



THE INEVITABILITY OF JAGANNATH CULT IN THE CULTURE OF ODISHA AND ITS IMPACT ON THE TRADITION OF ODISHI

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ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial, the elegant tradition of Odishi has been a vital part of the cult of Shree Jagannath. Odishi dance, performed in accompaniment with Odishi music, traces back its sources to the Mahari tradition, performed in the temple of Lord Jagannath and later refurbished as the philosophy of the Devadasis and the Gotipua art. Odishi music, that projects an innate intimacy between the poetical theme and the musical domain, was originally the brain behind the Maharis and the Gotipuas. Odishi dance form of today is largely a reconstruction of the Mahari and the Gotipua styles, both of which retain their identities in the same. Apart from that, the entire process finds its connect with Lord Jagannath and the same is evident from the carvings of Odishi dancers on ancient temples. Both the Odishi and the Jagannath culture are symbiotic in relationship, bolstering each other in many ways.

KEYWORDS : Odishi, Jagannath, Cult, Music, Dance

The temple of Lord Shree Jagannath, originally constructed by Raja Ananta Varman Chodaganga Deva with the finishing touches given by his grandson Ananga Bhima Dev during 12th century AD, acts as the spiritual epicenter wherein the people bring their artistic pursuits to the fore. It finds its mention in the four abodes (Dhamas) of the divine, instituted by Adi Shankaracharya. Not just for the people of Odisha, but the temple of Lord Jagannath is an umbrella that congregates underneath, all differences on a global denomination, encompassing universal brotherhood. Moreover, the cult stands proof as a synthesis of the Vaishnavite and the Shaivite traditions, and gracefully assimilates the aura of native religious practices along with Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism as well. May it be the Pattachitra paintings or the Geeta Govinda composed by poet Jayadev, the cultural entity of Lord Jagannath transgresses geographical boundaries and promotes spiritual sustenance. It is a matter of great pride for the netizens Odisha to boast of the presiding deities of the temple, Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra, portrayed in black, white and yellow, standing as vivid representations of the major races of humanity.

The ceremonial history of Lord Jagannath exposes the grandeur of Jagannath cult and the profundity of its thematic beliefs that is deep rooted in the traditional setback of Odisha. Its feature of syncretism amasses spiritual faculties from divergent religious trends. Moreover, Jagannath cult is loosely based on the thematic composites of conscience, heritage and religion. Engrossed in the sublime component of Sanatana, Jagannath culture is an embodiment religious harmony. It balances the essence of Shaiva, Shakta, Nirguna and Saguna. Lord Jagannath has rightly identified with Lord Buddha, taken as the ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

The major ingredients of Odia society are literature, art and music, all of which find their seed in the temple of Lord Jagannath. The classicality of the Odishi dance form has evolved as a ritual in the temple itself. The ritualistic dance of the Maharis seeks its provenance in the temple as well. During the reign of Chodaganga Deva, the Mahari tradition gained eminence when he encouraged the art to be performed in the temple. Later, this gave way to Devadasis who carried forth the tradition, with the same enthusiasm and elegance. Similar was the case of the Gotipua dance, which was performed outside the temple.

With the advent of Geeta Govinda, penned by poet Jayadev, the shape of Odishi culture took a formative turn. The compositions retained the classical content of Odishi music and Odishi dance. It was specifically cultured towards the service of Lord Jagannath. To this day, Geeta Govinda stands

tall as a replica of Odishi being a pivotal part of Jagannath cult.

The present day Odishi dance is an embodiment of the Mahari and the Gotipua forms. Most of the Odishi dancers have been associated with Gotipua or Mahari dance in the past. Odishi music and Odishi dance have been regularly a traditional norm of the Shakta, Shaivites and the Vaishnavites. The unification of Jagannath cult with the heritage of Odishi is a tale of unity amongst diversity. Each of the identities is singular, yet subtly connected to each other. The soul of the Odia is deftly derived from this blessed union and will continue to be so, reliving and reviving the plethora of richness of tradition and conventions.

JEL: Z11, Z12, Z13, Z19

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