



## ODISSI AND CHHAU DANCE



Photo Courtesy :  
KNM Foundation, BBSR

### Introduction :

Odissi dance got its recognition as a classical dance, after Bharat Natyam, Kathak & Kathakali in the year 1958, although it had a glorious past. The temple like Konark have kept alive this ancient forms of dance in the stone-carved damsels with their unique lusture, posture and gesture. In the temple of Lord Jagannath it is the devadasis, who were performing this dance regularly before Lord Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe. After the introduction of the Gita Govinda, the love theme of Lordess Radha and Lord Krishna, the *devadasis* performed *abhinaya* with different Bhavas & Rasas. The Gotipua system of dance was performed by young boys dressed as girls. During the period of Ray Ramananda, the Governor of Raj Mahendri the Gotipua style was kept alive and attained popularity. The different items of the Odissi dance style are Mangalacharan, Batu Nrutya or Sthayi Nrutya, Pallavi, Abhinaya & Mokhya. Starting from Mangalacharan, it ends in Mokhya. The songs are based upon the writings of poets who adored Lordess Radha and Krishna, as their ISTHADEVA & DEVIS, above all KRUSHNA LILA or 'RASALILA' are Banamali, Upendra Bhanja, Kabi Surya Baladev Rath, Gopal Krishna, Jayadev & Vidagdha Kavi Abhimanyu Samant Singhar.

### ODISSI DANCE RECOGNISED AS ONE OF THE CLASSICAL DANCE FORM

#### Press Comments :-08-04-58 STATESMAN

"It was fit occasion for Mrs. Indrani Rehman to dance on the very day on which the Sangeet Natak Akademy officially recognised Orissi dancing as a classical system equal with Bharat Natya and Kathkali."

#### Times of India-08-04-58

"Testimony for the recognition of Odissi as a classical dance on par with Bharat Natyam by the dance seminar on Monday was found the same evening in the dance numbers presented by Indrani Rehman at the Talkotra Gardens."

#### Hindustan Times-08-04-58

"Within a few hours Sangeet Natak Akademy dance seminars according national status fifth school of Indian classical dance, namely Odissi, a large audience had the opportunity to witness the same performed by Indrani Rehman."

(Extract taken from 'KUMBARA CHAKA, Autobiography of Kavichandra, Dr. Kalicharan Pattanaik)

### GURU PARAMPARA

The revival of the Odissi dance owes a lot to the guru-shishya parampara (an order of the teacher and the taught), which has sustained the living traditions of dance in India. Several reasons had contributed to the weakening of the system and the *gurus* were forced to fall back on other allied arts—the theatre and the Rasalila. They somehow managed to survive. Some of them together formed

an association called Jayantika. With the help of scholars and dancers they polished the techniques and brought order to the form of dance. Their effort has contributed in placing Odissi among the major classical dance forms of India today.

### **Guru Pankaj Charan Das**

Of the two classes of performing artistes, the *maharis* and the *gotipuas*, Guru Pankaj Charan Das belongs to the Mahari class. His aunt Ratnaprava trained him in dance. It is other *gurus* were Raghunath Dev Goswami and Bhikari Charan Dalei, two important exponents of the *rasalila* in Orissa. He was also a male dancer in a leading *akhada*, before serving as dance director at the Annapurna Theatre B-Group, where he trained most of the present day *gurus* of the Odissi, including Guru Kelu Charan Mohapatra. With growing interest in Odissi, Pankaj Charan Das shot into fame and was sought after by the dancers in Orissa. He played a major role as one of the architects of the neo-classical form of Odissi, in focusing attention on the tradition of the *maharis*, training dancers like Yamini Krishna Murty, Ritha Devi and Sumathy Kausal and choreographing special numbers for them. Most of the dancers in Orissa at one time or another have studied under him. He has taught at the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, Bhubaneswar and was also for a short period in Patna at the Bharatiya Nritya Kala Mandir. He has choreographed several dance-dramas and some of his choreographic pieces of Solo numbers have been documented by the Odissi Research Centre. He received the Sangeet Natak Akademy Award in 1971. His daughter Vijay Laxmi Das carries on his tradition.

### **Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra**

Born in a family of Patta Chitra painters, Kelucharan Mohapatra was trained in Khol playing by his father. At the tender age of nine he joined the Rasalila party of Mohan Sundar Dev Goswami and served there for twelve years after which he was on his own. But during this apprenticeship he required sound knowledge in all aspects of the theatre. He also worked in the Orissa Theatre of Kavichandra Kalicharan Pattanaik while continuing to study the Khol and Mridang under the guidance of Agadhu Moharana and the Tabala under Khetra Mohan Kar and Harihar Rao. He joined the Annapurna Theatre B-Group where he took lessons in dance from Guru Pankaj Charan Das. He took part in the several dance dramas and partnered Laxmi Priya, a dancer whom he married. After leaving the Annapurna Theatre he returned to Puri where he studied the Mahari tradition and also undertook research in Gotipua dance tradition.

For fifteen years he taught at the Kala Vikas Kendra. It is the premier institution in Orissa, which helped to establish Odissi on a sound footing. At the Kendra, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra trained hundreds of students and also some of the younger *gurus*. He composed several dance numbers and also choreographed dance-dramas for the annual festival of the Kendra. He has laid the research groups of the Kendra several times and gathered knowledge about the folk and tribal dances of Orissa.

He later moved to Delhi where he taught at the Nritya Niketan for sometime. Many awards and honours including that of the Sangeet Natak Akademy (1966) were conferred on Kelu Charan who had already become a famous guru and his all pervading influence was recognised on the Odissi dance scene. The Government of India honoured him with Padmashree in 1972 and later on with Padmabhusan.

He conducts several workshops now regularly at Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay and Cuttack and he is the senior *guru* at the Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar. The extensive research projects on the Notation of the Odissi dance technique are progressing at the centre under his guidance.

He has given innumerable performance in India and abroad and has participated in the festivals of India in the UK, the USA, and Japan. His performances whether of *nritya* or *abhinaya* are of a high

standard and leave an indelible impression on the audiences. His *sanchari bhavas* are imaginative and his playing the Pakhawaj as an accompaniment lends an extra dimension to the dance performance. His choreography inspired by the sculptures and *pata* paintings is a sheer visual delight. He has enriched Odissi with his inimitable touch and imagination. The contemporary repertoire of Odissi bears his signature and some of his Pallavis and Ashtapadis have become classics. His style can be discerned immediately and has acquired a distinct character of its own. There is sophistication, beauty and all permeating aesthetic in his style that stands out as its hallmark. His contribution to Odissi is indeed outstanding and lasting. He has trained his son Ratikanta—in dance and the playing of the Pakhawaj. Ratikanta follows in his father's footsteps participating actively in performing teaching, choreographing and major dance programmes. Doyen of Odissi, Guru Kelucharan passed away on 7th April 2004.

### **Guru Deba Prasad Das**

Guru Deba Prasad Das shot into prominence when Indrani Rehman took him along with her to various national and international dance festivals. Fond of dance and music from childhood, Deva Prasad Das was trained in Odissi by Guru Mohan Chandra Mohapatra who was an *akhada pilla* and a *gotipua*. When Deba Prasad came of age, he joined an intonate theatre group as a full-fledged dance director. He later joined the Annapurna theatre B-Group and went through the apprenticeship which equipped him to become a performer and a *guru*. In 1950 he left the theatre and joined the National Music Association. By then the enthusiasm for reviving Odissi had swept over Orissa and his association with Indrani Rehman helped the movement a great deal. He travelled with her from 1957 to 1963 before settling down at Bhubaneswar. He joined the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya where he trained a large number of students till his untimely death in 1986. He was a gifted *guru* and had contributed significantly to the revival of Odissi. His style was lyrical and his abhinaya had a special earthy flavour. He trained his students Bijaya Laxmi Mohanty in Bandha Nritya. He was a repository of the sabdaswarapatta. For his outstanding contribution to Odissi he had received the Sangeet Natak Akademy Award in 1977. He was working under Government of India, Department of Culture, senior fellowship on a project on the Jagannath Sebare Naache (a dance ritual in service of Lord Jagannath) and Akhada Sampradaya (the Institution of Gymnsia). He also wrote a book in Oriya, Nritya Sarani that is now being edited for publication by Priyambada Mohanty at the instance of the Central Sangeet Natak Akademy. Among his students Sujata Mishra, Sudhakar Sahoo, Durgacharan Ranbir and others are carrying on his style.

### **Guru Mayadhar Rout**

Mayadhar Rout was trained in the art of *gotipua* dancing by his elder brother Harihar Rout. He also studied under Durlav Singh, Yudhistir Mohapatra and Mohan Mohapatra. Like other *gurus* he too had joined theatre companies including the Orissa Theatre of Kalicharan Pattnaik and the Annapurna Theatre, where Guru Pankaj Charan Das taught him Odissi. Later he joined the Kala Vikas Kendra as a guru in 1952 when Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra was on the staff. In 1955 he went over to Kalakshetra at *matras* under a scholarship and studied Bharat Natyam under Rukmini Devi and Kathakali from T. K. Chandu Parikar. At Kalakshetra he took part in several dance dramas and studied the *Natyasastra*. When he returned to the Kala Vikas Kendra, he could utilize his knowledge to choreography several new dance numbers enriching Odissi in the process. In 1967, he moved to Delhi and taught at the Nritya Niketan—most of the leading Odissi exponents in the capital studied under him. He joined Sriram Bharatiya Kalakendra in 1970 and has been a resident *guru* there training several students. Among his well-known students are Aloka Panikar, Kiran Sehgal and his daughter Madhumitta. For his contribution to Odissi he has received many awards including Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1985. He has choreographed several numbers and Ashtapadis employing various *sanchari bhavas*. He has retained in his style delectable elements of the *gotipua* techniques

and his style is distinctive and has fluidity and grace. He has trained his daughter Madhumitta Rout who projects his style faithfully.

### **Guru Harekrishna Behera**

Guru Harekrishna Behera was trained as a *gotipua* from the tender age of eight by Ramahari Behera. Like his other contemporaries, he too joined a *jatra* party and toured all over Orissa, performing and learning various aspects of theatre. From Ram Chandra Dey, he took lessons in music and other traditional dance styles. He also studied to play the Tabla and mastered the Champu and Chhanda styles. In 1957 he joined Kala Vikas Kendra, Cuttack and was trained in Odissi by Guru Mohapatra. Kala Vikas Kendra sponsored him to study at the Natya Ballet Theatre in Delhi. In 1964 he received a grant from the Sangeet Natak Akademi to study Kathak under the guidance of Birju Maharaj. He studied the Pakhawaj with Purshottam Das and *thumari* singing from Sidheswari Devi. He set up Nritya Niketan, the first school of Odissi dance in Delhi with the help of Mr. Khosla and invited Guru Mayadhar Rout, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and Guru Surendranath Jena to teach there. The school ran for sometime before closing down for several reasons.

In its short spell, it contributed substantially to the popularity of Odissi in the Capital in the early sixties. Practically, all the major exponents of Odissi in Delhi had taken lessons at the Nritya Niketan. Kum Kum Lal (nee mathur) Aloka Panikar, Ranikarna, Sonali Mansingh, Priya Pawar, Radha Reddy and several others took lessons there. In 1971, Harekrishna joined the Gandharba Mahavidyalaya where he taught Odissi to several dancers including Madhabi Mudgal, Smurti Mehta and others. He also accompanied leading dancers at performances. He taught at the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya till 1979. Then he started his own Institution named Odissi Kendra where he is conducting dance classes. He has trained his daughter Kavita Behera ensuring a continuity of dance in his family. The Odissa Sangeet Natak Akademi and the All India Critics Association, Calcutta has bestowed awards on him for his services in the promotion of the arts.

### **Guru Surendranath Jena**

Guru Surendra Nath Jena had a natural aptitude for dance and music from childhood. Like his contemporaries he too joined the Kala Vikash Kendra and studied Odissi under various *gurus* including Gurus, Mayadhar Rout, Kelucharan Mohapatra and others. After qualifying for the degree courses in 1966, he moved to Delhi and joined the Triveni Kala Sangam as an Odissi Guru and has trained several students. His style differs from those of other Gurus in that he has introduced elements of folk forms with various sculpturesque pose, among his children he has trained his daughter Prativa Jena in Odissi.

### **Guru Ramani Ranjan Jena**

Guru Ramani Ranjan Jena was trained by various gurus including Mayadhar Rout, Kelucharan Mohapatra and Raghunatha Datta at the Kala Vikash Kendra from where he obtained a master's degree in Odissi. He has given several solo performances and also appeared with dancers in duets. When other gurus were migrating to Delhi, Ramani Ranjan moved to the south and settled in Madras where he has taught several young dancers, who were also proficient in Bharat Natyam. Foremost amongst his disciples is Malavika Sarrukhai, the well-known Bharat Natyam exponent. He taught Odissi at the Kalakhetra for a period of three years from 1977 to 1980, before returning to Cuttack, where he has set up his own Institution, the Kamal Kala Pitha to teach dance to local students and also students from abroad. He has travelled extensively. Among his children, his son Rasmi Ranjan Jena has received training from him in Odissi and is a promising dancer. Another son has been trained in music. Currently he too has moved to Delhi and teaches at Triveni Kala Sangam.

### **Guru Gangadhar Pradhan.**

Gurus Banchhanidhi Pradhan, Chandrasekhar Pattnaik and Mohadev Rout trained Guru Gangadhar Pradhan as a *gotipua* dancer. He later received training in Odissi from Gurus Pankaj Charan Das, Kelucharan Mohapatra and Deba Prasad Das. He joined the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya and received training from Minati Mishra also. He is proficient in playing the Pakhawaj having received training from the late Singhari Shyam Sundar Kar and Banamali Moharana. He now runs his own dance academy at Bhubaneswar training several young students among whom Aruna Mohanty is his best-known student. He has choreographed many dance-dramas and various dance numbers. He has also accompanied many leading dancers on the Pakhawaj.

## **Some Eminent Odissi Danseuses**

### **(1) Priyambada Mohanty Hejmadi**

It was in the early fifties that Odissi received serious notice from the outside world for the first time. Little was known about Odissi when Priyambada Mohanty, a young talented dancer from Cuttack represented Orissa in the category of classical dance at the Inter University Youth Festival held in Delhi in 1959. She was given the third prize for classical dance. Another dancer taking part in the same competition was the research scholar Dhirendranath Pattnaik.

Priyambada Mohanty was trained in Odissi by Singhari Shyam Sundar Kar, Gurus Pankaj Charan Das, Kelucharan Mohapatra and Deba Prasad Das. Priyambada happened to be the one dancer whose performances helped Odissi gain recognition as a classical dance art. In 1963 she left for further studies in the USA. When she returned to India in the late seventies Odissi had already grown into a full-fledged dance form. She joined the Utkal University as a Professor of Zoology, but has continued further researches in Odissi. She and Guru Pankaj Charan Das have trained her daughter Ahalya Hejmadi. Priyambada has received several awards including awards from the Orissa State Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi. She lives at Bhubaneswar and is preparing a book on the dances of Orissa for the Orissa State Sangeet Natak Akademi.

### **(2) Sanjukta Panigrahi**

Though late Sanjukta Panigrahi belongs to an orthodox Brahmin family of Orissa, her parents took a bold step when they entrusted her Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra to train her as a dancer when she was barely four years old. Since then she has never looked back. She was one of the leading dancers of Odissi in the Country. She had rendered invaluable service to Odissi by taking it to all parts of the World. Her name has become synonymous with Odissi.

Though she was proficient in Bharat Natyam, she gave it up early to concentrate exclusively on Odissi. She studied Bharat Natyam at Kala Kshetra for six years directly under Rukmani Devi and took part in several dance dramas choreographed by her. All the knowledge, experience and exposure, she received at Kalakshetra, helped her in the advancement of Odissi, when she returned to Orissa. With single minded devotion she studied intensively under Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and devoted all her energies to Odissi only and soon emerged as a leading exponent helping to establish this form on a sound footing. In her endeavours to popularise Odissi, she has received artistic support from her husband, the vocalist and musician Raghunath Panigrahi. They had pooled their talents and their team work enriched the Odissi Repertoire. Besides traditional numbers they had choreographed dances to the *padabali*s of Surdas, Chaupais from the Ramacharitta Manas of Tulasidas and the songs of Vidyapati and Rabindranath Tagore. They had also choreographed innovative numbers like the Yugma-Dwandwa : a short of Jugalbandi between the dancer and the musician in Raga-Bageshri.

Gifted with a tall frame a slim figure and possessing a perfect command over the technique, Sanjukta brings to her recitals an intensity indicative of inner vitality and poise, leading her dance quality which sets her apart from her contemporaries. Her body takes various postures of great beauty, reminiscent of the Orissan sculptures. Her training in Kathak under the Gurus Sunayana and Hazarilal has helped her gain mastery over *tala* and *laya*. There is authority in her footwork and movements. Her total involvement brings to her recitals and iridescent quality. She seems to be lighting up from within and the glow permeates her entire being.

In *abhinaya*, Sanjukta at times seems to get so carried away that it appears exaggerated. But on a closer look it is this total involvement, which blurs the line of distinction. The most impressive number in her repertoire is the Moksha, in which she seems to be in a trance. To the *stuti* in praise of Goddess Narayani, she brings a hypnotic quality. The various forms of the goddess in her beatific and benign moods are evoked by Sanjukta to the exquisite music by Raghunath. Sanjukta has set a trend and most of the other dancers are invariably influenced by her presentation of Moksha. Sanjukta's Moksha Mangalam has her own individual signature. It offers the spectators an elevating experience by ending her recitals on a note of all pervading peace.

Sanjukta has received several awards. She was given the Padmashree by the Government of India and an award by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, that she shares with Raghunath for their service to Odissi. Besides these awards, several honours have come her way, which she richly deserves.

### (3) Kum Kum Mohanty

Kum Kum Mohanty (nee das) started studying dance from the age of nine at the Kalavikas Kendra at Cuttack, receiving training from Gurus Mayadhar Rout, Kelucharan Mohapatra. Later on she took intensive training from Kelucharan Mohapatra and became famous as his leading disciple. During her studies at the Kala Vikas Kendra, she took part in several dance-dramas choreographed by Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra. She contributed substantially to the revival of Odissi by her solo performances all over India and abroad.

Kum Kum is gifted with an expressive face that registers subtle nuance of *abhinaya* with effortless ease. She externalises inner emotions, highlighting the essence of the Ashtapadis from the Gita Govinda. Kum Kum's impersonation of the *nayikas* is dignified. She is best known for her *abhinaya*.

She qualified for the Indian Postal Service and after her marriage she has restricted her performances to a few major conferences. With the help of the Orissa Government she succeeded in establishing the Odissi Research Centre under the Department of Culture at Bhubaneswar, where she has brought together a team—Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, the vocalist Balakrishna Das and the musician Bhubaneswar Mishra to codify the Odissi dance technique, launched various research schemes undertaken a project of dance notation with new dance terminology and published the Odissi path-finder in Oriya and English. She has also recorded the repertoire of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra on video, worked out a methodology of analysis of dance movements recorded the choreographic works and numbers of Guru Pankaj Charan Das and other Gurus as well as instituted scholarship for training youth and students. In addition she has launched a research project in Odissi music, organised seminars and continues to work on several other aspects including documentation of *gotipua* dances and *sakhi nach*.

Under her leadership and with the help of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra the Odissi Research Centre has contributed in a significant manner to the development and growth of Odissi. With her catholic approach, besides being a gifted exponent Kum Kum has rendered invaluable service to Odissi.

**(4) Minati Mishra**

A senior dancer, Minati Mishra was trained in Odissi by Guru Kelucharan and Deba Prasad Das. She had also received encouragement and guidance from the poet and scholar Kalicharan Pattnaik. Minati studied Bharat Natyam at Kalakhetra for sometime and later on from Guru Chhokkalingam Pillai at the Indian Institute of fine arts at Madras. She received critical acclaim for her recitals from connoisseurs and became famous as a Bharat Natyam exponent.

Later on, she concentrated on Odissi devoting all her attention to it and helped considerably in popularising the dance form. She went to West Germany and did her Ph.D in dance at the Marburg University. After a stay of five years abroad, she returned to Orissa and was appointed Principal of the Utkal Sangeet Vidyalaya at Bhubaneswar. Where she now teaches Odissi in the Dance Department. For her service to the field of dance, she has received several honours and awards including an award from the Orissa State Sangeet Natak Akademi. She divides her time between Europe and India.

**(5) Sonal Mansingh**

By the time Sonal Mansingh started taking lessons in Odissi from Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, she had already received critical acclaim as a Bharat Natyam exponent. In Bharat Natyam she had received training from Professor U. S. Krishna Rao and his wife U. K. Chandrabhagar Devi, Guru Nana Kasar, Jayalaxmi Alva and others. She also studied for sometimes *abhinaya* Gouri Amma. She received guidance in the theoretical aspects of the Natyasastra from T. N. Ramachandan. Well versed in Sanskrit and Oriya she brings to bear upon her recitals an extra dimension by creating a parallel kinetic poetry. A sensitive visage, a pair of large eyes, resilient body and an arresting stage presence contribute additional charm to her performances.

Widely travelled, with an exposure to various, cultures, she has imbibed a sharp and perceptive understanding of various dance forms and over the years has evolved her own art of aesthetic presentation.

Most of the Ashtapadis from the Gita Govinda choreographed by Guru Kelu Charan Mohapatra were taught first to Sonal during her training under the great maestro. While learning dance from Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Sonal also received guidance in the culture of Orissa from the renowned poet and litterateur Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh. Her own study of sculptures, paintings and the knowledge of the dance technique equipped her for exploring various aspects of Odissi in a meaningful manner. Besides Guru Kelu Charan Mohapatra she took lessons from Gurus Mayadhar Rout, Harekrishna Behera and Srinath Rout. She also took lessons in Mayurbhanja Chhau dance from Guru Anant Charan Sai in order to understand the kinetic principles and inter-relationship between Odissi and the indigenous dance traditions of Orissa.

In her artistic endeavours she collaborated with the poet and scholar Jiban Pani. Together they have extended the horizons of Odissi dance. In particular, they have enriched the repertoire of Odissi exploring the poetic content. Besides presenting the traditional repertoire of Odissi, Sonal has used contemporary poems, using the traditional Pala Sangita, attempting to blend the folk and classical elements. Her choreography of Nayane Sunayana Re and Kuntala Sakuntala deals with various poetic images, comparisons, concepts and *alankaras* the embellishment in dance. It is refreshing in its exposition and imbues her dance with rich poetic nuances.

After mastering the technique from the *gurus* Sonal has charted her own path her approach to dance has been both artistic and corebal. Her rendering of the Astapadoes from the Gita Govinda to the musical mode closer to the original music tradition are noteworthy both for the emotional and expressional content with the guidance and help of Jiban Pani and vocalist Bankim Sethi she has explored the Odissi music and developed a repertoire that sets her apart from her contemporaries.

With an inquiring mind she has shed light on the close relationship between poetry and dance. Whether it is *nrutta* or *nritya*, she renders the numbers with a natural flair and ease. Her impersonation of Radha and the depiction of the various moods of the *nayikas* find a felicitous expression in her abhinaya. She has a heightened awareness of *auchitya*, propriety which marks her presentation in whatever she selects for delineation. In her rendering of dance numbers with an intuitive sense she observes the aesthetics principles that govern the classical arts.

Sonal runs the centre for Indian classical dances in Delhi, imparting training in Bharat Natyam and Odissi. Under the aegis of the Centre she has undertaken several activities such as promoting the dance forms, organizing seminars and creating an awareness to the values and aesthetics in dance. The seminars on Odissi music and presentation of the traditional performing arts of Orissa have been noteworthy. These activities have focused attention on the importance of a catholic approach towards understanding Odissi dance in its totality.

She has given several lectures demonstration and conducted dance workshops besides giving performances in India and abroad. Prefacing her dance numbers with lucid explanations and excellent commentaries, Sonal offers her audiences an entry into the subtleties of dance, leading them gently to a memorable *rasanubhava*. She has received several honours and awards including the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for her contribution to Odissi. Currently she is writing a book on Indian dances for Penguin.

#### **(6) Gita Mahalik**

Trained by Gurus Mayadhar Rout and Deba Prasad Das, Gita Mahalik has been performing Odissi from a very early age. She has imbibed the style of her Guru Mayadhar Rout and continues to expand her repertoire under his guidance. She lives in Delhi.

#### **(7) Dr. Ileana Citarist**

Italian by birth, Ileana holds a Doctorate in Philosophy with a thesis on 'Psychoanalysis and eastern mythology'. She has come to Indian dance after years of experience in the traditional as well as experimental theatre in Europe.

Ileana has been living in Orissa, India, since the year 1979 in close contact with the people, their language and culture. Her mentor in the Odissi dance style is the renowned Guru, Padma Bibhushan, Kelucharan Mohapatra. She is equally at home with the different martial postures of the Chhau dance of Mayurbhanji which she has learnt under the guidance of Guru Shri Hari Nayak, obtaining the title of 'Acharya' from the Sangeet Mahavidyalaya of Bhubaneswar in Orissa.

Her contributions, besides the many performances and lecture-demonstrations given in all the major centres in India, include articles on Oriya culture published in Indian and foreign magazines, research work for film-documentaries on Odissi and Chhau dances and practical dance workshops for dancers and theatre workers which she regularly conducts under invitation by different institutions in India and abroad. She has given performances in all the major dance festivals in India as well as in Italy, Argentina, Poland, France, Germany, Holland, Denmark, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan, USA Australia and Israel.

Her innovative choreographies in Mayurbhanji Chhau include the Greek myth 'Echo and Narcissus', which was a revelation at the East-West Dance Encounter held in Bombay in April 1985, 'The Wreck' (December 1988), 'Icarus' (July 1991), 'Pancha bhuta' (January 1996), 'The journey' (September 1998), 'Images of change' (March 2000), 'Surya devata' (December 2001), 'Jarjara' (January 2003) and in Odissi style the ballet 'Maya Darpan' premiered at Nehru Centre in Bombay in April 1993.

'A' grade artist from Cuttack Television, Ileana has been awarded the prestigious title 'Leonide Massine for the art of dance' in Italy in September 1992 and the 'Raseshwar' award by the Sur Singar Sansad, Bombay, in December 1994. In May 1996 she won the 'National Award for best choreography' for her dance direction to the Bengali film 'Yugant' directed by Aparna Sen. She has conducted a research on the Martial Art of Orissa under the aegis of the Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts in 1991 and in 1996 she has been granted a senior Fellowship by the Department of Culture, Government of India, for writing a book on Kelucharan Mohapatra's life. The book titled 'The making of a guru' has been published by Manohar and released in New Delhi, in April 2001.

In Bhubaneswar she is imparting training in Odissi and Chhau dances to local as well as visiting students in her own institution 'Art vision', founded by her in the year 1995. Through Art Vision Ileana has organised along the years several Festivals unique in concept like the 'Festival of films on performing and visual arts' which has reached the 6th edition and the 'Kalinga Mahotsav', a Festival of Martial Dances held in front of the Dhauli stupa at Bhubaneswar. Art vision is regularly hosting performances of folk theatre in the mini auditorium situated in its own premises.

## Chhau Dance

Orissa has contributed two distinct schools of classical dance the Chhau and the Odissi, to the rich and colourful dance forms of India.

Chhau is an ancient dance form. It originated in the mock fights of the Oriya Paikas (warriors) who fought rhythmically to the accompaniment of indigenous musical instruments. The highly stylised Chhau dance of today follows the basic principles of the Natya Shastra of Bharat Muni and the Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikeswara. This dance form became closely associated with religion. The Chhau dancers worship Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati, the two presiding deities of the Tandava and the Lasya styles respectively. The typical Chhau dance pose when the dancer is at rest is the bent knee so that the legs form a square, the raising of the right hand upward with the left hand hanging downward both forming right angles at the elbow. The Chhau dancers have to practice difficult modes of walking, striking difficult postures and moving in a way peculiar to this style. It is a virile dance form and was in the past undertaken by male dancers who performed in female roles, as and when required. Today there are also female dancers who have mastered this art. The face is generally covered with the mask of the character who is being depicted by the dancer in the Saraikala school of Chhau dance. But in the Mayurbhanj school, the face is left uncovered. Emotions and passions are not depicted by facial expression but by intricate footwork, whirls and jumps. Hence, the waist, the feet and the legs are used to depict *bhavas*.



The dance is usually performed in the open air on a raised platform. The musicians stand on one side of the platform and play on big kettle drums and other musical instruments. In villages, Chhau dance is usually performed during the Chaitra parva festival in the days concluding the month of Chaitra. Popular stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata are staged. The costumes, the headgear and other ornamental requisites are carefully selected. The dance programme consists of solo, duet or group performances. Today, the subject matter of Chhau dance is borrowed from the whole gamut of animate and inanimate nature. The famous peacock, swan and deer dances depict the wild beauty and grace of the forest and are excellently choreographed. The hilly region of north-eastern Orissa with a rich folk and tribal culture has influenced Chhau dance.