



In spite of the recent modernization of the Kurmi community they have still retained their old age cultural traits and values which is distinctive from other tribals and Hindu castes. In their family functions such as marriage, birth, death ceremonies they observe certain rituals which reminds us of their rich cultural tradition. Culture includes the material objects of human interaction, techniques of social interaction and social orientation, world view, performing arts etc. The symbolism of decorative art may be drawn from their habitat, the gods and deities of the Kurmi-Mahatos in their 'cultural area' customarily related in some ways to the forces of nature, stories about

which are contained in cultural communication are very often the sample people.

The music as a whole is divided into movements which are related to each other by aesthetic rather than manifest association. For musically sensitive listener, each phase each movement and the symphony as a whole form a system of inter connected unities. The whole performance may take an hour but the message is transmitted as if everything happened simultaneously. The whole analysis is really true to the Kurmi-Mahatos and other ethnic groups residing in this cultural area. The Kurmi-Mahatos has got very rich folklore in respect of folk

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## The Cultural Life of Kurmi Community in the District of Mayurbhanj

*Leelabati Mohanta*

animals rarely refer to creatures found outside the habitat.

### **Folk drama**

The anthropological approach provides a systematic description and analysis of such a symbolic act in its verbal, non-verbal communication in the context of social matrix of kinship, modes of body decoration, folk songs and folk dances. The Kurmi-Mahatos rituals in day to day life in its cultural context are a pattern of symbolic communication that is supposed to guide the members of the community in their social activities. The senders and receivers of messages

medicine, folk belief, folk song, folk dance, folk tales, mythology, proverb, riddles, etc.<sup>1</sup>

The Kurmi-Mahatos are very fond of their collective excellence like songs and dances. Some are ritualistics and some are secular. In taste and flavour, in rhythmic beauty and fury, with regional rustic tonal quality, *jhumar* is an expression of unique collective excellence of the region. Many important *jhumar* poets and lyricists like Binaniya Singh, Uday Karma Kar, Dina Tanti, Brajuram Bhabaprit, Ananda Ojha, Ramkrishna Ganguly, Narottam Das, Trailokya Mandal, Pitambar Das, Baul Das, Narayan Sing,



Sristidhar Mahato and Haripada Mahato etc. had contributed many poems with lyrical grace in *Jhumar* form.

Following the above tradition, Girish Mahato, Bipin Bihari Mukhi, Bhabtosh Satpathy, Hajari Rajowar and others continue to write and compose *jhumur* song with regional folk language, which communicate the deeper cultural dynamics of the tribals and peasants which are integrated with unsophisticated regional literature or *Janapadiya Sahitya*. The sophisticated regional literature or *Janapadiya Sahitya*, the aesthetic quality is the delicate and yet vigorous use of metaphors, symbols and syntax may easily be compared with the expressive quality of the established 'developed' Indian language.<sup>2</sup> *Jhumar* deserves to be noted for its unique quality of poetic-cum-musical excellence. The Bhakti movement beginning in the south and sweeping the rest of India in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries due to Gaudiya Vaishnava movement in Bengal and Odisha, systematically also influenced the tribals.

## Dance

The main performers of this dance are professional singers, lyricists, musicians and dance directors. They have been traditionally patronized by the royal families.

**For dance they use different types of instruments. That is:**

1. **Madal or Mrudanga**- It has four types:

- (a) *Bhadaria madal*
- (b) *Tunda Madal*
- (c) *Thungri madal*
- (d) *Jhumri madal*

2. **Dhal**- It has six types:

- (a) *Rangabaja*
- (b) *Judanbaja*

- (c) *Asralbaja*
- (d) *Asarchamkabaja*
- (e) *Badtalbaja*
- (f) *Natkibaja*

3. **Dhumsa**<sup>3</sup> -It has four types:

- (a) *Nag Dhumsa*
- (b) *Nisan Dhumsa*
- (c) *Tumang Dhumsa*
- (d) *Jodi Dhumsa*.

**Mahuri**<sup>4</sup>-It has two types:

- (a) *Gavi Mahuri*
- (b) *Talpatria Mahuri*.

**Kurmi-Mahantas has many types of dance.**

**That is:**

- (1) *Nachni Dance or Sakhi Dance*
- (2) *Panta Dance and Jawa Dance or Karam Nach*
- (3) *Kathi Dance and Mahada Dance*
- (4) *Chhau Dance*

## 1. Nachni Dance or Sakhi Dance

Centering round *Jhumar* songs, a solo dance named *Nachni Naccha* is very popular among the Mahanta community. This dance is performed at the time of marriage ceremony, birth ceremony and other social festivals. This dance is performed by one female dancer or with a male dancer. This dance is originated along with the *jhumar* song in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in the royal courts.<sup>5</sup>

The male dancer is called *Rasik* and the female dancer is called *Nachni*. *Rasik* wears a *dhoti* in a special way covering both the lung is known as *Mal Kachha Mara Dhoti Pindha*. In the body he wears either an embroidered *chaplan* or a *sal*, a head with a peacock feather. He holds a flute in his hand, wears a garland and *ghunguru* on the feet.



On the other hand the female counterpart *Nachini*'s dress consists of a colourful saree or a *ghagra* with blouse. Over the blouse, she wears an embroidered jacket. Also, she has a number of different ornaments on the nose *notha* or *phuli* and the hands such a *makdi*, *baju*, *chur*, *chapa*, *kadhi*, *banki* etc.

The subject matter of this dance is mainly on the lore between Radha and Krishna. The dancers themselves sing the songs. So the singers and dancers are the same artists. Dance critics have taken this dance as folk classical because of its *mudras*. The costume of this dance is known as *Aughara*. There are many *mudras* in this dance such a *Asanghura* (greeting with folded hands) *asanbanda* (prayer to different *Devas* and *Devis*), which are performed successively followed by *karan*, *chari*, *than* and *lagan* and lastly *Natki*.

## 2. Panta Dance and Jawa Dance or Karam Dance

*Pantanach* is performed by the Kurmi-Mahanta community in the occasion of *karam* festival and. This dance is a group dance, also performed by the neighbouring tribal communities. Though this is linked with religious festival performed on *Bhadra Sukla Ekadasi* but now-a-days dance is celebrated only evening of the year.<sup>6</sup>

### A song for example –

"*Karamkatikat Akhalathapanakari*  
*Akhalathapana Brajer Nari,*  
*Ajarekarameker Rati*  
*Kariakaram puja karamrajarseba*  
*Gopin save Karen Ekadasi*  
*Ajarekaramkarrati*"

"Aj tare karam raja Ghareduare  
Kal tare karam raja kansnadi pare."

This dance is also known as *Dandsal*, *Dand Jhumar* and *Jhimaphulianach*. Since the dance is performed in standing position it is called *Dandasal*. Also the dance is based on the tune of *jhumar* songs and it is called *Dandajhumar*. The name *Jhingaphulia* is a Metaphor on *janki* flower which blossoms in the evening and died in the morning like that of the *panta* dance which starts at evening continues to morning.

There is a basic difference between the *jhumar* dance and *panda* dance. In *jhumar* there is one or two dancers whereas the *panta* is a group dance. In this dance both males and females take part and dance by holding hands and singing songs. On the tune of *madala* instruments they move their feet and body forward and backward. The songs are of different tunes. With the change of the tune, the dancing mode used to change. There are many modes and tunes of this dance such as *Patiamedha*, *Khemta*, *Adkhemta*, *Rinjamatha*, *Damkach*, *Udasia*, *Rasrasia*, *Jhumka*, *Jhumta Tamadia*, *Nagpuria*, *Patartual*, *Nikan* and *Chalbata*.

There is no need of stage for performing this dance as it could be performed from the courtyard of the house to the field. It starts with different *bandana* or prayer songs dedicated to Lord Ganesh, village deity, ten *dikpals*, parents and elders of the village. In the pre independence times, this dance was patronized by the royal courts, zamindars and rich men of the village but now there is a decline of this dance.

## 3. Kathi Dance or Mahada Dance

*Kathinach* is another form of dance prevalent in north Odisha where mainly the *mahata* community takes part. It is known as *kathi* dance because the performers dance with two wooden sticks or *kathi* in their hands. This dance is performed in October and November



during the time of Durga Puja and ends with the immersion of the Goddess<sup>7</sup>. The male dancers take part in this dance. It is a group dance. They wear sarees in their wastes in ghagra style with many plaits and a blouse to cover their body. A number of ornaments like *nakachana* on the nose, ear studs on the ears and *bahuti* on the hands, garlands on the neck, hands and heads. Sometimes leaves decorate their bodies as ornaments according to the characters they play. Village main road or the courtyards in front of the house are the places of their dance. They perform in the moonlit night or with torches or petromax lights. Now-a days electricity lights have replaced the present lighting system.

In this dance the music instruments such as *madala*, flute, *thila*, *lautumba*, *kendara* and *gopijantra* are used. Besides these, the wooden stick held by the dancer produce prominent pleasant sound along with the other music instruments. The wooden sticks are made of kuruchi tree and produced a sweet sound with minimum beating. The length of the sticks are roughly three feet and the colour is white so that in the light, They give a sparkling colour.

The dancers in a group dance in a semi – circular line by moving from left to right and again from right to left direction. In this way they circulate with dancing, beating two sticks on the tune of music. They also show different modes shouting, haihaidesh. The theme of this dance is based on Puranic stories, historical episodes and social life like Rama and Sita Banabas, Indrajit Badha, Mandodari Soka, Balibabha, Krishna coming to Kansapura, playing of *pasha* between Pandavas and Kauravas, Chhatrapati Siraja, expeditious of Bargis, deer hunting, pala, fish catching palabaradekhapala, bilabachapala, kathachirapala, etc

The dialogue and the lyrics of this dance are on Kudumali language generally spoken by the Kurmi – Mahanta community. Also, Odia, Bengali, Hindi and local tribal language such as Santali, Mundari and Bhmijali are used in this dance finds an important place in the folk traditions of the area. It educates the local village, illiterate people regarding the environment protection, literacy, preservation of jungle and animals etc<sup>8</sup>.

#### 4. *Chhau Dance*

Even in Chhau dance many words used are taken from the kurmali language. The Kurmis participate in chhau dance. This dance is contributed in Mayurbhanj district. Kurmis participate in the jhumar dance of Mayurbhanj, which depict different feelings of human being. The design and dance techniques are the greatest contribution of Kurmis of the region.

#### *Songs*

Epics of Indian literature and Krishna myth with the help of seven tribal peasants folk forms of the area, namely Khemta, Arkhemta, Patiamedha, Rinjamatha, Domkoch, Jhingaphulia or Chaiti, Bagaliya or Udhaya and Bhadria superbly blended in artistic expression of Vaishnava aesthetics with kirtan (mass prayer) tunes. Under the patronage of Rajas of different Garhs over the region a typical tradition of dance by dancing girls are locally know as Nachni Nacha accompanied by elaborate Nachnisalaiya or Darbari Jhumar forms of music developed. The music experts came to be known as Rasik.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Jhumar song*

Jhumar is origin of chhau dance of Mayurbhanj and Jharkhand. Though it is the main dance of dharma Ganjan originally but now becomes ritual dance forms blended in one dance from known as chhau. These are Nachin, Danr



Nach, Kirtan, Gajan Natua, Majhi Nach. Chhau dance is a form of mask dance, mainly reflecting the lasya (passion), Tandava (destruction) and other moods. Stories from the epics and the Puranas choreographed by ustads (specialists) in micro regionally standardized forms. In the chhau dance of Mayurbhanj, the Kurmi – mahatas are the main participants. They do not use mask, but jhumar provides the main background of the choreography. Jhumar song is divided into ten type.

1. Jawanachiajhumar
2. Pantasaliajhumar
3. Kathinachiajhumar
4. Nachininachiajhumar
5. Bibhahakalinajhumar
6. Upanasikajhumar
7. Darabarijhumar
8. Sakhinachiajhumar
9. Mahadanachiajhumar
10. Chhaunachiajhumar

#### ***Jawanachiajhumar***

It is performed in Bhadrab Ekadasi puja for karam raja (karam thakur). The unmarried girls observe this puja.

#### ***Panthasaliajhumar***

It is also observed in Bhadrab month Ekadasi for puja of karam raja. Here some raga and ragini are used that – patiamedha, Khemta, Adkhemta, Rinjhamatha, Jhingaphulia, Udasia, Rasrasia, Jhumka Jhumta, Tamadia, Nagpuria, Patartala, Nikan, Chalchanta, Chalkhemta.

#### ***Kathinachiajhumar***

The performers dance with two wooden sticks or kathi in their hand.

#### ***Nachininachiajhumar***

This dance is performed at the time of marriage ceremony, birth ceremony and other

social festivals. This dance is performed by one female dancer or with a male dancer.

#### ***Bibhahakalinajhumar***

This jhumar song is sung at the time of marriage ceremony. Both bridegroom sider gether and the song is managed unit to both the parties.

#### ***Upanasikajhumar***

This jhumar song use for the main gods and goddess. This song is two type one is – Bandan Salia Jhumar 2- Mantra Salia Jhumar.

#### ***Darabarijhumar***

This jhumar is performed in kings darabar. It is only for the entertainment for king and wealthy persons of the kingdom.

#### ***Sakhinachiajhumar***

When the Vaishnavism spread across Odisha, at that time the sakhi and sakhi dance of Vashnavism influenced the Kurmis. Then the Kurmis followed dancing and singing of Jhumar song.

#### ***Mahadanachiajhumar***

This dance is performed for nature gods like birds, animals, field, tree and Assur –Action of this dance is based on epics and folk tales like –Rabana Badha, Mahisasura Badha.<sup>10</sup>

#### ***Chhaunachiajhumar***

Jhumar is original convainer of chhau dance of Mayurbhanj. Though it is the ritual dance of Dharma Gajan originally but now became ritual dance of Siva – Ganjan, chhau dance is form of dance, mainly reflecting the lasya (passion), tandava and other moods.

Besides these there are other dances and songs like *karama* dance mainly for women connected with jawa songs. The Bandna or



ceremonial songs depicting the glory of cattle are sung by males. The women also sings like tusi, which is ritual as well as secular songs. They sing also plantation songs Dhan rope or udhaya, songs. The male and female dance is Danrnach during Dal-Gara or jita festival. Various forms of marriage songs are also very much prevalent among the Kudmi – mahantas. Basically the Kurmi – mahantas are very much fond of dance and music and are pleasure oriented.

But the Darabarijhumar is a rather late origin. It originated in the last part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the royal courts of the Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar states.

In this song and dance the traditional music instruments are used such as madal, Dhumsa, Dhal, Kadakha, Sahanai, Flute, Thila, Kendera, Gopiyantira etc. Besides these, now a days modern instruments like Dubitabla, Harmonium are also used.

#### **A collection of Tusu songs revel the mood of the people in Mayurbhanj:**

*Bangalaisekangalkorilo*  
*Hamadersabkichukairenilo.*  
*Partite aerjabonakollekata*  
*Hamrahbonabhojer shalpata<sup>11</sup>*

(After coming here Bengalees made us pauper, taken away everything from us. We won't go to Calcutta for the meetings, we would not be used as a dinner plate.)

#### **A collection of Bandana songs reveal the mood of the people in Mayurbhanj:**

*Jago Ma Lachhmi*  
*Jaga Ma Bhagabati,*  
*Jago Sutain Amabashya Rat,*  
*Jagoke re Pratiphal,*

*Pow Ba Re Akhani,*  
*Pancha Putra Dasha Dhenu Gai.<sup>12</sup>*

(Oh Mother Lachhmi, Oh Mother Bhagabati; keep awakening, the night of Amabashya. The cost of awakening will give you five sons and ten cows.)

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