



Gotipua: A traditional folk dance of Odisha

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Abstract

Odisha has a rich tradition of preserving arts, culture, customs and traditions. The intricate carvings on the walls of ancient temples display a rich tradition of music and dance that Odisha had. The objectives of the research paper is to analyse the theme behind the traditional majestic folk dance Gotipua, its origin and the present status. The information was collected from secondary sources such as books, journal and internet. "Gotipua" is a traditional dance form in the state of Odisha, India and the precursor of Odissi classical dance. It has been performed in Odisha from centuries by young boys below 14 years who clad in female dress and dance to the tune at the music to praise Lord Jagannath and Krishan. In the Odia language "Gotipua" means single boy but the dance is executed by a group of boys who perform arobatic poses inspired by the life of Radha & Krishna, which enthrall the audience. Long ago the temples of Odisha had female dancers known as "Devadasi" (Mahari) who were devoted to Jagannath which give rise to "Mahari dancers. With the decline of Mahari dancers around the 16th century during the reign of Ramachandra Dev, boys dancers in Odisha continued the tradition. Though Gotipua dance is similar to Mahari and Odissi, but its techniques, costumes and presentation is different. Young boys put on sarees, ornaments and paint their faces like girls. The dance typically begins with vandana prayer. The dancers perform a three step salutation; the first above their heads towards God, the second in front of their faces for the guru and the third in front of their chest for the audience. It is followed by Abhinaya and based on Radha Krishna Poems or Gita Govindam and Bandha Nrutya which includes Kaliyadaman, Kelikadamba, Bakasura etc. Gotipua had been patronised by Kings during medieval Odisha and at present the "Gotipua Troups" are invited by the villages during festivals like Dola, Dashara and Raja. Each year Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odishi Research centre Organises Gotipua Dance festival in Odisha to popularise this dance. Government should provide physical and financial support to the dancers to encourage them & take necessary steps to make this dance famous worldwide.

Keywords: gotipua, vanadana prayer, abhinaya, bandha nrutya

Introduction

Heritage in Odisha has always been preserved through art, culture, customs and tradition. While art and culture are being propagated for tourism, customs and traditions are unique in to communities and ethnic groups that are usually handed down through generation. The intricate carvings on the walls of ancient temples display a rich tradition of music and dance that Odisha had. Folk culture refers to the unifying expressive components of everyday life as enacted by localized tradition bound groups. Earlier conceptualization of folk culture focus primarily on traditions practiced by small foot, homogenous, rural groups living in relative isolation from other groups. It is defined as traditional practices held by small homogenous groups typically living in isolated areas. "Gotipua" is a traditional folk dance form in the state of Odisha, India and the precursor of Odissi classical dance. It has been performed in Odisha from centuries by young boys below 14 years who clad in female dress and dance to the tune at the music to praise Lord Jagannath and Krishan. In the Odia language "Gotipua" means single boy but the dance is executed by a group of boys who perform arobatic poses inspired by the life of Radha & Krishna, which enthrall the audience.

The objectives of the paper is to analyse

1. The origin/history of Gotipua dance.

2. The theme behind the Gotipua dance.
3. The present status of Gotipua dance.

Materials and Methodology

The information on Gotipua dance was collected from secondary sources such as books, journals and internet.

Results and Discussion

Gotipua is a fascinating classical folk dance of Odisha where boys below 14 years clad in female dress and dance to the tune at the music to praise Jagannath and Krishna. In Oriya colloquial language Gotipua means "Single boy" - Goti means single, Pua means - "boys".

History of the Gotipua Dance

In ancient times, the temples of Orissa had female dancers called "Devadasi or Mahari (in Orissa)" who were devoted to Lord Jagannath. The sculptures of the dancers on the bas-reliefs of the famous temples of Orissa (the Sun Temple in Konark and the Jagannath temple in Puri), show the evidence of this very ancient tradition.

Around the 16th century, with the decline of the Mahari dancers, the class of these boy dancers came into existence in Orissa, to carry out the tradition. This was during the time of Bhoi king Rama Chandra Dev, founder of Bhoi dynasty.

It is totally unknown that when exactly this danced form came in to practice. Still some historians say that this dance tradition appears to have originated during the region of Prataprudradev (1497 A.D. to 1540 A.D.) and gained popularity in the subsequent Muslim Rule. Ray Remananda the famous Vaishnavite Minister of King Pratapruda and ardent follower of Sri Chitanya is the originator of this boy dancing tradition, As Vasishnavs were not approving of the females in to dance practices so it possible that the dance tradition must have come after Sri Chaitanya came to Orissa.

The Gotipua Dance Tradition is now seen in the village Raghurajpur situated 10 kms away from Puri town, situated on the banks of river Bhargabi. It is otherwise known as the Crafts Village as various Orissan handicrafts' craftsmen reside in this village contributing their expertise in Patta Painting and other handicrafts.

Dance

Gotipua dance is in the Odissi style, but their technique, costumes and presentation differ from those of the *mahari*; the singing is done by the dancers. Present-day Odissi dance has been influenced by Gotipua dance. Most masters of Odissi dance (such as Kelucharan Mohapatra, from Raghurajpur) were Gotipua dancers in their youth.

Odissi dance is a combination of tandava (vigorous, masculine) and lasya (graceful, feminine) dances. It has two basic postures: *tribhangi* (in which the body is held with bends at the head, torso and knees) and *chouka* (a square-like stance, symbolising Jagannath). Fluidity in the upper torso is characteristic of Odissi dance, which is often compared to the gentle sea waves which caress the Orissa beaches.

Dancers - their costumes and make-up

To transform into graceful feminine dancers the boys do not cut their hair, instead styling it in a knot and weaving garlands of flowers into it. They make up their faces with mixed white and red powder. *Kajal* (black eyeliner) is broadly applied around the eyes to give them an elongated look. The *bindi* (Red Dot) usually round, is applied to the forehead, surrounded with a pattern made from sandalwood. Traditional paintings adorn the face, which are unique to each dance school. The costume has evolved over time. The traditional dress is a Kanchula, a brightly coloured blouse with shiny decorations. An apron-like, embroidered silk cloth (*nibibandha*) is tied around the waist like a ruffle and worn around the legs. Some dancers still adhere to tradition by wearing a pattasari: a piece of thin fabric about 4 metres (13 ft 1 in) long, worn tightly with equal lengths of material on both sides and a knot on the navel. However, this traditional dress is often replaced by a newly designed cloth which is easier to put on.

Dancers wear specially designed, beaded jewellery: necklaces, bracelets, armbands and ear ornaments. Nose-piercing jewellery has been replaced with a painted motif. Ankle bells are worn, to accentuate the beats tapped out by the feet. The palms of the hands and soles of the feet are painted with a red liquid known as *alta*. The costume, jewellery and bells are considered sacred.

The repertoire of the dance includes

- Vandana Prayer (worship prayer) of God or Guru (a

customary invocation, offering prayers of gratitude to the Mother Earth, the Divine Lord Jagannath and one's Guru, and welcoming the audience). The dancers perform a 3 step-salutation, the first one above head towards God, the second in front of the face for the Guru, and the third in front of the chest for the audience.

- Sa ri ga ma (a pure dance number, celebrating beauty and highlighting mastery of technique). This dance is portraying the elegant dancers and musicians carved into the outer walls of ancient temples.
- Abhinaya (enactment of a song, interpretation of poetry of ancient writings). This dance depicts the Radha-Krishna oriented poems such as the famous Gita Govinda from the 12th century. The verses used for narration are extremely ornate in content and suggestion. Graceful, fluid, and sensual, the Abhinaya is like a moving love poem with facial expression, eye movement and mudra gestures:

"Come and see, my love

Here comes Krishna, the flute player, the Supreme Performer

Come and see, my love

He dances wearing ankles bells

So lovely rhythmic patterns he makes

Listen to his melodies, the mardala beats

Listen to his flute and clappings"

Bandha Nrutya (presentation of acrobat yogic postures, creation of figures of Radha Krishna, having similarity to visual presentation drawn up by Pattachitra artists, the traditional painting of Orissa).

Musical accompaniment is provided with

- Mardala (two heads drum, rhythm percussion instrument of Orissa)
- Gini (small cymbals)
- Harmonium
- Violine
- Bansuri (alto bamboo flute)
- and one or two vocalists.

Bandha Nrutya (Acrobatic Dance)

The most interesting part of Gotipua is "*Bandha Nrutya*", a dance with acrobatic figures and movements. The difficult and intricate poses of the body with supplying of various limbs, are known as "Bandha" (acrobatic in Oriya language). To be able to perform these figures, the boys need to start learning the dance at the early age of five or six. The postures mostly refer to mythological scenes from the life of Krishna.

"*Abhinaya Chandrika*", an ancient text on Odissi Dance written by Maheshwar Mahapatra during the 15th century, gives a detailed study of the various movements of the feet, hands (mudras), the standing postures, the movement and dance repertoire.

"*Sangita Darpana*", an ancient text from the 17th century about music and dance, gives a complete repertory and overall style of presentation.

These writings give details about Bandha Nrutya.

Abhinaya Chandrika mentions more than 25 varieties of Bandha:

They are *Gagana, Dhurmukha, Torona, Shayana*, etc...

Some Bandhas are found in oral tradition and are known as

- Chira (welcome pose)
- Padmasana (lotus pose)
- Hansa (swan: represents wisdom, grace and beauty, and is the vehicle of Saraswati, goddess of knowledge, music & arts)
- Mayura (peacock: sacred bird of the Hindu mythology, whose feathers were adorning the head of Krishna)
- Chara Mayura (grazing peacock: represents splendor and majesty)
- Keli kadamba (holy tree under which Krishna was playing)
- Garuda (mythical eagle, vehicle of Vishnu)
- Kandarpa Ratha (chariot of Kandarpa, the God of Love)
- Sagadi (wheel, compared to the wheels of Jagannath chariot)
- Nauka (boat)
- Kaliyadalan (defeat of Blacksnake by Krishna)
- Bakasura Badha (Krishna killing Bakasura demon)
- Radha Krishna, etc...

Present Status

At present the Gurukulucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research centre organises the Gotipua Dance festival in Bhubaneswar each year to encourage the Gotipua dancers and for the promotion of Indian classical music and culture amongst the youth. Guru Maguni Das, Guru Birbar Sahoo are the eminent Gurus of this dance. The dance is not an easy one to master, as it requires rigorous training and regular practice. The boys are recruited to learn the dance at a very young age and undergo training until their adolescence.

It is known that Gotipua had been patronised by kings in medieval Orissa. They were invited by the villages in festivals like Jhulana, Dola, Dasahara and Raja. The subject matter of Gotipua dance's is invariably mythology and stories from Puranic literatures. Gotipua is responsible for popularisation of the age old Champu and Chhanda literature.

Conclusion

As the "Gotipua dance" is proud of Odisha and a source of heart felt amusement for the audience, care should be taken at every level for the promotion of this dance from the grass root level to make it famous world wide. Government should take necessary steps to establish dance schools at Village, Block, District State and Country level to train the dancers in free of cost and with scholarships. Bold steps should be taken at all levels to popularise this dance by giving proper training to the young youth for the promotion of Indian classical Dance, Music and culture.

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