



Gotipua Dance Tradition in Odisha : An Overview

Chitta Ranjan Mallia

The Gotipua dance is an age old tradition sprouted from the seeds of religion and spirituality and not from a ritualistic or social base. We find some uncertain ties with regard to the specific period of the origin of the Gotipua dancers. But male dancers with female costumes were the important components in the performing arts of Odisha. They were called in different names like Akhada Pila, Sangeeta Pila, Dakhini Pila, Nachua Pila or Natapila etc. in different places and setups. But boy dancers with female role were performing in Dhuduki Nacha, Ghodanacha, Radhapremaleela, Bharata Leela, Ramaleela, Prahalad Natak, Suanga and in Jatras.

It is undoubtedly a fact that the advent of Sri Chaitanya to Puri in early 16th century had stirred the socio-religious and cultural life of the people of Odisha. Chaitanya introduced the doctrine of Madhura Rasa

Upasana or the mode of devotion to Krishna through conjugal love which occupied a prominent place of worship. He popularized the Bhakti movement and Lord Jagannath at Puri was identified as Srikrishna.

It is thus narrated in 'Jagannath Charitamruta' that;

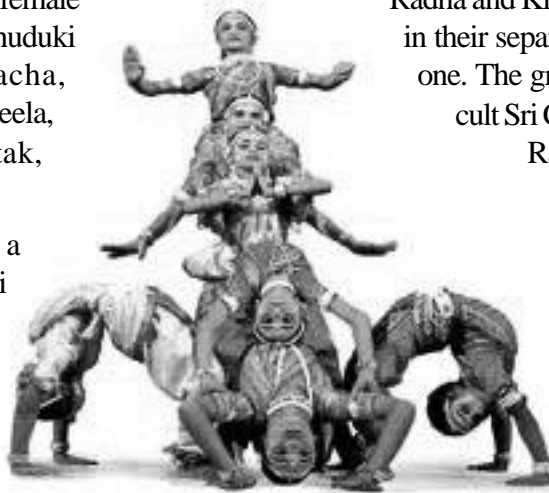
**Striyamamatmanamakalpya radharupam bibhabaye
Aham radheti manmanah kalante lavate gitam.**

During the religious discourse Ray Ramananda stressed Sakhi Bhava as the best means for realizing divine love. The Sahajiya Vaisnavas believed in the eternal dalliances of Radha-Krishna in the highest spiritual land.

In the eyes of the devout Hindu, Radha and Krishna are inseparable either in their separate identity or merged into one. The great exponent of Vaishnava cult Sri Chaitanya always conceived

Radha and Krishna merged into one in his own heart and himself felt the pleasure and pain which Radha felt due to the love or rejection of Srikrishna or vice-versa. It is true that after Ramananda and Sri Chaitanya the Vaishnavism was in full

swing in Odisha but the Vaishnavites had not approved of dancing by women instead they had preached and practiced the cult of Sakhi Bhava or offering one's own self to Krishna as a female attendant and introduced boy dancers. This dance





later had developed its technique, style and presentation.

For the first time the temple dance performed by the Devadasis or Maharis came out of the temple and was performed by those boy dancers with female garbs in temple precincts and on festive occasions though subsequently it went to the public and more so for rural masses it became an important medium of entertainment.

During this period Vaishnavas took the opportunity of preaching their cult or philosophy by adhering to the innumerable lyrics composed by the Vaishnava poets like Kabisurya Baldev Rath, Kabisamrat Upendra Bhanj, Gopal Krushna, Banamali etc. in votive dedication to Lord Krishna and making these Gotipua dancers as the medium of their publicity as the singing was done by the dancers themselves. Most of the Vaishnava Maths of Odisha patronized the dancers and even some of them had their own groups to perform. The Gotipua dance performance was more music oriented than of dance.

In the later part of 16th century the Bhoi king Ramachandra Dev while reviving the daily rituals of the temple which remained suspended for a considerable number of years established gymnasiums in each street of the town to encourage physical culture in order to protect that temple from intruders. The gymnasiums known as Akhadas also served as nurseries for all cultural activities. Here the Gotipuas were trained. That is the reason why these Gotipua dancers were called as Akhada Pilas. Later they received patronage from the Zamindars, some of whom maintained their own troupes. During the last part of the 19th century there came in a large number of professional groups. The Gotipua dance has some distinctive poses, movements, gestures and postures (Bhangis). Literally in pure Odia term

those are called Chhai, Chhataka, Chhapaka. According to Kabichandra Kali Charan Pattnaik an erudite scholar on Odissi dance and music, a Gotipua must learn :

*Utha Baitha Thia Chali
Buda Bhasa Bhaunri Pali*

Utha : It means to rise up from the sitting pose and then dance. The dancer at the Bol (Ukuta or Vani) of the Mardal rises up from the sitting pose.

Baitha : At the Bol or Vani of the Mardal the dancer bends his knees in equal measure and dances with the weight of his body set up his waist.

Thia : It is the standing pose of a dancer at the beginning or during the pauses or at the end of the dance.

(At the beginning of the dance the dancer offers flowers to Gods in the standing pose). This is also called Sthai or more popularly Thai in Odia.

Chali : Odissi dance is accompanied by the singing of songs by the dancer. The dancer steps forward, while singing in a measured way, and is said to practice Chali.

Buda : Towards the close of the dance the dancer lifts his hands above his head and acts as if he is immersed in feelings.

Bhasa : This is a movement of the dancer by bending the body alternately to the right and the left sides and acting with the hands. It appears like swimming.

Bhaunri : While practising this, the dancer revolves in such a manner and so quickly that his body is not discernible.

Pali : This is the back-stepping of the dancer while dancing.

Besides the above mentioned poses and movements, the Gotipuas were practising



'PARIJA' which means Acting : As we know like present Odissi dance Gotipua dance has also 4 parts technically known as 'Angika', Vachika, Aharya and Sattwika.

Angika means movement of limbs to express some feelings.

Aaharya means dressing etc. of the body.

Vachika means conveying the feelings by means of words.

Sattwika means outwardly reflecting innermost feelings.

The Angika, i.e. acting during dance is known as Parija or Lakshana.

Selection and Training of Gotipua

The selection of small boys to the Gotipua dance stream was and still is a very tough job. Unlike other dance or art forms it has no formal selection. Infact boys are taken into for this art form mainly on two grounds. Firstly the boys who are very poor and their parents are unable to take care of them even to feed them two times a day and the second way is a ritualistic method in which the parents offer their boys to the Gods hoping their well-being, their good health and after all their life. Because in those days when children fall ill then their only option was to offer their children to the God's and Goddess for Their services.

The first method was flexible and tenable as the boys were either being spotted out by the Gurus or their representatives or they were being sent to the Gurus by parents to stay with Guru, learn Gotipua songs, dance and perform and at the same time they were not passing time out of hunger. The second method was a complete surrender and not many boys were coming through this way because this was the last resort the parents of the ill children were taking.

While accepting boys to the Gotipua art form two things are taken into consideration though not strictly, one is the willingness of the parents and the other is the interest, may be he is ignorant of what Gotipua means to him but it was not an outright imposition or suppression of his feelings of nostalgia besides the appearance of the boy.

The training of the dance normally starts at a very tender age of 5 to 6 or 7 maximum, when their limbs are soft and adopt flexible forms. It is a traditional Gurukula Ashram system. The boys have to stay in the Guru's home and Guru provides free boarding and lodging and academic education etc.

In the early morning the Gotipuas were practicing Galasadhan or voice control with the basic nuances and notations of Odissi Ragas. Then they rehearse songs of Vaishnava poets. After that the boys do physical exercises. The Guru prostrates the disciples on the floor and then massages till oil with deft hands called in Odia "Taila Mardan" and in the process the limbs become supple and more flexible to adopt the difficult acrobatic movements.

After musical practice followed by physical exercises the trainees are given substantial food like "Khecheddi", rice cooked with Mugdal, Chuda (Parched rice), Dahi (Curd), Bananas, coconut and Ghee to keep themselves fit and strong. Then they are sent to the Chatsali or pedagogy, where they get the opportunity to learn reading and writing. Generally they go up to primary level in some cases maximum up to M.E standard but by the time they go to M.E. standard they reach at their retiring point. After coming from school they take their food like Khechedi, Coconut, Ghee and after little rest they start practicing the music and dance. In Gotipua dance singing is inevitable by the Gotipua while dancing.



Bandha Nrutya

The most interesting in a Gotipua dance performance is Bandha Nrutya. It is a dance with acrobatic poses of the body with suppling of various limbs known as Bandha in Odia, so derives the name of this dance. Because of the strenuous and time taking nature the young boys aged about 7/8 years are trained to learn this dance. Elaborate description of this Bandha dance is found in Abhinaya Chandrika the treatise on Odissi dance written by Sri Maheswar Mahapatra in 15th century A.D. and in 'Sangeeta Darpana', a treatise on dance and music by Chatura Damodar Mohapatra in 16th century A.D. Abhinaya Chandrika enumerates ten varieties of Bandhas. They are Gagan, Dwimukha, Torana, Shayana, Khuddra, Trisula, Brutanga, Damaru, Pradipa and Mithunasraya. There are some which are found in oral tradition in Gotipua and are known as Chira, Nahunia, Mayura, Chara Mayura, Sagadia and Olatachit.

In the afternoon at about 4 pm the Gotipuas were practicing with musical accompaniments. At the outset the Gotipuas were being trained with Padasadhana, typical practice with the feet and legs.

Like it is said in Odia

Chata Kada, Tak
Chauka Kada Tak
Panjha Kada Tak
Goithi Kada Tak

After that 'Arasa' is taught. This is a movement of the body and limbs on a particular Ukuta of a Taal. Then "Abalaya" a mixture of eye, neck, foot movement was also being practiced and Gurus were giving much stress on Abalaya.

This is followed by movement of eye (Netra Chalana) without neck movement (Greeba chalana). For the practice of Greeba Chalana the

Gotipuas were being taught to keep both hands at both sides of their ears with Mrugasisya Mudra. The practice would initially be very hard which becomes easy later by doing it daily.

Similarly different Mudras were being taught to the Gotipuas though they had a very limited Mudras for demonstration like, Pradeepa, Gabaksha, Tambula, Akash, Pani, Ratri, Radhakrushna, Siva, Brahma, Chandra, Surya, Bajra etc.

In all the Gotipua groups Bandha Nrutya was not being found, but in troupes from Dimirisena it was abundantly found. Out of two boys in Gotipua troupe one had to perform Bandha and accordingly he was being dressed with Kachhi, a typical wearing of saree and Khosa (Hair style) and other with Ghera and normal dress with Beni (Hair style) as he was to perform Abhinaya. Tahia with Ketaki flower was also in vogue and the Beni (hair style) was in practice till 1955 as recalls Guru Birabara Sahoo.

Make-up and Costumes :

Abhinaya Chandrika also refers to make-up and costumes required for Gotipua dancers. Originally Haldi and Kumkum were used by the Gotipuas. Subsequently the make-up involves a buff colour base in powder form which is applied on the face; collyrium is used to darken and elongate the eyes and eye-brows. A decorative pattern called 'Gorachana' of a creeper like design is painted on the forehead and encircles the eye-brows and runs down on to the cheeks. A beauty spot in the shape of a fly is placed on the chin. A Tika or Tilak mark on the forehead also adds beauty to the delicate face. Typical flower arrangement, specially devised for the hair style is called Puspa Chuda in the Abhinaya Chandrika. Two other types of flower arrangements are Ardha-Baktaka or semicircular and Katibeni or a single plait hanging down the back.



A large number of ornaments were previously used by the Gotipuas, as can be gathered from the several names mentioned in Abhinaya Chandrika. But now a days the dancers use very few of them like Chandra, Alaka, Ketaki used for the forehead. For the ears Kapas are worn. Name of necklaces used by them are Chapasari and Padatilaka. The arms are adorned with Tayita and Kaankan for the wrists. Around the waist are tied Bengapatia, the silver sets and Kamarpeti of brass.

For the costume traditionally the Pattasari made of indigenous silk of bright colours, generally in some shades of red and nine yards in length was worn. The Kanchula or blouse was also of a bright colour on which were sewn imitation stones. A length of cloth draped the hips and was tied in front and was known as Nivibadhana and the curl called Jobha, with teasels at both ends was tied like a waist band, of late the Jobha is not in vogue. This costume was similar to that used by Maharis or Devadasis, in the past, the difference being in the manner of wearing the sari. The Pattasari was worn tightly and it had an equal length of material on both sides which was caught up and tied in a knot near the naval and finally anklets are tied by the Guru before he goes for the performance.

Songs :

The songs sung by the Gotipuas are generally the compositions of Vaishnava poets of Odisha like Kabisurya Baladev Rath, Kabisamrat Upendra Bhanja, Gopalakrushna, Dinakrushna and Banamali etc. According to Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh, one of the greatest poets and educationists Odisha ever had, mentioned in his article published in 'Marg' in 1960 that "Of many of these composers of Radha Krishna songs three dominate the field. They are Kavisurya Baladev Rath, Gopal Krishna Pattnaik and Banamali Das. Of this trinity Kabisurya is the most musical, Gopal Krishna the most poetic and Banamali the

most devotional. The Gotipuas also perform on the varied musical aspects of Odissi i.e. Chhanda, Champu, Chaupadi and Chautisa etc. It is these Gotipuas who not only sustained the Odissi musical tradition through their performances but also carried forward and popularized the Odissi songs.

Vadya

Musical instruments like Odissi Mardal, Tabla Violin, Harmonium and Gini (Cymbals) were being used. It is known that Odissi Mardal has been used continuously since 1956. Even Veena and Kendera (stringed instrument) were originally used and the Palias (co-singers) were accompanying in singing with Gotipuas. It is because of strong initiative taken by the illustrious singer and erudite musician Singhari Shyam Sundar Kar amply supported by and truly followed by a galaxy of Gotipua teachers and Gurus and scholars, the Odissi Songs got refined which appealed common masses.

Gotipua dance

The Gotipua dance has its own repertory which starts with Dhyana and Vandana in honour of Lord Ganesh, Saraswati, Guru and Jananas & Bhajanas to Lord Jagannath; then Odissi songs on Radha-Krushna Leela are sung with the performance of Abhinaya. The songs and dances by Gotipuas during the Chandan Yatra and Jhulan Yatra of Lord Jagannath at Puri are inevitable. The Gotipuas perform for 22 days during the Chandan Yatra of Lord Jagannath before the deities and in the procession. During Jhulan Yatra or swing festival the Gotipuas perform before Radha and Krushna in the temple premises and Mathas in and around Puri. The Gotipuas perform for hours together on the songs of the medieval Vaishnava poets.

Chitta Ranjan Mallia, Secretary, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi, Plot No. - 339, Gautam Nagar, Bhubaneswar-14.