

Original Research Article

Dalkhai: A popular folk Dance of Western Odisha

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ABSTRACT

Dalkhai, one of the important and popular folk dances of Western Odisha is performed at Bhai Jiuntia in the districts of Bargarh, Sambalpur Jharsuguda, Deogarh, Bolangir, Sonepur and Boudh. It is a religion based traditional folk dance linked to the agrarian culture of society. Dalkhai is said to be “the Goddess of Fertility” worshipped by the native like Mirdhas, Kondhs, Kuda, Gonds, Binjhals etc. Basically, it is group dance accompanied with a song which adores ‘Goddess Dalkhai Devi – a physical manifestation of Goddess Durga.’ The word “Dalkhai” connotes a stem from the branch of a tree worshipped as Goddess Durga or Shakti by unmarried girls between Saptami and Dussehra puja for wishing long life of their brothers. Dalkhai dance and song require a set of musical instruments like Dhol, Tasha, Nishan, Tamki and Muhuri. Costume for this dance comprises Sambalpuri saree, bangles, katriya, bandriya, nose tude, and colour scarf. In fact, Dalkhai stands unique in many respects. This type of unique dance is fading away from the memory of the people. So, the purpose of this research work is to highlight the significant of this traditional dance among the people. For this topic descriptive, analytical and oral interview have been adopted to get relevance data.

Introduction

Western Odisha is highly distinctive for multi-farious features. Though it does not have a separate political identity, it has its specialty in the socio-cultural aspects. Western Odisha comprises the districts like Kalahandi, Nuapada, Bolangir, Sonepur, Bargarh, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Jharsuguda, Sundergarh, Boudh. Apart from this, as stated by the geologists and environmentalists, “The locality is filled with mines and minerals, flora and fauna with a developed modern agricultural output.”

This region is full of dense forests and mountains, hills and plateaus, rivers and plain lands. Hills and mountains cover 50% of the total land. The southern mountains are part to East range mountain whereas the northern mountains are part to Chhotanagpur and Vindhyanal regions. Among them, Kathpar-Purubadi mountains of Guragarh (Nuapada), Dongarla mountain of Kalahandi, Gandhamardan of (Bolangir-Bargarh), Barpahad range of Bargarh, Khajuria, Pradhanpat and Khaidanta range of Deogarh, Makadanacha Badmagad, Kumiritar, Belchakhani, Khandadhar of Deogarh are prominent.

This region is mostly habited by socially and economically backward people. Western Odisha contains 24.34% of the total population of Odisha. Tribal population comprises 40% total population of Western Odisha. These people are emotionally linked to religious performances and rituals which directly and indirectly promote socio-cultural development. Folk dance in Western Odisha has gained popularity in different names and in conformity with the taste and aptitude of the native people. So are the folk dances like Ghumura in Kalahandi, Dalkhai in Sambalpur, Dhap in Kalahandi, Bajasal in Kalahandi, Nachnia in Bolangir, Badi in Nuapada and Kalahandi, Danda in Bolangir.¹ (Behera-2016).

For centuries together, Odisha had been a traditional ground for Natyashastra and Bharata Muni. Stretching from the Eastern to the Western Odisha, there are varieties of dance forms that reflect its cultural identity. One such small but unique land in Western Odisha is Sambalpur which abounds with lush green forests, colourful wildlife, captivating waterfalls, rich tribal culture, folk songs and dances. The region is well known for Dalkhai, the most popular form of folk dance of the Adivasis.

As a cultural performance, dance is heart throbbing and it attracts anybody regardless of time and place. Dance can be performed at any occasion whether it is associated with hunting or puja (worship) of gods and goddesses or meant for entertainment. Every dance and music has its own relevance to the life of people. Dances are many kinds such as Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Odissey, Sambalpuri and its forms are Classical, modern, folk etc. Odisha in general and Western Odisha in particular are famous for folk dances.

There are many folk dances in Odisha such as Ghumura Dance, Changu Dance, Baagh Naach or Tiger Dance, Goti Pua Dance, Nachni Dance, Odissi Dance, Ruk Mar Nacha (Chhau Dance), Dhap Dance, Karma Naach, Dasakathia Dance, Jhoomar Dance, Chadya Dandanata Dance, Ghanta Patua Dance, Ghumara Sanchar Dance, Kandhei Dance, Kelakeluni Dance, Sakhi Nata Dance etc which have been entertaining the teeming masses since old age² (Mohapatra -2017). These dance types have carved a niche in the consciousness of the people across Odisha.

Folk dances in Western Odisha stand a class apart for its typicality. Dance as a form of art is not merely for pleasure, rather it is an act of the folkloric expression of the folks in Odisha, particularly in western Odisha. The dance gets involved with the folk song, music with multi dramatic and expressional effects, highly a reflection of their socio-economic structure. Considering the folk dance as a mere means of pastime, may never be sufficient, rather it has every strength of binding the people, their cultures, costumes and traditions together. The transformation in form and representation of style in these folk dances are an integral part of the folk culture. This has been handed down from generations to generations with an expressional mode.

Dalkhai dance or Bhai Jiuntia (Unmarried girls worship goddess Dalkhai Devi wishing long age of their brothers) is the most significant and the most popular dance form in Western Odisha mainly covering Bargarh, Sambalpur, Bolangir, Sonapur, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Jharsuguda and Deogarh, Sundargarh and Boudh district. (For its social uniformities, relationships, cultural and traditional aspects, linguistics and dialectical integrations)³(Op.cit Behera).

It is a socio - religion based traditional folk dance linked to the agrarian aspect of society. Dalkhai is said to be “the Goddess of Fertility” performed by the tribes like Mirdhas, Kuda, Kondhs, Gonds, Binjhals etc. Dalkhai dance has various forms such as Mayelajada, Rasarkeli, Gunjikuta, Jamaduli, Banki, Sainladi, Jaifula etc. considering its style, theme and performance⁴.(Padhan-2018)

Literature Review

An attempt has been made in the present article to provide a general frame work relating to Dalkhai: A popular folk Dance of Western Odisha. A few books have been written regarding this article include J.K.Behera’s Tribal and Traditional form dances of India where he has elaborately discussed various folk dances of Odisha but he has given a little reference to this dance only. In the work of A. Mohapatra’s ‘ The Essence of Popular Folk Dances of Odisha but he has mentioned a bird eye view of Dalkhai dance of western Odisha. Lidia,Cuzy in her work, Marginalised Music, Religion and Politics from Western Odisha has written the legends and origin of Dalkhai dance but she has not mentioned musical instruments, nature of dance and traits of dance. C S Pasayat’s two volumes ‘Tribal and Folk Culture, and Tribe, Caste and Folk culture has written dances like Karma, Sambalpuri, Madli, Bajasalia, Goudbadi, Dandari, Dhap, Ghumura, Go spade dance and Chhaki dance in details but he has given a little reference regarding this dance. Therefore, it is the prime duty of the research scholar to highlights this type of popular dance form to the people which is not covered by many writers.

Methodology

Descriptive and Library documentation method have been adopted with analytical and historical perspective for the present study. The archival materials journals, newspapers; magazines, seminar paper, conference articles, books and internet archives and e-books etc. are considered for the present study. Oral interview with the trainers of Dalkhai dance is another method adopted by the scholar to get relevance information for this work. Through this method information origin of Dalkhai dance, legends, musical instruments for this dance, posture, nature of dance, motif of Dalkhai, thematic Vision and Worship Style and costume etc have been collected for this article.

Results

The aboriginal communities, the bonafide harbingers of the dance are willy nilly weaned from it whereas various cultural and recreational groups, clubs, government and non- government organizations play vital role in promoting Dalkhai dance. It is because of the effort of all these agencies that the dance has gained both national and international recognition. The dance form looks forward to touching new height in the time to come. The folk dance Dalkhai is getting modernized by and by. The colourful modern costumes of Dalkhai and the uniqueness of the dance win over the heart of the spectators. The heart throbbing musical instruments are unmatching to the musical tools of other dances.

Discussion

Dalkhai dance, songs and its musical instruments are unique among the other traditional dances of western Odisha. Let us briefly discuss the popular folk dance so that the reader will fully acquaint of it.

Origin and History of Dalkhai Dance



Dalkhai is a group dance accompanied with a song and group dancing connected with the worship of goddess Dalkhai Devi, Durga, the demon killing mother and the embodiment of power. The word “Dalkhai” connotes a stem from the branch of a tree. The “Dala” (branches) are symbolically adored as Goddess Durga or Shakti. Her abode is known as Dalkhai kuthi or abode of goddess Durga. Therefore, the name Dalkhai is derived from the name of the deity as the dance is performed in her name.

In the past, people used to worship some unrecognized deity to protect them from the outrage wild animals and the outbreak of other mishaps. In the course of time, the deity became synonymous with Bana Durga(Forest or Jungle Goddess) or Durga and people continued to worship Her age after age.

Its origin goes back to antiquity. It traces to the district of Nuapada, in Western Odisha.⁵ (Ibid)

Saying goes that it had been originally performed by the locals during Dussehra to appease the Goddess who would protect their corns from insects⁶ (Ibid).

Another myth of local narration about the Dalkhai dance relates to stories of seven sisters and seven brothers venerated at Dalkhai or Sula Kutti , the altar of the goddess Dalkhai, or called “altar of the sixteen”⁷ (Cuzy-2013).

As per folk tale, the story goes that, “once upon a time a Rusi (Holy man, Sage or Saint) told the seven sisters that in case you cannot bath in the Ganga, you will die. One time, the seven sisters could not find any water to bath during seven days and thus decided to commit suicide on the seventh day. But before they could carry out the deed, the seven brothers came to the jungle and rescued the seven sisters from suicide by marrying them. The seven brothers, who all were sons of a king (Raja Putra), then took the seven sisters entered the kingdom and after that, they performed the Dalkhai dance (“Ussa”)⁸ (Ibid). Afterwards, the seven sisters continued to perform sixteen Pujas or worship year wise. When fasting, the sisters danced in order to forget the hunger.”⁹ (Ibid)

The legend highlights the value of marriage for individual and social continuity by depicting it literally as a life saving event. The fable also preserves a variety of names of local goddesses which over time have been suppressed in the general narrations about the dalkhai dance. They were Durga ,Samalai, Dula samalai, Chara bahati, Maha Lakshma, Borul Ma ,Adi mata, Shiva Parvati, Ahalya Mata, Rohelia, Chanchala, Kosala/ Bimali, Subrokeshi, Chandra tara/Promila, Subratara and Bhima Goura¹⁰ (Ibid).

Since time immemorial, Dalkhai Devi had been worshipped among the tribals. Later on people of other communities were found attracted towards it. People irrespective age or gender sing and dance in Dalkhai. During the time of its initiation, love between Lord Krishna and Radha constituted the theme of Dalkhai dance. With the passage of time the magnitude of public involvement grew. Consequently, the popular theme, of Dalkhai rested on 'ladylove'.

Etymological and metaphorical levels of the term Dalkhai

The term Dalkhai is said to have been derived from Dala meaning branch. During Dalkhai dance, the Dala (branches) are symbolically planted as of Dalkhai Devi or Durga, who is associated with Shakti, the female power. This Dala also stand for brushwood, evoking the picture of young shy girls dancing in the brushes. Dalkhai dance is performed accompanied with a musical dialogue in which young men profess their love in one bit of the dialogue whereas the virgins retaliated in the next bit.

Some tell that, the Dalkhai dance is performed on Dussehra days in order to prevent the paddy from insects. The vibration of dhol of the concert accompanying the Dalkhai dance is believed to affect the air and disturb the flights of the insects, so they are fended off the paddy. The term Dalkhai does not only designate the ritual dance and the local goddess Dalkhai, in whose honour it is performed, but it may simultaneously refer to other goddesses such as the pan Indian goddess Durga, Shakti Devi, the local goddess of power, Bandurga, the local forest-goddess, or Samalai the regional goddess of the Sambalpur district.¹¹ (Op.cit, Behera, p-18) The cult of worship of Goddess in India often implies a polysemic inclusion of diversified goddess concepts. One goddess is regarded and venerated as an integral part of another. While displaying one personality she may simultaneously incorporate other manifestations of her divine identity.

Posture of Performance

This dance is performed at a fixed spot, usually at river side where an idol of Goddess Durga is installed under a tree and worshipped. The unmarried young women known as 'Kuanris', start the performance with a folk song, which is followed by the Dalkhai dance. The performers go on fast at the time of performing Dalkhai dance. This dance commences at Saptami and ends with the Dussehra festival of Durga Puja. Mostly the songs are romantic modes.

It is interesting to note that the virgins form a semi- circular chain y spreading each other's hands across waist. They can dance in this semi- circular form for as many as 36 hours at the tune of a set of beating and blowing instruments. At the same time, they are engaged in musical dialogue with their counter parts who stand around the chain and take delight in its performance.

The male musicians or drummers also called 'Dholia' beats the Dhol at the outset of the performance. The men play the music and flirt is around with them. The women/young girls gracefully join their legs together and bent their knees to create steps of Dalkhai dance. They also move forward and backward in a half sitting posture for the dance. Both boys and girls move in clockwise and anti-clockwise during the performance and hands are moved forward and backward alternately. In this way, always Dalkhai folk dance goes with Dalkhai song and i.e. also intermittently. During song, the dancers sway their body, dangle their hands, steps their feet as per the rhythm of the music and the Dholia (the drummer) who beats the Dhol slowly. The rhythmical movements of the body and the steps are the reflection of the oneness of the mind¹² (Ibid).

At that time one can find the description of nature, seasons, gods, and goddess. Even one can chance to listen satire and teasing also. This dance is also performed during Nuakhai, an agrarian festival and marriage ceremony etc.

Nature of Dance and Singing of Song

After a brief stimulating spell of instrumental exercise, the Dalkhai song starts smartly with the invocative "Dalkhai' (or 'bo'). It proceeds with the mild, rhythmic beats of the drums till it comes to the last line of the stanza. The repetition of the last foot of the last line predicts the approaching halt. At the same time with the halt, starts the explosive playing of the instruments as well as the group dance. The singers - cum- dancers belong to the women while the instrument players are men.

The length of compositions is not regulated. It has been found to vary from three to fifteen, at times eighteen lines, apart from the initial singing of the signature (refrain)' Dalkhai re' or 'bo' once or twice at the commencement and once at of fourteen beats to be followed by two beats . Thus, virtually these two lines are sixteen beats, divisible as four- measures or feet. Each foot, then, should consist of four beats, but each of the appears to be of three fractions. Under last tempo such compositions give the impression of moving in three beat feet. In the last line of a three-lined Dalkhai composition the third

foot is song twice and the word 'Kai' (an interrogative meaning is it ? but having no contextual value), or some other two-lettered word is added. Then the signature (refrain) 'Dalkhai re' is sung once and the singing comes to a halt.

Motif of Dalkhai / Bhai Jiuntia

In some parts of Western Odisha this Dalkhai folk dance known as **Bhai Jiuntia** (observed by the women or maidens praying the Goddess for a longer and healthy life for their brother(s)). During the hours of worship, the Dalkhai dance is performed. It has a special form of song and rhythm preceded and followed by an expression phrase 'Dalkhai bo...' or Dalkhai re -- which acts as an address for both the dancers, musicians and the audience to get ready for the performance -

Dalkhaire-----Dalkhaire----

Ghadi mariude dasarajanha

Kuanri tukel manankara manauchhana

Sulakuthi kede sundara dise

Fule fule saja heichhe sate

Sahe aathaduba, chauladhari—2

Dalkhai Devi ke bandheikari-2

Kuanri tukel mane dhanare -2

Sate ken ---

Upasakari, make sumari dada bhailagi ken

Dalkhai re ---

(The Autumn Moon comes up at the stroke of his hour,

Boundless are the damsels with excitement galore.

They deck the shrine of the Goddess,

With flowers abundant.

A hundred and eight springs of sacred grass,

They adore Her with white rice of the same amount.

My Sweet heart!

They truly invoke her,

At the end of day's fasting,

Wishing for the well being of their brothers.)

The men bellow the word 'Dalkhai bo!' at the time of dancing and singing. This is the reason why the dance is known as the Dalkhai dance. The themes on which the dance is performed are the eternal love story of Radha and Lord Krishna. The dancers are either male or female both but the musicians are male only.

Thematic Vision and Worship Style

The entire dance has originated from the womb of tradition; its superstitions edge cannot be ignored. It is believed that, if the Goddess is satisfied then peace, prosperity and harmony will rule the world. In some districts, particularly in the tribal and forest areas, animal sacrifice is made to satisfy the Goddess. The place, where the sacrifice is perpetuated is known as 'Dalkhai Gudi'. The worshippers eat and drink heavily. They dance holding an Aanla branch. It is observed on each Thursday of the Odia month Aswina (between September-October) and in Sambalpur region it is worshipped on the eighth day of the first fortnight of Aswina.

So, thematically, Dalkhai songs present a variegated poetic picture. Nature, common natural objects and phenomena with 'man' at the centre –stage, social behavior and situation and particularly human passion, which is a source of ecstasy and continuance of the race, are variously celebrated in Dalkhai songs.

Musical instruments require both for the Dance and Song

Dalkhai dance and song cannot be thought of without the accomplishment of music produced by a set of beating and blowing instruments. These are briefly described below:



a) **Dhol** (A cylindrical drum) – It made of a hollowed cylindrical shaped wood on either side of which there is taut membrane. The drummer uses his both hands and sometimes a stick to produce a sweet sound. Being the prime musician, the Dhulia initiates the concert, monitors through and ends it. It his at his beating that the semi-circular chain of dancers moves its feet, hands, makes required contortion and pauses.



It is an age old instrument of Indian folk music. It is made from the trunk of a tree. Both the side of the Dhol player is of same size. The person who beats the dhol is called Dholia. The whole depends on the master musician like 'Dholia' or drum beater who makes, influences, encourages the dancers to stop and dance to hop and jump, to straight and bend etc. He plays an important role in the whole dance. Primary importance is given to different movements of hands, legs, knees and hips. The dance sometimes goes slow and fast depending upon the sound of the Dhol. Also, as the dance proceeds, the dancers make circles in clock-wise and anti-clockwise direction.

b) **Nishan**-It is a bowl shaped drum made of iron sheet and tautly membrane. The sound produced by Nishan is heart throbbing. This is mostly beaten in the worship of Durga and in the battle field,

c) **Tasha**- It is also semi – circular drum made of membrane and hollowed wood and is played by two thin bamboo sticks. The sound of Tasha creates an atmosphere of horror, fear and excitement.

d) **Tamki**- It is the smaller form of Tasha and is played by two sticks. Its sound is shriller than that of Tasha.

Nagra – (the mogul nakara) is a small one side drum play by two sticks. It is mainly a rhythmic instrument used in dance and music of aboriginal Santals.

e) **Mahuri** – (Trumpet) – it is made of earthen pipe properly plaited with brass. It produces a shrill sound that evokes awe and fear. This instrument is mainly blown at the time of worshipping a Goddess.

-A traditional wind instrument (Flute) as an auspicious instrument for all marriage ceremony and gods and goddesses worship. Muhuri a wind instrument is the centre of all musical instruments.

f) **Jhanj**- (cymbol) Jhanj is the percussion instrument.(Taal)

g. Ghungoor or Ghungroo- Anklet bells, which jingle sound excite the dancers.

h. Sehnaï- it provides tonal accomplishment

Costume



This dance requires costume of similar colour and design for both male and female and musicians. Women and girls put on colourful printed Sambalpuri sarees known as kaptas. They place a towel of red or pink colour on their shoulders holding the ends with the hands. They wear some ornaments like Guna (nose stud), Jhalka (ear ring) Khagla (necklace) Katria, Bandriya, Bahati (arm bangles), Tudal and Paenri or Ghunsi Or Payal (leg ornaments), Antasuta (bracelet like ornament in belly and Khosa (unique hairstyle opposite of plait) on their heads to give the look of perfect dancers.(Op. Cit, Padhan, p-264)

Touch on Modernity in Dalkhai

Time brings change. Dalkhai dance is no exception to it. With the passage of time, this dance form has stepped out from its traditional anchor and has assimilated in it the taste and aptitude of the modern viewers. Its religious flavor has waned. On the other hand, it has got its nourishment on the cultural value. The aboriginal communities, the bonafide harbingers of the dance are willy nilly weaned from it whereas various cultural and recreational groups, clubs, government and non-government organizations play vital role in promoting Dalkhai dance. It is because of the effort of all these agencies that the dance has gained both national and international recognition. The dance form looks forward to touching new height in the time to come.

Conclusion

Time has brought a change to its traditional scope i.e. its delimitation to the worship of Goddess Dalkhai. The folk dance Dalkhai is getting modernized by and by. Various cultural teams are performing this dance across the country and even at the international level. The colourful modern costumes of Dalkhai and the uniqueness of the dance win over the heart of the spectators. The demand of the dance has now a day increased a lot and this is the time to enjoy watch, and observe how far is destined to go (Op.cit, Behera, pp-15-18).

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