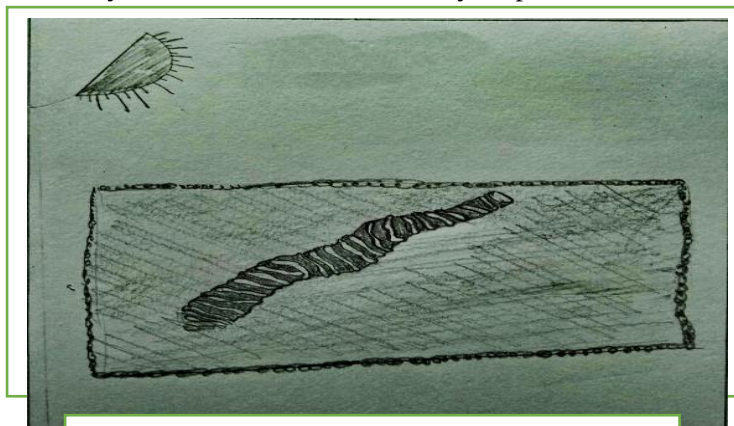


Fig 5. Drying the horn under sun

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As the horn is now dry and solid, it can now be cut for the creation of a mouth hole. For the cutting purpose, a hacksaw blade or any traditional cutter can be used. With the help of the hacksaw blade, a portion on the top of the horn is cut in a rounded manner so that a mouth hole of appropriate size can be made. Due to the separation of the inner bony structure, the inside of the corn horn is now empty, filled with vacuum. However, the extreme top of the horn is solid in nature. For making of the mouth hole, this solid part of the horn has to be separated. Hence, cutting is usually initiated at the extreme top of the horn and is continued until the empty vacuum is reached. As the point of vacuum is reached, this point has to be selected for making of the mouth hole. For this, cutting has to be done in a rounded manner as mentioned above.

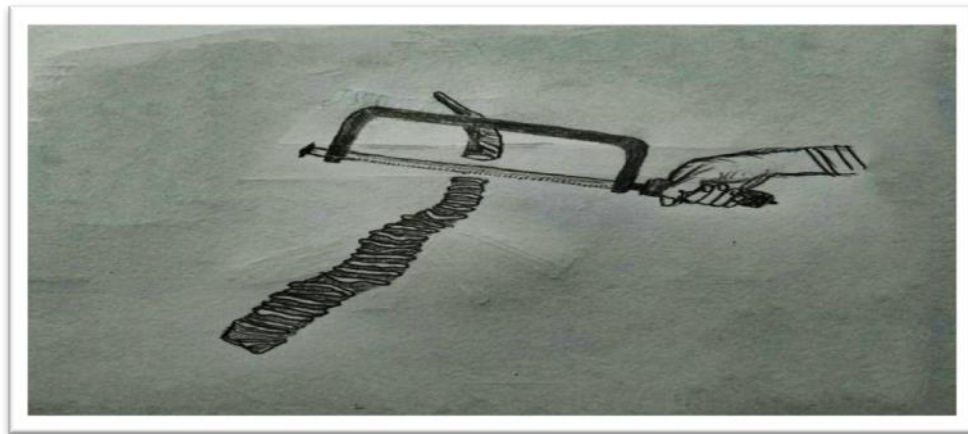


Fig 6. Cutting of the terminal end of the horn for creation of the mouth hole

4. After making of the mouth hole, it is usually rubbed with the help of a sand paper for making it smooth. Rubbing not only gives a smooth texture to the mouth hole but also aids in better sound production.
5. Although the mouth hole can now be used for sound production, making of the mouth hole cannot be considered as the completion of this process as the Jogis perform an additional step after this. This step involves the making of a detachable mouth piece. The mouth piece is basically made of bamboo, having a length of about 2-3 inch. The diameter of the mouth piece is kept at a size, same as that of the diameter of the horn's mouth hole, so that the mouth piece can easily be fitted into the mouth-hole whenever necessary. For better attachment, a cotton cloth can be wrapped around the joining point of the mouth piece and the mouth hole. This would result in a stronger fixation. Although the mouth piece is a very important element of the baraat, it is not used regularly for blowing. The Jogis use the mouth piece only during holy occasions. However, during performance of their usual ritualistic chores at nights, the Jogis detach the mouth piece from the horn, and play merely by using the mouth hole (Jogi B. , 2021).

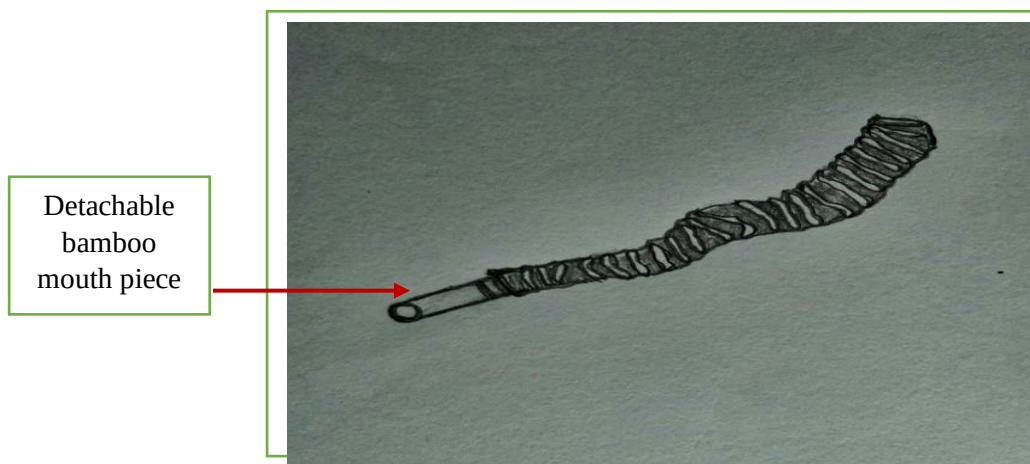
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Fig 7. Attachment of the bamboo piece for creation of the mouth-piece

Playing Technique of Baraat: The orientation of the baraat while playing is kept in such a way that the mouth hole lies towards the face of the player. For sound production, the player must first carry out a deep inhalation, following which a strong blow of air must be given out through the mouth hole. While blowing the air, the player must use his lips to create a vibration. This will in turn enhance the quality of sound and provide that unique, uncanny touch to it, very much peculiar to ‘Baraat’.

Images Procured During the Research Work

Fig 8. Picture depicting a real ‘Baraat’



Fig 9. Researcher playing the ‘Baraat’ during participant observation with a local Jogi during night time

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Fig 10. The researcher collecting information during an interview with a Jogi



Fig 11. The researcher during an interview with eminent person and treasurer of Gorakhnath Jogi Welfare Association, Shri Bhanu Jogi

The Jogis of Sikkim forms a small yet very significant part of the Sikkimese society. The Jogi people have some unique cultural patterns which distinguish them from any other community of Sikkim. The ancient history, strong cultural beliefs, and unique traditional attire portray the rich cultural heritage of the Jogis. However, the most important aspect of this heritage is the ritualistic practices performed by the Jogis, which makes them very different from any other such group. These ritualistic practices not only depict the culture of the Jogis but also uphold their identity in the Sikkimese society. The most fascinating element of these ritualistic practices is certainly the use of unique traditional aerophones of the Jogis commonly known as Baraat. The Baraat is a horn-like wind instrument that is blown by the Jogis while they roam about from place to place to eliminate the evil powers of the society. It is largely believed that the sound produced by the Baraat is so pure and divine that it can hunt down anything evil prevalent within the society. Technically speaking, the Baraat is nothing but a very refined and processed version of the Blackbuck horn, making it suitable for sound production. In modern days, poaching or killing of the Indian antelope or the blackbuck is strictly prohibited under Law, hence, the architectonics involved in the making of the baraat is completely based on the ancient oral history of the Jogi which has passed down from generation to generation. Currently, the Baraats used by the Sikkimese Jogis are the ones

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preserved since ancient times. Some Jogis even break up a Baraat to create two pieces from it. This helps them increase the number of Baraat which can then be used by a greater number of people.

Although the Baraat is quite different from the conventional aerophones due to its unique structure and lack of finger holes, there exists an ancient horn-like aerophone that is quite similar to the Baraat. This instrument is known as the 'Shringa'. It is also known by the name 'Kombu' in Tamil language. Similar to the Baraat, the Shringa cannot produce many notes, as well, due to the absence of finger holes (Krishnaswami, 1965). As a result, the sound produced by both these instruments completely depends upon the blowing pressure applied by the player. A high pitch or low pitch sound would depend solely on the blowing technique. Most of the time, the sound produced by these horn-like aerophones seems to be monotonous in nature. However, apart from the similarities, there are a number of differences as well, that exist between these two hornpipes. While the 'Shringa' is made of a buffalo horn, the 'Baraat' is exclusively made of the horn of a blackbuck. Even though both these hornpipes are conical in structure, the 'Shringa' has a curved shape that forms an arch-like structure. However, the 'Baraat' has a linear, spiral-shaped body without the presence of any curvature. The mouthpiece in Shringa is fixed. On the other hand, the 'Baraat' consists of a detachable mouthpiece, along with the presence of the mouth-hole. This 'Baraat' can be played both by detaching or attaching the mouthpiece.

Hence, it is well understood that although the 'Baraat' and the 'Shringa' are ancient wind instruments belonging to the animal-horn family, they are unique and unconventional in their way. This also implies that the 'Baraat' not only differs from the conventional flutes but also other hornpipes as well which portrays its uniqueness and at the same time creates a fascination for it.

Conclusion:

The Jogis have always been an integral part of the Sikkimese society. Their unique cultural patterns have always fascinated researchers as well as people in general. The use and creation of the Baraat depict a very important aspect of the Jogi culture. The Baraat not only symbolizes the culture of the Jogis but also forms a very significant musical asset of the Sikkimese society. However, the absence of an ample amount of data has restricted its documentation.

The present research work is the first initiative that has been undertaken to understand the different dimensions associated with the 'Baraat'.

The current study has attempted to craft documentation of the making of the 'Baraat', its playing techniques along with its cultural significance amongst the Jogis of Sikkim. This, in turn, would enrich the contemporary understanding of the architectonics involved in the making of horn-like wind instruments in general. The study has also revealed the specific times, rituals and occasions during which this ancient ethnic aerophone is played. Hence, this study has paved a new path in exploring ethnic musical instruments made of animal horns. The study has also shed light on the amount of cultural, ethnic and most importantly musical diversity that exists within the indigenous communities of Sikkim. This study also promotes the preservation of these unique musical instruments which symbolizes the identity of the

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Jogi community. The concerned authorities should, thus, take necessary steps to create awareness amongst the younger generation of Sikkim, more specifically, the Jogi community, which would help in retaining the cultural diversity of the state.

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