

Martial Art Tradition of Odisha

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Odisha had a long history of martial tradition with glories and frustration attached to it. Kingdom of Kalinga, as it was known earlier, Odisha was subjected to military aggression of various neighboring rulers and had its own heroes who led the army for territorial aggrandizements. Odisha had seen the great battle of Kalinga in which thousands of Odia soldiers sacrificed their life to resist the attack of Chandasoka, the Magadhan aggressor. The lavish bloodshed on the bank of the river Daya and the bravery and valour of the Odia militia had brought tremendous mental agony in Ashoka, who promised here to relinquish war forever. It was this Kalinga which changed Chandasoka to Dharmasoka. The great kingdom of Kalinga also had seen the fighting spirit of Kharavela, Odisha's own empire builder. Kharavela had avenged the defeat of Odias in the battle of Kalinga and brought down Magadha under his subjugation. The military career of this emperor was one of the rare examples of oriental valour. The Sun Temple of Konark displays on its wall imposing war scenes as well as war horses and elephants. The military spirit of the Odias naturally got its reflection in the art and literature of the times. In this small article we shall discuss the rudiments of militarism in the life style of the Odias through their semblance in art and literature.

Martial Art Tradition in Odia Literature:

Literature is a reflection of time. Adikabi Sarala Das lived in a time when militarism was at its splendid height in Odisha. Sarala Das was a part of the invincible Odishan army which had overrun the Karamandal coast and Kondavidu was the second capital of Odisha of the Gajapati King Kapilendra Deva. Adikabi Sarala Das, the composer of the great Odia epic "Mahabharat" was a contemporary of Kapilendra Deva and was an eye witness to the military glory of Odisha. In his books Mahabharat, Vilanka Ramayan and Chandi Puran the martial art tradition of Odisha has been distinctly depicted with details. In Mahabharat vivid description can be seen about the art of "Byuha" formation, the tacticse of Khanda Yudhya, Gadayudhya, the war strategies etc. In Chandi Puran one can find vivid descriptions of martial art during the war between Sri Durga, an woman deity and Mahisasur, the demon king. In the Vilanka Ramayan Ramachandra with the help of Sita was able to kill the thousand headed Ravana. Here Sita is depicted as the Shakti and the description of the battle between the two adversaries has been described in a heroic martial style. In Balaram Das's "Jagamohan Ramayan" one can observe narration of warfare education. In 'Mathura Mangala' of the poet Bhakta Charan Das one

can find a scene of wrestling (Malla Yuddha) between Sri Krishna and Chanur in Mathura at the behest of demon” Kansa.”

In Kanchi Kaveri one can observe the depiction of war scenes. Brajanatha Badajena in his Samar Tarang has given vivid descriptions about the martial activities of Odisha. Another book named “Paika Khela” is also valuable for record of military traditions of Odisha. In this book one can find the description about the dress, ornaments, arms, weapons, titles of Odia Paikas (peasant militia) engaged in different military activities. The jobs of various military title holders (examples-Maharathi, Rout, Bahubalendra, Gajendra Pahad Singh, Dakhin Kabat, Uttar Kabat, Jenamani) are clearly mentioned in this small booklet entitled “Paikakhela”. In the poetic description of Sachi Routray (Baji Rout), Godabarish Mishra, Radhamohan Gadnaik we can find martial themes displayed in a lucid manner. Odia literature is a storehouse of description of heroic deeds of Odia warriors, their glories, pathos, sacrifices and inspiring patriotism.

Martial Spirit in Odisha Art Form:

In the Kanchivijaya painting in the Jagamohan of the Jagannath Temple one can see Lord Jagannath and Balabhadra on horseback on their way to Kanchi to fight against Salva Narasingh for the prestige and pride of Odisha. On the walls of Biranchinarayan temple of Buguda one can see war scenes of Ramayan. One of the popular themes of the Pattachitra tradition of Raghurajpur is the marching of soldiers with horses and other royal displays.

Odishan architecture displays the military valor of Odisha. In the *carving of Udayagiri Rock-cut caves of martial tradition of Odisha, particularly of Kharavela times found mention*. In the beautiful carving of the Sun

Temple, Konark, we find scenes of heroic deeds, warfare and friezes of innumerable elephants. The war horse of Konark is another specimen of Odishan martial art.

In the performing art of Odisha the influence of Odisha military glory can be distinctly observed. Mayurbhanj Chhau is one of the most acclaimed folk dances of India. It has classical flavor and has a unique style. The style of this folk dance is based on the basic principles of Natyasastra of Kapilamuni and Abhinaya Darpan of Nandikeswar.

This dance form has its origin in the mock fights of the Odia Paikas who fought rhythmically to the accompaniment of indigenous musical instruments. The Chhau-dancers have to practice difficult mode of walking, striking, postures and movement in a way peculiar to this style. It was a virile dance form and primarily performed by male dancers. Chhau dance has serious martial characteristics in it. In the traditional performing arts of Odisha like Jatra, Pala, Daskathia we find the semblance of “Veer Rasa”, the cream of heroism and bravery.

Ghumura is another leading folk dance form of Odisha. It is classified as a folk dance as the dress code of Ghumura resembles more like a tribal dance. But recent researchers argue that different *mudras* of this dance bear resemblance with other classical dance forms of India. This dance is performed with musical instruments like Ghumura, Nishan, Dhol, Taal, Madal etc. The playing of music and the heroic rhythm overshadows the song and dance part of the performance. The expressions and movements of the artists make this dance to be a “heroic dance”. Since thousands of years Ghumura dance has evolved from a war dance to a dance form for cultural and social activities.

Ranapa Nacha is another performing martial art form very much prevalent in southern part of Odisha. "Ranapa" an instrument made of wood is attached to the legs to add height to the Paikas. Wearing Ranapas a Paik could walk in double or triple speed. As Ranapas were used by the traditional Paikas of Odisha it can very well be categorized under martial art.

Paika Akhada the known traditional martial art of Odisha is very old and linked to the Stone Age culture. "Akhada" is a place mostly in rural Odisha where military training is imparted. The participants in these "Akhadas" (martial training centre) were mostly the Paikas or the peasant militia. So the composite meaning of "Paika Akhada" is a place where the Paikas were getting their military training. The Paikas were mostly Khandayats, who had tremendous control over swords (Khanda-Sword/ Ayata-Control/ Khanda + Ayata = Khandayat). So also Khandayat means the master of the sword. They may be compared with the "Samurai" fighters of Japan. These Khandayats were patriotic and loyal to their king. The king of Odisha was very much dependent on the strength of these Paikas not only during for defence activities or of aggression, but also during the time of peace for smooth administration of the state. These Paikas showed their strength, valour and pride mostly during the

Gajapati rule of Odisha. We found certain semblance of their martial spirit during the revolt of Jayee Rajguru against the British and the Paik Revolt led by Buxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar. Barunei Fort of Khordha stands as a mute witness of this valour and courage of the Paikas. The display of such martial tactics in a dance form has come down to us as "Paika Akhada." The rich culture and techniques of Paika Akhada can be compared to other martial art forms of India like "Kalari Payatu" of Kerala. It can also be compared with the martial art form like "Wushu" or "Kungtu" of China, Judo, Karta Aikido, Kyudo of Japan, Taekwondo, Hapkido of Korea, Boxing, kickboxing of Europe, Kapoera of Brazil, Muaythai of Thailand. All such martial art forms are being used for physical fitness, self defence and as a sport. The techniques of Paika Akhada can also be utilized in the same manner and can be a popular game.

Thus the martial art tradition of Odisha speaks a great deal about the sporting as also military spirit and glories of the Odias.

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