



## A STUDY ON PALA: A FOLK ART OF ODISHAN CULTURE

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**ABSTRACT**

The folk culture of Odisha has been enriched a lot by several folk art traditions. Pala is one of the unique traditions of Odisha's folk art and culture. Due to its presentation style Pala is still obtained a special position in Odishan folk dance and music. Though several research scholars of Odia literature have studied and analyzed the various angles of Odia poetry, drama, folksongs and folk literature, and have written their well-thought views and analysis but the 'Pala' culture of Odisha has not caught the attention of anyone. The history of its origin is yet to be unfolded. In case one fails to find out evidential facts regarding the origin and development, a country's culture then on the basis of several series of events surrounded to that notion one can finally reach a conclusion. Pala performances also inspire people to have inclination towards God and religion.

**KEYWORDS :** PALA, ODISHA, FOLK, CULTURE

According to some, the word 'Pala' has originated from a Sanskrit word called 'Palyatey'. The sole aim of 'Pala' is to propagate the divine value or the importance of God. Pala singers only try to inculcate devotional awareness among the mass people through their performances, before the mass audience. Pala performances advise people to be devoted to God and teach them to be believers of God and religion. As these things are taught through Pala, hence many have opined that this has originated from the root word 'Palyatey'. And there are some, who oppose this opinion and belief, say that 'Pala' is not only the medium which teaches people about God and religion but also the same thing can be done through the medium of drama, acting etc. These other mediums like drama, acting can also be considered as 'Pala', as opined by some scholars. The 'Pala' singer who first performed on a particular topic called 'Alankar', the second or subsequent 'Pala' performer had to follow the ending lines of his predecessor or also had to recite a poem in a conclusive style. According to some other critics, the word 'Pala' has originated only from the mode of Pala singing. One who occupies the main position in Pala performance is called singer. Those who assist the singer as co-performers or also who repeat the lines sung by the singer are called 'Palia'. As they imitate and repeat the lines of a singer they are called 'Palia'. In 'Pala' performance, this method of imitation was called 'Palia' and in course of time this word 'Palia', was transformed by a chorus group, a single singer first use to sing a line of the song and then the same line or stanza is repeated by the co-singer of that group. Besides, Pala songs this type of song performance also staged in higher level musical programmes. With the publication of Odia dictionary, the 'Pala' singers in those days used to participate in various competitive 'Pala' programmes known as 'Badi-Pala'. During the 'Pala' competitions the pala singers used to argue and criticise their singer counterparts through their performances and for this war of words and noisy scenes use to occur there. So in view of this type of situation the dictionary writers had a possibility termed this pala as a noisy event. In Odia encyclopaedias 'Pala' has been termed as Utsav or function, even has been mentioned as a noisy with a confusing meaning, but a dictionary is essential as 'Pala' has been existing since long. But it would be a futile attempt to find the meaning of 'Pala's origin in a dictionary. But the founders of 'Pala' perhaps have given this meaning by studying the movement of 'Pala' and its nature. 'Pala' is usually organised on the occasion of special function. here is a plenty of music in the Pala. But it would not be appropriate to name it as music. There is enough dances in Thia-pala, but it would not be appropriate to say it a dance form. It is worth mentionable that there is another example which proves that Pala of Odisha belongs to ancient times. By studying the

Purbaranga described in Bharat Muni's composition 'Natyashastra' and the Purbaranga followed even today during the performance of Pala subject matter, we come to know that there is much similarity in these two. As described in the 'Natyashastra'-Purbaranga there are three types of Purbaranga viz. 'Bikrutha', 'Chaturastu', 'Nyasra', we have to do further study and research about the Purbaranga needed for the subject matters of Pala. Here some meaningful descriptions have only been mentioned. There are eleven alphabets in every 'Pada' or 'stanza'. It comprises four stanzas or 'Pada' of this type. It will be a song of 'Chatara taal'. There need to be four 'Sannipat' (strilung with both the hands) three 'laya (Druta, Madhya, Bilambati) three 'Jati', four 'Paribarta' (sound of Taala) and three 'pani' (that means an expert of musical instrument when strikes with his thumb to play the music). The Natyashastra is believed to have been composed about two thousand years ago. Through these descriptive performances religious meanage idealism and social discipline etc. were instilled in the minds of people. The drama or plays have originated from these tale or story descriptions. The examples of such tales descriptions are found today in the Jhankada's sarala temple of Odisha where the Mahabharat epic is read out daily in a traditional way before the devotees. Earlier these stories were perhaps imaginary ones or the written stories were told before the group of people. In course of time, several creations have changed or even have become extinct. But this 'Thia-pala' of Odisha has surprisingly been kept intact. The serial wise entry of its performance in the stage, the musical sounds of the musical instruments and the forms of compositions like Dhruba, Shuskabakrushta, Mangalastuti, Abrutti Padabikhyepa, Parikrama, Parigeeta act, Abakarushtha, Anucha Uchharam, the interaction called Trigata between the characters like Sutradhara Bidusaka and Pariparshuska (The side actors or associate actors) the humor or laughter scenes created during the pronunciation of 'Heu' during this interaction the arguments presented by 'Bidusaka' and the 'Bachanika' etc. which were presented years ago are also performed today in the same traditional way. the performers and actors who have been following the ancient and traditional rules of this classical form of performance for years and years are truly commendable for keeping this art form intact, these traditional performers. These persons are the pride of this native land. This 'Natyashastra' is the only strong evidence which can prove the ancient nature of the 'pala' art form. There is no other drama form in other states which is intimately related to the Purbaranga mentioned in the Natyashastra as like Odisha's 'Thia Pala'. For the research of Natyashastra the requirements are the base, background and examples. The way in which the Natyashastra has made a detailed analysis of Chaturastha Purbarang composers who

composed the 'Pala' or 'Pali' had observed this very minutely. As the performance style found in 'Pala' is almost according to the rules of otherwise there would not have been so much similarity. By studying Natyashastra no one can try to do the alphabetical application in other such art form. But there are several examples which show that 'Dhruba' was composed by following the 'Natyashastra' and some other rules and process of Natyashastra were following during some compositions. While doing 'Baithaki-pala' the pala book is usually read by one person. It is said that telling an imaginary story is the previous form of drama, then reading out a book in a dramatic manner is also considered as the modified form of its previous form. But it cannot be called as 'Rupaka' or 'Drushyakabya'. In a Pala performance the puja rituals of five Hindu deities viz. Lord Ganesh, Lord Narayana, Lord Rudra (Shiva), Ambikey (Goddess Durga), Bhaskara (The Sun God) are done as per the tradition. And Lord Satyanarayan is regarded as the representative or symbol of these five deities (Pancha Debata). The performers doing these 'Pala' shows use to wear king like or royal type of garments. They use colourful sarees, dhoti or Chudidaar, Pyjama etc. as their costumes. Over these garments the performers also wear shining 'Ghagras', their chest portions covered with decorative chest-guards, wear a pair of traditional ear-pendants, with a shining crown like cap on the head decorated with feathers and jewellerys, attracted necklace around the neck, a belt worn around like the waist, bracelets worn around the artists Kajal near the eye-lashes, a tip of sandalwood paste and vermilion applied on the forehead, jingles around the feet etc. a muffler worn around the shoulders. This was the look of appearance of a Pala performer which was looking like a 'Gandharba'.

There has been a wrong notion among many that there is no uniqueness and specialties of Odia and Odisha. Odia people have always been on the back foot regarding propagation of Odisha's culture. Pala' singer use to hold a pair of brass (Metallic) bells (Ginni) and a feather like brush called chamara in his hands. The 'Bayaka' or assistant singer holds the Odissi Mrudanga (Dhol or drum) and the other assistant performers hold brass made large size hand bells in pairs which are called 'Jhanja'. Apart from this Pala performers also use to hold a pairs of 'Daskathi' traditional musical instruments along with conch. The performers use to play these traditional musical instruments as per the required situations of their performance. In every Pala troupe there are normally two or three Pala performers. These performers imitate or follow the main Pala singer. They also use to clap during the performance. During the dramatic scenes, they play different characters. When the Pala singer sings and explains the subject matter then these performers support him completely by singing Heu, meaning alright. These performers also memories and know the Pala songs and when the singer leaves the song incomplete the song likes by singing.

The traditional costume of Pala which had a royal book is being termed as Islamic or Maratha and is being replaced with a new type of costume for Pala. This new change need to be analyzed. Now a day's some highly qualified and talented male and female Pala artists are performing Pala in a decent way, which is a great pride for Odia people. Pala is completely a classical and traditional drama art of our Odisha. If a performer of Odissi Dance would perform in modern costumes instead of traditional Odissi costume, then it would look unconventional. Likewise if the same condition happens in our Pala of Odisha then it would be a matter of concern. The Pala has been a popular and educative medium of entertainment for the people of Odisha. Pala is the pride of Odisha the religious propagators and saints in the ancient times were regarded and honored by the people.

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