



Dummy Horse: A Folk Art of Odisha

KEYWORDS

Dummy horse, goddess, folk dance, fishermen community

Mr. Ashis Mohapatra

Ph.D. Research Scholar and Guest Faculty in P.G. Department of Culture Studies, Utkal University Of Culture, Bhubaneswar

ABSTRACT *The art of folk dance in evolved from the natural instinct of human beings self expression. Dummy horse dance or Chaiti Ghoda Nacha is a folk dance form as natural to the fisherman community of Odisha as speech in to human beings. This festival is observed for eight days by the Kaibarta (fishermen's community) in the Odia month of Chaitra (March-April) during celebrations of the annual festival of goddess Vasuli or Baseli worship. As the local goddess Baseli is believed to be horse-headed, the dummy-horse dance becomes a necessary part of invoking her. In this colorful item of performing art dummy horse dancers perform to the tune of Dhola and Mahuri, accompanied by songs composed by the local poets. Fisherman communities all over Odisha, enrich their life with the joy of community folk dance performed as a part of ritual of community gathering. The Dummy horse dance connected with the Shakti cult of coastal regions is very popular and attracts a large audience.*

The culture of Odisha has been presented a picture of synthesis of both classical and folk form. Due the assimilation of various types of racial and cultural elements Odisha occupies a unique place among the states of India. Odisha is known as "Utkal" (the land of excellence in art) because of her brilliant folk traditions which have been maintained from ancient past. Whatever their level of economical status, literacy rate as well as motion of progress, most of the communities of Odisha have their an folk cultural way of life which includes folk dance, art & crafts, theatre, songs, rituals, legends and ballades etc. Odishan folk culture is still preserved in our rural life and agrarian society. Folk dances imbibe new influences and at the same time maintain tradition and continuity. Folk dances are still popular among different communities of Odisha and Chaiti Ghoda Nacha (Dummy Horse dance in the month of Chaitra) is one of its vivid examples.

Chaiti Ghoda Nacha is a popular folk dance of Odisha connected with goddess Baseli or Vasuli. Worship of Baseli and the Dummy horse dance inexplicably connected with its rituals and celebrations is the most important festival of the fishermen who observe it with great devotion and austerity. The details for the worship have been enunciated in "Kaibarta Geeta" by Achutananda Das, a mystic Odia poet of 15th century A.D. In the month Odia month Chaitra (March) there is an exclusive festival for the bonafied fishermen community of coastal Odisha who are popularly known as "Keuta" (Kaibarta). This colorful religious festival is held for an entire full month beginning from Chaitra Purnima (full moon day of Chaitra in March) and ending with Baisakha Purnima (full moon day in April). This festival as well as folk dance is connected with the regards for Shakti cult by the fisherman community of coastal Odisha. Worship of the goddess Baseli or Vasuli and the dummy-horse dance inexplicably related with this ritual and celebrations are the most important festival of the Kaibarta community. Who observed it with great devotion and austerity?

Chaiti Ghoda Nacha or Horse dance is a glorious chapter of Odishan folk culture, which is also popularly known as Baseli or Vasuli puja. Goddess Vasuli, the horse headed goddess is considered to be the tutelary deity of the fishermen community. The details about the Goddess Baseli and her worship traditions have been enunciated in "Kaibarta Gupta Geeta" written by Achyutananda Das, a mystic Odia poet of 15th century A.D. In ancient the worship of Shakti had gained tremendous prominence and it is believed that the worship of Goddess Baseli or Baseli puja originated during tenth centu-

ry when tantricism of both Hindu and Buddhist merged into one religious practice. Baseli a form of Mother Goddess who was earlier formless evolved during tenth century. According to legend, when the world was in deluge lord Vishnu could not able to find a place to rest and reduced his form and rested on a floating banyan leaf. During the leaf dwindling on the stormy waves of the ocean Lord Vishnu by his power created a man out of the dirt of his ear zone the leaf still with the help of a row, but soon he fell into deep slumber and a huge demoniac fish 'Raghab' swallowed the man. When the leaf again dwindling and lord Vishnu's sleep was disturbed. Lord Vishnu surprised when he found the man missing by his intuition Lord Vishnu could know everything and at once killed the 'Raghab' and got the man out. In the mean time Lord Vishnu transformed the banyan leaf into a horse and also summoned Biswakarma and asked him to build a boat immediately. Then Lord Vishnu said to the man that you and your community will be known as Kaibarta and you would be the king among them, make this horse as your carrier and use this boat for trading. As you were swallowed and almost got killed by a fish, so generation by generation you would kill the species and live on them. Baseli became the name of the horse and God ordered man to worship Baseli as tutelary deity on the full moon day of Chaitra, it is believed that since the tradition of Baseli puja followed.

Baseli puja is also popularly known as Chaiti Ghoda connected with the Dummy-Horse dance of the fisherman community of coastal Odisha. The celebration of this festival begins on the auspicious day of Chaitra Purnima and the Kaibarta (fishermen) worship a bamboo with vermilion, candle paste, butter lamp etc. then the bamboo is ceremonially split into pieces out of which only twelve are taken out for preparation of the frame of the dummy horse. The frame after dyed with red clay covered with a Pata (indigenous silk cloth of Odisha). After which a painted colorful horse head made out of wood is fixed to the frame and a garland of Mandara (Hibiscus) flowers is placed on the neck during early worship. The dummy horse is worshipped till the eighth day of the dark fortnight and after which it is taken out for dance. A man enters through the hole kept for the purpose behind its neck and then dances to the rhythm of Dhola (country drum) and Mahuri (the kind instrument) during the dance of dummy horse moves along with the steps of dancer. Basically the Chaiti Ghoda dancing party consists of two dancers, one male, one female (mostly a male in female attire), and a drummer along with a piper. Particular folk songs are sung which bear the beauty of the whole performance. This horse dance is extremely simple with minimum steps or movements very

easy to learn and understand for which very popular among local people. People are fully excited while the dance performance along with the people who are witnessing the dance all around. The Chaiti Ghoda Nacha (dummy horse dance) as a part of Odishan folk culture as well as popular culture (particularly in villages of coastal Odisha) is very popular and attracts a large audience.

During the performance of Chaiti Ghoda Nacha two other characters called as "Chadua-Chaduanii" or "Rauta-Rautani" also exhibit dance with folk songs based on different mythological episodes. The Rautani (female character is played by a male) is Rauta's (male character) co-dancer as well as co-singer. During this portion of the dance the dummy horse is ceremonially placed in the centre and the performance is held in front of it, the audience sitting all around. Particularly in the coastal districts of undivided Cuttack and Puri there are both professional and amateur dummy horse dance groups perform this folk dance. Some scholars also opined that the fisherman community of Kujanga area used this dance as a way of freedom movement against the auto critic rule of British administration. Because through this dance some freedom fighters easily mobilized the fishermen community of Odisha after the end of the Chaiti Ghoda and Vasuli Puja festival the dummy horse head is taken out ceremonially from the frame and is preserved in a local temple, again in next year during the festival it is brought out and repainted for use during dance.

In present days the Chaiti Ghoda Nacha is not only limited within the fishermen community because people of other communities have also taken interest in this colorful folk dance of Odisha. At present the votive dancers no longer hermetically sealed in the Kaibarta community. Since the Dummy horse dance is attached to many Shakti Shrines of Odisha also people of other communities have also taken interest to join the votive dancers.

Through the indigenous folk traditions of Odisha are now losing its grip day by day due to advancement of techno-culture and impact of globalization but the folk culture is still preserved in Odishan rural life. Chaiti Ghoda Nacha or dummy horse dance is untouched and unaffected by western influence and still popular among villagers of Odisha as one of our colorful folk traditions. This Chaiti Ghoda Nacha or horse dance tradition should be preserved by proper documentation through publication and audio visual presentation. As a result of which we can able to regenerate the same spirit among the fishermen community against the modern social evils as well as able to exhibit the colorful folk dance of Odisha before our new generation.

REFERENCE

1. Banerje, Projesh.(1959),: The folk dance of India,Kitabistan | 2. Bulletin (1959),: Folk dance & music of Odisha, Kala Vikas Kendra | 3. Das,K.B.& Mohapatra,L.K. (1999), : Folk lore of Odisha, National Book Trust, India | 4. Khokar,A.M.(2003), : Folk Dance: Tribal, Ritual & Marital forums, All Seasons Books | 5. Leach, Maria.(ED)(1972), : Standards Dictionary of Folklore, mythology and legend, Funk and Wagnall's co. , New York | 6. Narain, Shovana(2004),: Folk dance traditions of India, Subhi Publication | 7. Pattanaik , Dhirendranath (2000), : Folk dances of Odisha, Odisha Sangeet Natak Academy, Bhubaneswar | 8. Tiwari , A.N. & others(ED) (1999), : Reference Odisha, Enterprising Publisher, Bhubaneswar | | 9. Vatsyayan (1996),: Traditions of Indian folkdance, Clarion Books associated with Hind pocket books. |