



IMPORTANCE OF ODISSI MUSIC IN JAGANNATH CULT

Arts

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ABSTRACT

Religion and music has marked a strong influence on the culture of Odisha. Followers of all religions and sect today live in harmony in Odisha, their magnificent journey of being ruled by the rulers of many religions have imbibed the qualities of tolerance amongst them. The qualities that makes Odisha unique, a place on earth where not only human beings but the wilds and the woods along with the nature, all are contributing towards nurturing of each other. The Madala Panji or Chronicles of the Jagannath Temple states that gods and other celestial beings attended the ceremony of the pratistha or installation of the deity at the Jagannath temple in Puri. Odissi music is surviving through ravages of time and nature are group activities forming an integral part of the same culture. Odissi dance is originated in the temples of Odisha, India more than 2000 years ago.

KEYWORDS

Jagannath, Music, Odissi, Tradition, Dance

The *Maharis* danced in the great temple of *Jagannatha* in Puri at specific times (Patnaik 1971: 52, Mohanty Hejmadi 2007, Sahu 1956, Marglin 1975). Despite evidence from sculpture and palm-leaf manuscripts that the dance was widespread in Odishan temples during the mediaeval period, by the mid-twentieth century the *Maharis* seem to have had a very limited dance and music repertoire. At the time when modern Odissi was being recreated, the *Maharis'* dance was very restricted, comprising limited selections from the *Gita Govinda* and a five-minute rhythmic dance performed in the Puri *Jagannatha* temple outside the closed doors of sanctum while Lord Jagannatha was eating, and the devotees waited for his *darshan*. This is in strong contrast to the large dance and music repertoire of hereditary dancers (*devadasis*) and musicians inherited by current Bharatanatyam. In addition to the theatre and dance traditions indigenous to Odisha, both the structure of certain dance items, and the testimony of those involved, suggest that the sculptures of dancers on Odishan temples, especially the Surya temple at Konark, were influential in determining the outward form of many of the movements. These poses are especially prominent in *Bottu Nritya/Sthayi*, one of the first pieces formalized by *Jayantika*.

The impact of the religion of Lord Jagannatha was so strong in Odisha that in the sixteenth century when neo-Vaisnavism was introduced in Odisha by Chaitanya and his followers, it was absorbed into the cult of Jagannatha till Lord Jagannatha came to be regarded as the chief deity of neo-Vaisnavism. With the temple acquiring importance as the focal point of life, the dance as a ritual performed by the *Maharis* grew in importance. It is this class of dancers who have kept the dance tradition alive in Odisha. The tradition had declined during the last decades of the nineteenth and the early decades of the present century. The causes can be traced back to several historical, political and social factors. A tradition of young male acolytes dressed as female dancers came into being during the rise of the cult of Sakhibhava - a religious movement in which devotees considered themselves the consorts of the Lord. The boys performing as female dancers were called the *Gotipuas*. They danced outside the precincts of the temple, whereas the *Maharis* danced inside the temples. Several accounts of this tradition have come down to us in the form of chronicles and other evidence. Thanks to these two classes of dancers the tradition of Odissi dance has survived. Both religion and the temple have thus played a significant role in perpetuating the tradition of dance in Odisha. Situated as it is, Odisha has one foot in the south and one in the north of India.

Musicians and dancers on the trellised windows of the Jagamohana, and a dance sculpture of Shiva on the Vimana, Parashurameshwara temple, Bhubaneswar, 8th century. The tradition and practices which centre in and on this famous temple are still South Indian or Dravidian to a large extent, highlighting the many influences reflected in Odissi dance. The arts in Odisha have flourished from ancient times. Architecture, sculpture, temples, the living traditions of dance, music, painting, and the all-pervading influence of the religion of Jagannatha have had a symbiotic growth. The art of Odissi thus has a long history. The *Natyaashastra* refers to four *vrittis* (different modes of delivery), *Avanti*, *Dakshinatya*, *Panchali*, and *Odra Magadhi* which flourished in the different regions of India. *Odra* here refers to Odisha. Obviously

different regions had different kinds of dance traditions each distinguished by its special nature and technique." Innumerable inscriptions" prove that dance was a part of the life of the people. The kings extended their full support to its growth and development. The *Hatigumpha* inscription of King Kharavela claims that the king himself excelled in the science of music. The dance performances and the merry-making in the coastal districts of Odisha are a continuum of the practice of *Samaja* a congregation which is also mentioned in the inscription. Though there is little archaeological evidence available between the second century BC, and the fifth century AD, it is possible that if the Buddhist sculptures of this period were studied, considerable light could be thrown on the state of the art of dance. However, from the seventh century onwards there is enough evidence in terms of historical chronicles and archaeology to prove that their existence of a full-fledged dance style of Odisha. Of the various dynasties that ruled over Odisha, the *Bhaumakara* rulers built *Shaiva* temples which have excellent examples of Lord Shiva's dance. After the *Bhaumakaras* came the rule of the *Keshari* dynasty which extended from the eighth century till the end of the eleventh century. The *Keshari* kings were adept in the art of dance and music and *Yayati Keshari* took pride in describing himself as *Nritya Keshari* and *Gandharva Keshari*. It was during this period that there was an ascendancy of Brahmanism which in turn paved the way for the cult of Jagannatha. With the practice of consecrating dancing-girls, the tradition of dance was nurtured. The *Brahmeshwara* inscription refers to the dedication of dancing-girls to the Lord as his servants. The *Ganga* rulers followed the *Keshari* dynasty. They extended their empire from the river *Ganga* in the North to the river *Godavari* in the South, and from the Bay of Bengal in the East to distant parts in the West.

The rule of the *Ganga* kings extended for nearly four hundred years from 1078 to 1434. It was during the time of *Anangabhimadeva* that the celebrated poet *Jayadeva* wrote the great Sanskrit *Kavya* (poem), the *Gita Govinda*. So powerful was the impact of the *Gita Govinda* on the rulers and the devotees that it was regularly recited in the temple and thus the practice continues to this day. There are many references, regarding the appointment of various musicians and dancers in the temple of Jagannatha towards the end of the *Ganga* dynasty. The preaching of *Vaisnavism* by *Ramanuja* and his disciples had greatly influenced the rulers. *Narahari Tirtha*, a disciple of *Madhvacharya*, lived under the patronage of *Bhanudeva I* (1264-78). *Narasimhadeva II* (1278-1306) also preached *Vaisnavism* in Odisha. An inscription of *Narasimhadeva II* refers to *Narahari Tirtha's* appointment as a provincial governor. *Narasimhadeva* earned great fame for building the magnificent temple of *Konark*, "the grandest achievement of the Eastern school of architecture." Conceived as a great temple of sun worship, it is now ill ruins, but its *Nata-mandapa* (dance-hall), has innumerable sculptures of dance and serves for a lexicon of the Odissi dance, providing any serious student of the Odissi dance with a vast treasure trove of dance notations in stone embedded with corresponding images. After the *Ganga* rulers, from AD 1435, the dynasty of the *Surya* rulers rose in power, when *Kapilendradeva* ascended the throne. For next one hundred years the fine arts along with *Oriya* literature flourished in Odisha. Many inscriptions of this period are found in the *Oriya* language. *Kapilendradeva* was an ardent devotee of Lord Jagannatha.

It was during his time that the Maharis danced twice in the temple -at the time of Bhoga, (the Lord's mid-day meal), and at the time of Barha Singar (after the ritual adornment of the Lord and before he was put to bed). Purushottamadeva. Succeeded his father Kapilendradeva in the year 1467 and like him he was a devotee of Lord Jagannatha and a scholar. As a great warrior his reputation rests on defeating Saluva Narasingha of Kanchipuram. He married Narasingha's daughter Rupambika, who was later renamed Padmavati. The event inspired many Oriya poets, dramatists, and painters to create literary and other works of art. During the reign of Purushottamadeva's son Prataparudradeva, the great Vaishnav saint Chaitanya came and settled at Puri. Ramananda Patnaik, who was appointed by the king as the governor of Rajahmundry, came under the influence of Chaitanya and became his devotee. He came to be known as Ramananda Raya after he came to Puri. He was well-versed in dance and music and is credited with having written the Sanskrit operatic play Jagannatha Ballava. There are references in Chaitanya Charitomritai to the effect that Ramananda taught Sattvika abhinaya and sanchari Bhavas to the Maharis. When Prataparudradeva who regulated the services of the Maharis at the temple made it compulsory for the Gita Govinda to be sung regularly in the temple, it is very likely that Ramananda taught the Maharis abhinaya (histrionics) to the ashtapadis of the Gita Govinda. He also arranged for the enactment of the Gita Govinda as a dance-drama. Till the Afghans of Bengal came to power in 1568 Odisha was independent. The Muslim General Suleiman Karnani, known as "Kalapahad" destroyed several Hindu shrines. Madla Panji, the records of the Jagannatha temple, refers to the atrocities perpetrated by "Kalapahad," and historians like Abul Fazl, have left accounts of his depredations. Though for sometime Ramachandradeva, the Bhoi king was in power and had once again installed the idols in the temple, after his rule great political turmoil prevailed for the next three hundred years, when the Pathans, the Mughals, the Marathas, and the British ruled over Odisha. The British took over from the Marathas in 1803. However, they did not interfere with the temple services.

The art of dance and music suffered on account of political instability, the Muslim invasion, the desecration of the temples and the loss of independence, the lack of patronage of the landlords to both the Maharis and the Gotipuas dancers as a class of entertainers.

Since pre-historic days Odisha has maintained its pioneering status, not only in India but also in the world arena, with its wonderful creation in the area of literature, art, culture & sculpture. Starting from the sculptures engraved on the walls of hundreds of Odishan temples to the inscriptions on the broken temple walls found in all corners of Odisha, each stone piece bears testimony to the love of art and creativity of Odishan people. While enriching life through the medium of art, while creating wonders in the area of vocal & instrumental music, dance, acting, interior decoration, textiles & after all fine art and sculpture, they have left a special mark with original touch, taste and expressional avenue.

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