

Analysis of Odissi Dance and its Universal Importance

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Abstract

Indian culture has a great impact on society since some eras. Present scenario observes the culture in depth and also attracted on Western countries. Dance is one of them out of many other activities. As it is beneficial for health activities, mental peace along with most suitable entertainment as musical nights. In this paper, the importance of Odissi dance based on its history is depicted. Also the major techniques of the dance are given that attracts people of irrespective to place and culture. It is originated from the state Odisha (formerly named as UTKAL) of India. In last part of this paper, some of the easy and novel style and technique are described to make it ever more attractive.

Keywords

Classical Dance, Odissi, Spiritual Expression, Emotional Expression, Social

I. Introduction

India has rich cultural heritage that lies in its social culture, music and dance. The Indian dance forms vary from region to region. There are many varieties of dances in India. But rare dances are recognised well. The classical dances are recognised as Odissi, Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Kathakali, Mohiniattam, Manipuri, and Satriya. Among all these dances, Odissi and Bharatnatyam are most ancient and bear the original styles of performance, which make them stand out differently superb.

Dance is any one prescribed sequence of such movements in the music to which it is performed or an event at which it takes place. Dance in India comprises the varied styles of dances in the country. With other aspects of Indian cultures, different forms of dances originated in different parts of India. But particularly in our country, classical dance has a lot of significances. It is not merely meant for entertaining oneself but it serves as a fabulous way to express the innate feeling of heart. It is also the best means to get linked with God and to be self-purified. It can be traced back during the period of *NatyaSastra* of BharatMuni. It was performed to appease the deities and was considered a vital element of spirituality. All the prevailing dance forms use basically the same "Mudras" or signs of hand as a common language of expression and were originally performed in the temples to entertain various Gods and Goddesses. They were also effective in carrying forward the various mythological stories from generation to generation while entertaining the audiences.

Odissi also referred to as Orissi in older literature, is a major ancient Indian classical dance that originated in the Hindu temples of Odisha – an eastern coastal state of India [1-4]. Odissi, in its history, was performed predominantly by women [2, 5], and expressed spiritual ideas, particularly of Vaishnavism (Lord Vishnu as Jagannath). Odissi performances have also expressed ideas of other traditions such as those related to Hindu gods Shiva and Surya, as well as Hindu goddesses (Shaktism) [6-9].

II. Importance of Odissi due to its Origin

The Buddhist, Jain and Hindu archaeological sites in Odisha

state, particularly the Asia range of hills show inscriptions and carvings of dances that are dated to the 6th to 9th century CE. Important sites include the Ranigumpha in Udaygiri, and various caves and temples at Lalitgiri, Ratnagiri and Alatgiri sites. The Buddhist icons, for example, are depicted as dancing gods and goddesses, with Haruka, Vajravahari, and Marichi in Odissi-like postures [10-11]. Historical evidence, states Alexandra Carter, shows that Odissi Maharis (Hindu temple dancers) and dance halls architecture (*nata-mandap*) were in vogue at least by the 9th century CE [12].

According to Kapila Vatsyayan, the *Kalpasutra* of Jainism, in its manuscripts discovered in Gujarat, includes classical Indian dance poses – such as the *Samapada*, the *Tribhanga* and the *Chwaka* of Odissi. This, states Vatsyayan, suggests that Odissi was admired or at least well known in distant parts of India, far from Odisha in the medieval era, to be included in the margins of an important Jain text [13]. However, the Jain manuscripts use the dance poses as decorative art in the margins and cover, but do not describe or discuss the dance. Hindu dance texts such as the *AbhinayaChandrika* and *AbhinayaDarpana* provide a detailed description of the movements of the feet, hands, the standing postures, the movement and the dance repertoire [12-13]. It includes illustrations of the *Karanās* mentioned in *NātyaShāstra*. Similarly, the illustrated Hindu text on temple architecture from Odisha, the *Shilpaprakāsha*, deals with Odia architecture and sculpture, and includes Odissi postures [10-14].

After 12th-century, Odia temples, monasteries and nearby institutions such as the Nalanda in eastern Indian subcontinent came under waves of attacks and ransacking by Muslim armies, a turmoil that impacted all arts and eroded the freedoms previously enjoyed by performance artists [9]. The official records of Sultan Firuz Shah Tughlaq's invasion in Odisha (1360-1361 CE), for example, describe the destruction of the Jagannath temple as well as numerous other temples, defacing of dancing statues, and ruining of dance halls [11]. This led to a broad decline in Odissi and other religious arts, but there were some benevolent rulers in this period who supported arts particularly through performances at courts [9]. During the Sultanate and Mughal era of India, the temple dancers were moved to entertain the Sultan's family and courts [14].

Actual sculptures that have survived into the modern era and panel-reliefs in Odia temples, dated to be from the 10th to 14th century, show Odissi dance. This is evidenced in Jagannath temple in Puri, as well as other temples of Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism and Vedic deities such as Surya (Sun) in Odisha [6]. There are several sculptures of dancers and musicians in Konark Sun Temple and Brahmeswara Temple in Bhubaneswar [2-8].

The composition of the poetic texts by 8th century Shankaracharya and particularly of divine love inspired *Gitagovinda* by 12th century Jayadeva influenced the focus and growth of modern Odissi [15]. Odissi was performed in the temples by the dancers called Maharis, who played out these spiritual poems and

underlying religious plays, after training and perfecting their art of dance starting from an early age, and who were revered as auspicious to religious services [6, 15].

The antiquity of this dance form is evident from its roots that trace back to the ancient Sanskrit Hindu text called 'Natyashastra' which deals with different performing arts. All the 108 fundamental dance units elucidated in 'Natyashastra' are similar to this art form. It encompasses thousands of verses that are structured in various chapters. Dance is divided in two specific forms in this text namely 'nritta' and 'nritya'. While 'nritta' is pure dance that focuses on perfection of hand movements and gestures, 'nritya' is solo expressive dance that stresses on the aspects of expressions. Natalia Lidova, a Russian scholar, says that the text enlightens on several theories of Indian classical dances including that of Tandava dance of Lord Shiva, standing postures, basic steps, bhava, rasa, methods of acting and gestures. Reference to four popular styles of vruttis that is methods of expressive presentations namely 'Odra-Magadhi', 'Panchali', 'Dakshinatya' and 'Avanti' is found in the text, of which Odra refers to this performing art. There was a great deal of mobility between east and west and many migrations took place. According to some historians, there were groups of dancers who were brought to Puri from Gujarat and Andhra.

Odissi the term itself represents its origin from the state of Odisha. It is one of the famous classical traditional dance forms of the eastern part of India. It is an ecstatic and sensuous form of dance performed in the temples of Odisha as a religious-rite and offering by the "Devadasis" popularly known as "Mahari". The dance is found in the Manchapuri cave in Udayagiri which was carved during the reign of Emperor Kharavela. Hence it can be traced centuries back to its origin as a secular dance. Later it got attached with the temple culture of Odisha.

Odissi is a highly inspired, passionate, ecstatic and sensuous form of dance. In Odissi dance the whole body of the dancer is their instrument means of artistic expression and elevates body fitness. It also makes a dancer both physical and psychological strong as it requires high stamina and patience and tied with spirited mindedness. It creates devotion in one's mind and heart. Thus it is considered the most spiritual and religious based dance form like other Indian dance patterns.

III. Techniques of Odissi Dance (Styles, Music)

A distinctive feature of Odissi is that it includes both North and South Indian Ragas, which in 20th-century scholarship has been grouped as the Hindustani and the Carnatic music [7]. According to Alessandra Royo, Odissi music integrates the music styles of the two major Indian music concert traditions, and does not have a separate systematic classification like those found in the North and South Indian traditions [16]. According to Emmie Nijenhuis, Odissi music suggests performance arts and ideas were exchanged between the North and South India during the medieval era, and Odissi accepted both as a creative crucible of styles and ideas [17].

The unique feature of this dance form is that it incorporates Indian ragas, both from south and north that indicate exchange of concepts and performance arts between the two parts of India. 'Shokabaradi', 'Karnata', 'Bhairavee', 'Dhanashri', 'Panchama', 'Shree Gowda', 'Nata', 'Baradi' and 'Kalyana' are the main ragas of Odissi. The musical instruments include tabla, pakhawaj,

harmonium, cymbals, violin, flute, sitar and Swarmandal.

An Odissi troupe comes with musicians and musical instruments. The orchestra consists of various regional musical instruments, such as the Pakhawaj (barred drum), Tabla (double drums), Swarmandal (zither), harmonium, flute, sitar, violin, cymbals held in fingers and others [7].

Styles The Odissi tradition existed in three schools: Mahari, Nartaki, and Gotipua:

- Maharis were Oriya devadasis or temple girls, their name deriving from Maha (great) and Nari (girl), or Mahri (chosen) particularly those at the temple of Jagannath at Puri. Early Maharis performed Nritta (pure dance) and Abhinaya (interpretation of poetry) dedicated to various Hindu gods and goddesses, as well as Puranic mythologies and Vedic legends [18]. Later, Maharis especially performed dance sequences based on the lyrics of Jayadev's Gita Govinda [18]. This style is more sensuous and closer to the classical Sanskrit texts on dance, music and performance arts. [81]
- Gotipuas were boys dressed up as girls and taught the dance by the Maharis. This style included martial arts, athletics and acrobatics. Gotipuas danced to these compositions outside the temples and fairgrounds as folksy entertainment [18].
- Nartaki dance took place in the royal courts, where it was prevalent before the British period [19-20].

IV. Innovation of Styles for Odissi Dancers

Odissi treats the human body in three bhargas along with deflections of the head, torso and hips. The body is divided into two equal halves and the technique is built up on the principle of an unequal division of weight and the shift of weight from one foot to the other. Units of movement of the head, the torso or the hips and the knees are important here. The characteristic feature of this dance style is a hip deflection. The dwibhanga is greatly emphasized here. The tribhanga is one of the most typical poses of Odissi. The tribhanga is achieved by a sharp deflection of the hip from the horizontal Kati sutra, an opposite deflection of the torso and the head deflecting to the same side as the hip. The natavarabhangi in Odissi dancing is the familiar tribhanga of the Indian sculptural tradition.

The movement technique is developed from the basic position. There can be the possibility of walking in space, in different directions, in different manner and at different levels.

The most characteristic amongst all these is the semi-circular walk or the covering of space by one leg, more specifically the calf in semi circles, returning back to centre. The other half of the body is static. The same as the Minadandi i.e. covering space like a fish. There is then the manner of covering space in circles, half circles and concentric circles. This is known as Ghera. From the Tribhanga position emerge another group of movement. One half of the body is kept static along the vertical median, one knee continues to be bent and the other leg is either extended to the side or to the front or to the back. It can cross the static foot at the back or the front, it can be elevated at different levels and it can be totally extended at the back with the knee bending or calf and thigh in a straight line. Through a sitting or a kneeling position another group of movements emerge. The most characteristic amongst these is the extension of one leg to the side or to the back while one foot and knee are in contact with the ground. These

movements arise out of the sitting position known by 'the generic term baitha. Another group of movements emerge out of basic position of the Chauka or the Mandalasthana.

V. Conclusion

Finally, a word about technique and repertoire of Odissi dance. In Odissi dance, important parts are called Padabhada, Bhumi, Chari, Biramani, Bhangi and Hasta (Mudras) etc. The different items of Odissi dance are listed in the order in which they are performed:

- Manglacharana
- BatuNritta/Stayee
- Pallavi
- Abhinaya
- Mokshy

Odissi dance has a rich and varied repertoire. The most typical pose of Odissi is the 'Tribhanga' where the body is bent thrice. A fundamental posture of Odissi dance is 'Chawka'. Like other classical dance forms, Odissi admits of the division into nritta (pure dance) and nritya (expressional dance and natya (Drama). Several dance dramas using basically the Odissi dance technique have been choreographed. Odissi as a dance form has earned world popularity.

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