



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Arts**

**ODISSI DANCE IN TEMPLE ART OF ODISHA**

**KEY WORDS:** ODISSI DANCE, TEMPLE, SCULPTURE, ART

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**ABSTRACT**

The Odishan temple sculptures are of two broad categories, namely the cult image and the decorative motifs. There are also gods and goddesses, and depiction of religious episodes to create a religious atmosphere. Religious synthesis is reflected through the images of 'Arđanarisvara' and 'Hari-Hara' such as at Gandharadi. A significant feature of Odishan temple art is the presence of performing art sculpture on the outer walls to signify the fact that religion cannot be separated from real life. The sculptures have preserved thousands of examples, which are treasure-houses of the techniques of Odissi dance. The temples greatly helped the Gurus and research scholars to reconstruct the present form of Odissi dance from an almost lost tradition of dance. As we can see, Odissi, thus, recorded in the temples, provide us a world of Odissi postures, gestures, costumes and ornaments.

Dance in Odisha has evolved from glorious spiritualism. Odissi dance is reflected in her various religious cults as depicted in the numerous cave painting and architectural structures built through the ages. The earliest historical evidence of dance in Odisha dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. in the caves of Khandagiri and Udayagiri, near Bhubaneswar. Some scholars attribute the caves to the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. the Hatigumpha caves were intended originally from the Jain ascetics. The caves reflect principles of Buddhism and Jainism. Many believe Jagannath to be an embodiment of Buddhism, Jainism, Animism and Hinduism—all taken together. Odisha, Owing to the geographical position, had been the meeting ground of various cultural currents, all integrated into a harmonious synthesis. It is an established fact that Odisha was the cultural centre of eastern India in the ancient times, perhaps owing to its importance as a pilgrim place and its seaports. Asoka conquered Odisha in 261 B.C.; an important landmark in the history of Buddhism. Odisha was a Buddhist state at this time but later came under the influence of Jainism under the patronage of Kharavela. Kharavela a Jaina monarch, ruled Odisha after the times of Asoka. A very powerful and accomplished ruler, he was also proficient in music and dance. Kharavela delineated his various achievements in the wondrous caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri. The inscriptions of over hundred lines eulogize King Kharavela and praise his achievements during the thirteen years of his reign. The inscription in the Hatigumpha at Khandagiri reveals that the king Kharavela arranged the performances of Tandava and Lasya dance and music for the enjoyment of his subjects. Ancient Jaina caves inscriptions and friezes speak volumes about the presence of dance traditions during the times of Kharavela. In one scene in Haatigumpha a girl is seen offering flowers in a dance pose. Another scene depicts men and women singing and dancing around a tree. They all have been shown in worship, holding musical instruments. Many scenes depict female figures in dancing poses. These representations of dancing have been ascribed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century B.C. In that case, it is the earliest evidence of dance in your country. Odissi may well claim to be the earliest classical Indian dance style on the basis of archaeological evidence, the most outstanding being the Rani Gumpha caves of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. in Odisha. Scholars have dated these caves and their carvings to be earlier than the writing of the Natyashastra. The Rani Gumpha at the Udayagiri possesses a sculptured frieze depicting a dance performance in front of the king. The dancing girl is in a beautiful pose, along with four musicians playing the flute, harp and drum. Ranigumpha caves have numerous sculptures depicting detailed dance concerts. One can find the basic Chowka posture of Odissi in a number of dancing postures. The dance poses resemble the present day Odissi dance.

provide us with elaborate information on dancers and musicians who performed in front of the king and the public. The epigraphic records also through light on the elaborate costumes, ornaments and hairstyles the dancers maintained in ancient times. By studying these representations we can easily conclude that the dancers were specially trained people whose profession was regarded very highly in the society. King Kharavela himself adept at dancing was a—great patron of dance and music. He promoted an atmosphere where arts could flourish. He arranged for performances on the occasions of important gatherings and festivals there by making it an integral part in the lives of the people of Odisha. The Kharavela inscription tells us clearly that the Emperor provided dance as a pastime to his people. After Kharavela, from 2<sup>nd</sup> century onwards Bhanjas, Sailodbhavas, Bhoumakaras, Kesaris and many different rulers ruled Odisha, in parts. There are many dynasties and many rulers to be studied, but i am focusing only on the ones who have influenced the religious waves in Odisha and contributed beautiful temples that help us in our study of dance. We know by now that the temples were not only religious centres; they were also the centres of culture and arts. Both music and dance were closely connected with the rituals and worship at the temples. I am taking the main temples in my study yet i feel that there are hundreds of more temples we need to study along with their historical background. Each time I visited Odisha I discovered temples and more temples. "Unfortunately, after the days of Kharavela the political and cultural days of Odisha remains shrouded till the advent of Mahayana Buddhism and naturally, the blank period does not provide ample evidence till the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D."When Buddhism prevailed in Odisha dance flourished. Buddhism flourished apace, leaving in its wake monasteries, shrines and Buddha figure sculptured with great finesse. Mahayana Buddhism had beautiful Viharas in Ratnagiri and Lalitgiri. Chinese traveller Yuan Chuang who visited Odisha in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. mentions the Viharas of Pushpagiri and Lalitgiri. We can find dancing figures in stylised poses artistically carved in the rock—cut cave shrines. Beautiful sculptures have been found in Lalitgiri and Ratnagiri. It is believed that during those days Mahayana Buddhist believed in dance as a medium of meditation and players .it expressed itself beautifully not only in the architectural and ichnographic representations but it also reflected in the artistic excellence of dance and music. Innumerable sculptural pieces depict spirituality. Buddhist gods and goddesses have been depicted in dance poses. The artistic development of Odishan temple could only have taken shape in the wake of the religious and cultural resurgence that to place during those days. The Bhoumakaras were succeeded by the Kesari dynasty. Kesari were proficient in the art of dance and music. Kesari rules were originally Vaishnavite but later took to Shaivism. They built more ornamental and highly sculptured

The sculptural representation and epigraphic records

Shiva temples in Bhubaneswara. It became city of Shiva temples, reflecting a perfect symphony between their sculptures and architecture, the superb workmanship of their carvings, the grand repertoire of their motifs and astounding dance poses. Natamandapa or Natamandira, the dancing hall, became an important part of temple architecture during the time of Kesaries. Odisha's temple architecture flamed into a glorious dedication of the self to the godhead in a most exotic manner. It displayed a deep religious fervour. King Jatikesori was to proficient in dance that he was known as Nitya Kesari. He constructed one of the most magnificent temples of Odisha the Lingaraj temple. This 11<sup>th</sup> century temple is a remarkable specimen of architectural beauty and sculpted elegance. The temple, dedicated to lord Shiva is believed to have existed in a smaller form in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It homes a Natamandir (hall of dance), Bhogamandapa (hall of offering) and the Jagamohana (the porch). Over 150 smaller shrines crowd the temple enclosure. The temple displays all the richness and plasticity of the Kalinga style architecture. Apart from the main temple there are many smaller temples including Goddess Vimala, Laxmi and Vishnu. There were many Maharies (Devadasi), temple dancers, for the services of the deities at the part of temple rituals. The worship at the temple as not considered complete without the offering the dance. There were special Gurus to teach pure and pristine style of dance to the Maharies. The tradition of Maharies still continues, only as token presentation, when the two surviving Maharies are called to participant on certain occasions. The dance of the Malarias was an inherent component of worship in the Jagannath temple. The Mahari tradition began much earlier. There is an inscription in the 9<sup>th</sup> century Brahmeswara temple starting the appointment of Maharies. History provides enough evidence to show that the practice of consecrating dancing girls in honour of the gods was at a time prevalent throughout India. There are records to tell that Devadasis were attached to temples in Kashmir, Bengal, Odisha, Sourashtra, Rajasthan, Maharasta, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Owing to various reasons, mainly social and economical, the cult of the decades is now extinct everywhere except in Odisha. And in Odisha, the cult is at least 12<sup>th</sup> centuries old as is evident from the inscriptions.

The cultural heritage of Odisha dates back to the third century B.C from which starts her dated history, that is from 261 B.C .when Ashok conquered Kalinga. Sculpture forms an integral part of her cultural heritage. The Jain caves at Khandagiri and Udayagiri, the Buddhist relics and monasteries at Ratnagiri, the Hindu temple at Bhubaneswar, Puri and Konark and innumerable sculptures found in different parts of Odisha gives a vivid evidence of Odishan sculpture. These sculpture provides a concrete expression of Odisha's genius in art and architecture, and its social life and religious developments. The main characteristics of Odishan sculpture is decoration. The people of Odisha are great lover of beauty and this has been reflected in their various sculptures. The temple architecture of Odisha is by and large an offering pretended to the deity. The architects constructed the temples with the motive that a temple must be worthy of the deity. As such the filled the walls with exquisite carvings from the pavements to the pinnacle, providing a feast for the eyes and soul of the devotees from a distance. Thus it is to be seen that the women abundantly depicted in Odishan sculptures. Right from the sculptures of Kharavela's reign in the first century A.D. there is hardly any monument in which figures of women have not been depicted. A close study of those figures indicates the positions of women in the society during that period. It appears that their position was more or less at par with that of man. Otherwise the sculptors would not have taken so much of care in depicting theme in such a faithful manner.

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