

## The Story and History of Odissi Dance and Sri Geeta Govinda

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The tradition of Odissi dance is almost 2000 years old. It is gleaned from the past records that the first clear picture of Odissi dance was available in Manchapuri Gumpa of Udayagiri, which was carved at the time of King *Maha Megha Vahana Aira Kharvela*. Flanked by two queens, (Simhapatha Rani and Bajira Ghara Rani) King Kharavela himself was watching a dance recital where a damsel was performing dance in front of the court; there were several accompanists including female instrumentalists. Thus, the Odissi dance can be traced back to its origin as a secular dance, which was latter on very much attached to the temples.

Starting with the rituals of Sri Jagannath temple of Puri, Odissi dance was regularly performed in *Shaivite*, *Vaishnavite* and *Sakta* temples of Orissa. We have already got an inscription where it was also engraved that a *devadasi Karpursri's* attachment to a Buddhist monastery, where she herself, starting with her grandmother and mother, performed as devadasi. Thus, it may be inferred that this secular dance latter named as Odissi dance was first originated as a court dance and in due course of time became associated with Jaina monasteries as patronised and performed by royal presence, latter on also performed in all religious places including Buddhist monasteries.

It was said that one older temple existed at the same place reffered to as *neelachala* or Blue mountain, and Chodagangadeva constructed a temple at that place by renovating or moving the debris of dialapiated temple. The legends of Indradyumna and Galamadhava gave ample testimonies to this probability. However, existence of Lord Jagannath along with brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra was there as we have with us the famous hymn composed by *Adishankar* who visited this place in 9th/10th century and established his monastery at this place. In his famous hymn "*Jagannathastaka*", he has associated Lord Jagannath with Srikrishna and his first stanza was devoted to Srikrishna.

*"Kadachit Kalindi tata bipina  
Sangitakabarau*

*mudavirih narii badana  
kamalaswadmadhupa...*

This '*Asthaka*' or eight stanza was probably very much in use in the rituals of Srimandira which paved path for use of Sri Gitagovinda mahari dance in Srimandir of Lord jagannath.

According to *Madala Panji*, the temple chronicle, Gita Gobinda Seva was initiated by king Kabi Narasingha during his rule, corresponding to 1278 AD as starting year and 1309 A.D. as

the end of his rule. This Kavi Narahisnha of Ganga dynasty, literally translated, would be poet king Narsingha, who was actually Narsingha Deva of Ganga dynasty. Geetagoinda was actually composed during his predecessor Ganga king Kamarnava.

King kamarnava ruled Orissa in between 1147 A.D. to 1156 AD during which Geetagoinda was composed by Kaviraj Jayadeva of Kenduli village near Puri and Bhubaneswar. As Geetagoinda was quick to get recognition among the learned scholars of coastal Orissa, it was analysed by another Orissan poet and scholar kavi Udayana Acharya. The name of this first supplement is known as "*Vaba Bibhabini*" (Analysis of feelings). At this point of time, it was known that king Raghava Deva was ruling over Orissa. His period was limited to 1156 A.D. to 1170 A.D. Therefore, it is inferred that then ruling Ganga kings and Orissan scholars were amused by the musical rendering and scholarly writing of Kaviraj Jayadev mingled with devotional subject matter, and thought it proper to offer to the lord Jagannath along with music and dance rituals.

As Jayadeva has himself revealed as "*Padmabati Charana Chakrovorty*" and also mentioned this friend Parasara and others (*Parasavedi Bandhu barge*) it can be told, probably he was the composer and with Padmavati, his wife, they were a dancing couple. Most probably Parasara, his friends and other accompanists were there to perform dance and music recital before lords in the temples and kings in the court, it needs further examination and documentation.

However, we have seen in between 1150 A.D. to 1300 A.D., within 150 years, Sri Geetagoinda established itself as a devotional song suitable to be presented through music and

dance in the daily rituals of Lord Sri Jagannath in Puri. As already told before that different hymns and stores were rendered before Lord at different time and Upasana mudras (Poses, postures and gestures) were used to be performed by Sevayats. In all probability "*Jagannathastaka*", a hymn composed by Adi Shankar was one of the hymns those were rendered before Lord Jagannath as we also found it to be most suitable hymn in Odissi dance or without Odissi dance.

Dance as a ritual is present in all Hindu temples of India. There are ample evidence to prove that Jain monks along with kings were also patronizing dance as rituals. It was also similar in case of Buddhist practices. The Devadasi or Mahari tradition, later known as dancing girl tradition of Hindu temple, was a pan-Indian phenomenon, although most of the scholars attribute this to be a South Indian Style. North-Indian temples were also patronizing this Devadasi tradition though due to Muslim invasion the tradition was discontinued.

Thus Sri Jayadeva's Geeta Govinda was rendered by Brahmin Sebayats and female Devadasis known as "*Bhitara Geyeni*" and "*Samprada*". Some Mahari performed dance near the inner threshold known as '*Kalahaat Dwara*'. This was going on without any interruption for 200 years. Performance of Geeta govinda and Mahari Dance influenced other temples to start such tradition. As we see in Orissa all the temples, shavite, Vaishnavite along with Shakta temples patronised this tradition which is documented in temples of Bhubaneswar, Kakatpur and Jajpur. One Sadhu Pradhana Jayadeva was also honoured at the Sri Lingaraj temple of Bhubaneswar.

During this period, lot of learned scholars started writing imitating Sri Geeta govinda", which were by some research scholars were

branded as "Counterfeits of Geeta Govinda". We may use the euphemism as imitations of Geeta Govinda. All these imitations vied with original one, but inspite of their masterly qualities failed to surpass kaviraja Sri Jayadeva's master piece. The writers of these imitations included no less than the Gajapati king who wrote Abhinaba Geeta govinda also. There from its enviable position of every day rendening before Lord Jagannath continues. To put to an end to this controversy king Prataprudra deva of Suryavamsa issued a proclamation engraved in Jay Bijoya Dwara that original Geeta govinda only will be recited during temple rituals in the rights.

Thus Geeta govinda finds in eternal bond with the temple recital of music and dance. Till to day, Geeta govinda enjoys its coveted position despite various other musical composition and innovative approaches.

It was a different story that the Odisi Dance, resurgued out of the temples aided by Raya Ramananda, when he wanted to stage his drama "Jagannath Ballava" out side temple in Puri and invited the Devadasis to participate in it. This innovation also attracted objection and only after lot of royal support he could manage to get a temple girl called Mukta Devadasi to perform dance outside Sri Jagannath temple. Some opined that Raya Ramanda Managet got her from other temple. However, Sri Geeta Govinda remains to inspire.

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Gitagovinda manuscript in palm leaf

*Photo Courtesy : Orissa State Museum*