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CULTURAL TRADITION OF ODISHA AND MARDAL: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Odisha is considered as the land of arts and the music of this land shall remain forever. this a land where, the sweet chirping sounds of birds amid the dense green forests here, the rhythmic sound beats produced by the waterfalls and rivers, the roaring sounds of sea waves exist only on this land and all these nature's gift's are reflected in the art, literature, music and dance of this land which is not found in other art forms. There is uniqueness in the development of Aryan, Dravid and austik. Odissi style of classical music has some similarity with Hindustani 'Dhrupad' style. 'Gamak' is common to both, though Odissi also adopts the 'Tom Nom' sounds. The percussion instrument played with Odissi music is the 'Mardal', which is similar to 'Pakhawaj'.

The sculpture of Kalinga is unique in itself varies from the sculpture of north India and south India. Accordingly the Odissi style of music has its own uniqueness and it is quite different from north Indian and south Indian music. Temple sculptures in Odisha abound in statues of 'Mardal' players. Odissi is a very old classical style of music with specific raagas, taals, and its own special style of rendering of lyrics and melody. The musical instruments used in Odissi classical songs and dance which are called 'Tal-vadya' are mainly made of leather and this 'Tal- vadya' is popularly called as 'Mardal'. As like the use of 'Mrudangam' is important in 'Carnataki'- classical music and 'Tabla' instrument has significance in 'Hindustani' music similarly 'Mardal' is also one these 'Tal-Vadya' instruments which has of much importance in 'Odissi' classical music. It can be said undoubtedly that 'Mardal' instrument came into being along with the Odissi music. It is said because for the purpose of singing and dancing there needs to be a musical instrument. As per the researchs and findings in this context, about the origin and evolution of 'Mardal' the following informative facts are being presented.

At first when there was the usage of three-faced specific drum-like musical instrument, it look like the present day 'Mardal' with one face (surface) towards upwards and the other two faces were made on the sides. These facts about the musical instruments have been found in the writings of Bharat Muni's 'Natya Shastra' book. Evidence about this musical instrument have been found from stone carving of some temples, it shows some statues in dancing postures, holding this type of instrument. 'Mardal' musical instrument is also known by some other names like 'Puskar', 'Mooraj', 'Pakhauj' etc. The main musical instrument which is used during the performance of Odissi music is called 'Mardal'. According to some eminent scholars, 'Mardal' instrument has been made and designed by following the style and design of 'Mrudanga' instrument some research works and findings and according to some eminent veteran musicians of Odisha some information about the origin and history of 'Mardal' are mentioned in the following lines.

Various ancient stone carvings belonging 1st b.c. or 2nd century year old 'Rani Gumpha' and 'Hati Gumpha' during the rule of emperor Kharavela indicate about the musical-arts of Utkal various stone carvings of historical 'Rani Gumpha' and 'Hati Gumpha', made during the rule of Kalingana emperor (during 1st century b.c. and 2nd century) indicate about the musical arts of Utkal (presently called Odisha). Legends about the Odishan music are also indicated from the stone carvings and art works of some ancient temples. According to the 'Natya Shaastra' book written by Bharat Muni the musical art of Utkal called 'Udra- Sangeet' was discovered first. The musical art which was relevant during the age of god or deities and 'Gaandharvas' successively developed and gradually became popular as 'Udra-sangeet' and the Odissi music which we use to sing today was formerly known as 'Udra-sangeet'.

The musical instrument which was used along with these musical performances was called as 'Mardal' by the performers. Whenever there were musical celebrations among the Sabar tribals, the audience got spellbound with these performances and the

melodious sounds vibrating from this 'Maadal' or 'Mardal' instrument used to create an amazing and magical feeling among the audience. Earlier these 'Sabar' tribals used to call this 'Maadal' instrument as 'Mattal' (meaning intoxicating). In course of time this 'Maadal' instrument was called as 'Mardal'. "Odisha has an age-old tradition of the use the Mardal. It is solely used as an accompanying instrument in Odissi Dance, one of the chief classical dances of India. Though Odisha has a rich heritage of other folk dances and folk music, they are seldom accompanied by the playing of Mardal.

Odisha is the bastion of rich cultural heritage with its historical monuments, archaeological sites, traditional arts, sculpture, dance and music. Situated on the eastern coast of India, Odisha, more popularly known as Orissa, is a beautiful state with its own proud history and culture. Dotted with beaches, wild life sanctuaries, historical monuments, Odisha is also home to a vibrant arts and culture. Its traditions and customs being preserved and practiced for centuries reflect the glorious heritage of this coastal state, located strategically by the Bay of Bengal.

Thousands of master craftsmen weave magic with their hands in Odisha. Be it sand art, sculpture, handicrafts, painting, Odisha's skills are legendary. Music and dance are also an integral part of its rich and diverse culture.

Significant landmarks such as the Jagannath Temple in Puri and its famous Rath Yatra, the Sun Temple in Konark, the classical Odissi dance, sand sculpture artist Sudarshan Patnaik, the Chilka Lake, Sambalpur Deer Park etc have catapulted Odisha on to the global landscape. Today, the state boasts of a rich heritage and distinct culture blending harmoniously with its history and growth.

What distinguishes Oriyan culture from that of other states in India is that since many kings ruled the then kingdom, these multiple dynasties have impacted the culture and traditions in the state. Every Indian state has its own repertoire and rich tradition of music and dance—the two integral aspects of Hindu culture. Odisha too has a glorious history and rich musical heritage.

Odisha has its indigenous folk music, tribal music, light classical music etc reflecting the beliefs and practices of the ethnic communities. Classical music attained a form of recognition after the 11th century AD in Odisha. Musicologists contend that Odian music is distinct whose ragas and talas are different from what is used in Hindustani and Carnatic music. Odian music is said to be a fine blend of four classes—Dhrupad, Chitrapada, Chitrakala and Panchal and could be rendered to different talas or beats.

Music was indeed a means to propagate religious faith and belief systems in Odisha. With Odian culture woven around its magnificent temples, the Jagannath and Mukteshwar temples, bards travelled from one place to another singing the glories of these deities. Poet Jayadeva was the first saint-poet to compose lyrics which could be sung. His Gita Govinda is considered a pioneering effort, expressive of the infinite love between Krishna and Radha. He gave music a new contemporary form and style which are being adhered to this day.

One of the six classical dance forms of India is the Odissi dance of Odisha. With its origins in the temples and performed by the Devadasis, Odissi is a sensuous performing art set to soulful music. Usually portraying the Divine and Infinite love of Lord Krishna and Radha, Odissi dance is distinct from other classical dances of India in its costumes, music, rhythm, and style. Graceful and feminine, it is marked by Bhangis and Mudras .

Musical instruments used in Odissi Music are few in number. Some of the basic instruments which have been used in Odissi Music are the Ravan Hashta, the Harmonium, and the Veena or Sitar. Nowadays, a number of instruments are being replaced, like the Violin is being used instead of the Ravan Hashta. The Tanpura (a string instrument) is used by all the three streams of mainstream classical music- Odissi, Hindustani as well as Carnatic music. But one instrument which stands out among all as typical and irreplaceable both in case of Odissi dance and Odissi music is the Mardala. Further details of this typically Odissi instrument are given below.

In Odissi Sangeet Sastras it is mentioned that among all the skin percussions Mardala is the best. Its description is found in Charyagiti and various Sastras and Kavyas of medieval Odisha. In all Odishan temples also one finds the sculpture of Mardala players. Mardalavadini (the woman Mardala player) of Konark is famous. It is played during various Sevas (services) of Lord Jagannath. It is played as an accompaniment both in Mahari dance as well as Gotipua dance.

Odisha is also the seat of a huge variety of folk dances—namely Chhau Dance from the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, animal mask dance Medha Nacha, Danda Nata, Changu Dance and the Karma dance, Chaitighoda or the horse dance, Baunsa rani the bamboo dance, and Dalkhai. These are some of the more popular folk dance forms of Odisha practiced even today.

Mardal, the traditional percussion of Odisha, has a distinctive character of its own in its size, shape and mode of playing. its distinctive sound patterns and subtlety in resonance have established its own identity. Mardal is used as an inevitable musical instrument in the ritualistic service by Mardal players (Madeli seva) in the temple of Lord Jagannath. For Odissi classical dance and music Mardal is an insparable percussion . it has now endeared common people sans art connoisseurs and craved its own niche in the realm of Indian classical instrumental music.

Odissi mardala more or less resembles Pakhavaj but there is also a difference both in terms of construction and technique. The Mardala which is originally used in the Jagannath Temple is simple in construction and there is no mechanism in it to adjust the pitch. Simhari Shyamsundar Kar added 'Gotakas' to this simple Mardala so that it can be tuned as per need. In Pakhavaj, for example on the left side a layer of flour is given while in Mardala there is Kiran. As regards to practice and technique the Vaani or Ukuta, Khandi, Gadi Arassa in Mardala are different from those in Pakhavaj. Especially, the Chanti and movement of fingers are quite different in Mardala.

Till now Mardala is played mostly as an accompaniment of Odissi dance. Solo Mardala playing has not yet been very popular as stage performance. Gurus like Mahadev Rout, Chakradhar Sahoo, Harmohan Khuntia, Banmali Maharana, Dhaneswar Swain and Sachidananda Das are trying to make solo playing, dual playing and Jugalbandi of Mardala popular. The famous Odissi dance Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and Odissi music Guru Simhari Shyam Sunder were also famous as Mardala players.

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