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FOLK DANCE TRADITION OF GANJAM: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *RANAPA NACHA*

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Abstract:

The folklore, folk art, folk literature, folk dance, folk music are integral part of the folk-culture. These are interlinked with the growth of civilization from time immemorial. The district of Ganjam has the rich tradition of folk dance and culture. In comparison to the thirty district of Odisha the people of Ganjam district have been showing indomitable creative energy in the enrichment of their folk dance. Folk dance like Chadheya dance, Tiger dance, Laudi, Sankha Dhvani, Ranapa are the basic folk dances which are performed in the district of Ganjam. Among these folk dances most famous one is the Ranapa dance. Ranapa literally means a stilt. It performs on the stilt accompanied by the drum music along with song related to Lord Krishna's childhood stories. In this paper an attempt has been made to bring out the documented history of folk dance, Ranapa of Ganjam district.

Keywords: Folk dance, Culture, Tradition, Ranapa, Stilt, Heritage

Introduction:

Folk dance has a long history behind it but all the same, it comes to the people only traditionally. It is like a historical record in the minds of the people and they are handed down traditionally by one generation to another in an unbroken chain which in itself is a dynamic process. Such traditional dance is a spark of the external fire of social rhythm inherent in man and expresses itself according to the genius of the people. In other words, it is the spontaneous outburst of natural joys and sorrows, hopes and fears of a people manifesting interest in the forms of rhythmic movement by an urge to express oneself.

Dance forms an integral part of the social-cultural life of almost every human society though out the world. While in advanced societies it takes a reformed shape, in majority of the peasantry it is still prevalent in the form of folk dance. Ganjam occupied a specific place in the field of folk dance. (1)

The main purpose of the folk dance in Ganjam is to entertain the people for the sake of enjoyment of social unity. On the other hand it also tries to abolish the superstitions form the society. No festival, ceremony of celebration of any consciousness is considered complete without a dance performance.

Ganjam like any other district in the state is the proud possessor of varieties of dance and music. Besides the classical dance of fame it has the vibrant masculine and variety of lively and colourful folk dances. The tradition religious folk plays are still cultivated by the rural people with utmost sincerity and devotion. Folk songs in different dialects are mostly associated with religious as well as social festival and popular folk dances. Ganjam is the only district of Odisha which has kept alive all form of tradition folk dance up to the present times. In the assessment of Faubion Bower, the province of Odisha and tribal dance tradition of folk dances both in respect of quality and quantity among 30 district of Odisha. Most of the folk are associated with the ceremonies of war, worship, courtship, hunting & imitation of antics of animals and daily routine involving household and village life. Each dance forms owe their genesis, existence and development to the local tradition and social milieu.(2)

Folk dance and music of Ganjam is an integral feature of Odisha culture. It attracts & whole of the cultural heritage of Odisha. The folk dance and music of the district are so lively and colourful that they can captivate the minds of all the art loving people. The folk songs used in the dances are not only simple in its form and values.

Historical and cultural background of Ganjam district:

Ganjam has a glorious cultural heritage. It is one of the holy lands which has glorious cultural heritage and has remained a sacred land through the ages where various religious faiths flourished and prospered. It was homogenous and



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heterogeneous and has played a significant role in the religious and cultural history of India. Ganjam possesses a glorious tradition on varieties art and crafts like performing art in the sphere of drama, dance and music and is still richer by its great tradition on architecture, sculpture and painting etc. however, she has retained her cultural identity within the characteristic of Indian civilization. (3)

The geographical situation, the topographic feature, the religious and literary background, patronage of the Rajas, Maharajas and Zamindars of the region the purana panda tradition the beauty and bounty of the nature, the influence of south India all have contributed significantly to the growth and development of a number of folk in this part of Odisha. Folk dances like Chadheya dances, Tiger dance, Kela nacha, Laudi and Sankha Dhvani are the basic folk dances which are performed in the district of Ganjam.

Among the folk dances Ranapa dance is an important folk dance of Ganjam. The total credit for this in Ganjam goes to famous Nrutya Guru Padmashree Bhagaban Sahu.

Ranapa Dance:

Ranapa dance is one of the most popular dance forms of Odisha. This dance has earned Ganjam an international acclaim. It is believed to have originated in Ganjam district itself. Some art lovers say that the word ‘Ranapa’ is derived from the word Rana which literally means battle and ‘pa’ which means feet. At first this dance on stilts was prevalent among the cow-herd communities of south Odisha but gradually it assumed the form a folk dance in the village Narendrapur of Ganjam district and spread to different communities and places. (4)

The peasants, who joined the battle at the time of need invented this technique of walking with stilts to set up their speed in reaching the battle field. The stilts enabled them to hasten their place by taking large strides and saving time.

Ranapa dance is mostly prevalent in the agency tracts of the Ganjam and Phulabani district of Odisha. This is performed with due artists skill all acting of the spectators. The young village dancers standing on the stilts dance with utmost ease to accompaniment of Dhola and Mahuri. The artist dance in such a manner that they never fall down while dancing. (5)

Theme:

As the story goes very old people say this was being performed by lord Krishna was with his colleagues while grazing the cow-beds. In course of the dance the Bhangis(Action) would be of the types of lord Krishna. Songs relating to the boyhood exploits or lord Krishna the episode of Karna-Arjuna Yudhha and Bhima-Dhushasan Yudhha are sung intermittently.

Origin:

The origin of Ranapa dance is a mystery. According to different researchers of traditional art of Odisha. The origin of Ranapa is a controversial subject, Benimadav Padhi say “Ranapa Dance is the combination of Rana (war) and padda(foot). This form was originated to help the fishers to move fast from one place to another and in order to avoid the disruptions caused by bushes and thorns on the way.(6)

But Dharendra Nath Pattnaik EX-secretary of Sangeet Natak Academy contradicts this statement. He says that Ranapa is migrated from Bihar. Bhagaban Sahu has brought it to Odisha. Researcher like Anantaram Kar, says that it has come from the war tradition of ancient Odisha. It was invented in Ghumsar to Khurda there was no fair road. All the way it was full of bushes. So the soldiers used this in order to cross the road easily. Secondly old people say that Ranapa parade was compulsory before the war. It was originated from old Ghumusar province which was the boarder of Ganjam and Phulabani. The most prominent evidence for the origin of Ranapa is a village in Ghumusar province named Ranapa. Many believe that according to the name of this village the nomenclature of the dance was named.



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Some people opinion that the practice of dancing on stilt was elevated to an art during the British period when prisoners tried to clandestinely escape from the high walled boundaries of the jail with the help of stilts.

Performance of Ranapa:

Ranapa literally means a stilt. This dance is named after the bamboo sticks carried for support. The dance on the stilts is prevalent among the cow-herd communities of Ganjam. This is the only instrument for this dance.

Two bamboo sticks almost 6ft long with footrest about two feet from below are used by the dancers. Strapping their feet to the tiny strips of bamboo, holding the pair of sticks the dancers move forward, backward, swirling, jumping themselves into rows, moving rhythmically all the time to the high pitch of change and Mahuri.(7)

The artists stand on the stilt with good balance and dance rhythmically. They recite Balyalila (childhood play) of sri Krushna at the time of dancing. This dance relating to the childhood of lord Krishna. The artists dance in such a manner that they never fall down while dancing. Particularly young dancers of cowherd communities participate this dance. The main selection committee of Ranapa dance group selects only healthy, wealthy and capable persons for dance. The artists perform group dance or duel dance.

The dance is mainly performed by male dancers. But sometimes a female dancer also participates in it. The young artists perform dance with romantic music. In Ranapa duet the singer always presents the love solo songs of Kabisurya Baladev Ratha and Kabi Samrata Upendra Bhanja.

Stage:

No specific stage is necessary for the performance of Ranapa dance. It is performing anytime, anywhere among the surroundings of the people. This dance is easy to perform in the ground.

Musical instruments, songs, Dress and ornaments:

Dhola and Mahuri are the main musical instruments of Ranapa dance. But before performing this dance the Dhamal (a big drum), change, and Turi are played by the artists. Ranapa songs mainly relating to the boyhood exploits of lord Krishna are also sung intermittently. Except the young dancers, another unique character of this dance form is the Dhola Badak (drummer). At the time of the performance the drummer shows their feet rolling on the ground, jumping and twisting the body on their own style. There are so many body expression gymnastics are performed in this dance. These are Krushna Bhungi, Mayura Bhangi, Peacock expressions, Kandha or tribal expression etc. The monkey and interest among the spectators.

The dancers use turbans in head garlands in neck weak red colour gown with normal cloth on body and a napkin on their waist portion. Except this the artists also use tinkling or anklet in foot made of iron which produces jingling sound. The dance was a turban adorned with peacock feathers. (8)

The folk legend Bhagaban Sahu who renovated credit with perfecting and popularizing this traditional indigenous dance not only with in the country but also in abroad. (9)

Due to the efforts of late Padmashree Bhagaban Sahu of Narendrapur village it was revived and reoriented. It became an important item of his repertory. He has made it immensely popular through performance by the rustic feet which earn immediate applause from the audience. (10)

Bhagaban Sahu of Narendrapur with his party presenting this dance has dazzled many spectra tors in and outside Indian on ceremonious occasions and made this dance immensely popular.⁽¹¹⁾



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Recently they have been also invited to perform this dance in international cultural festivals being organised by different European countries.

Bhagaban Sahu's relentless to show case the resuscitated folk dance of this region made him a revered icon, a cultural ambassador of Odisha rich diverse folk cultural.

The irony of the fate is that the folk tradition which provided great entertainment and livelihood for the rural folk and also helped in the spreading the ideas of cooperation and harmony in the society on the verge of decline. This folklore traditional which are the valuable wealth of our society are not given the due recognition that they deserve. Hence steps may be taken to preserve all the Governmental level or by the NGO and private enterprises. Otherwise the tradition of the centuries and wealth of the society will be vanished with a few decades.

Cultural Significance: Ranapa dance folk dance from Odisha, is culturally significant because it reflects the history, beliefs, and traditions of the people. According to some scholars, the Ranapa dance is one of the primitive wars by the Paikas of Odisha which is categorized under martial art¹². The dance has its origins in the mock fights of Odia Paikas, particularly during sandy and thorn regions. It is also a form of communication, who were share their stories, news and massages through dance. Through the dance celebrate life and bring joy to the community.

Preservation of Heritage: This folk art is played among the very few communities of the region. It is played during the various festivals of the regions. Due to gymnastic activities are followed in the dance, very few members are participated in the dance form. Besides it the modernisation and globalizations the dance is diminishing its gloriousness. It is one of the primitive cultural heritage of the region gradually not attracted to mass. Through documentations like video and audio recordings written records and interviews with practitioners can be preserve the heritage. Proper training such as organise workshops and classes school curriculum and scholarships. Community involvements such as cultural festivals should be organised. And recognition to the artist can also preserve the heritage. The government should promote through granting funds, promotion campaigns which can some how preserve the practices. The dance form should also adopt the modern adaptation, such as fusion performances and adopting digital platforms collaborations with artists.

Tourism and Economy: Folk dance has acquired new connotations, treatment, forms and content, it has become a professional activity, a business activity and a leisure and leisure activity, but most importantly, it has become vital as a training element of in education, becoming a tool. A necessary way of educating and finally a constituent element of identities, their treatment is highly diverse and differentiated [¹³]. Folk artist are recognised part od national culture. The Ranapa dance can recognise the region to the nation, ultimately, the region will get benefitted in various perspectives such as development of a variety type of tourism; cultural, educational, medical and health, business, event, ecological rural and agro-tourism etc. The development of folk artist will strengthening their role in the socio-economic development of the region, stimulating economic activity of small and medium-sized enterprises, creating favourable conditions for the development of tourism, will contribute to the effective socio-economic growth of the region and attract tourists to Ganjam¹⁴. The festival tourism is amongst growing and enjoying high popularity tourist branch. With the special events, it focuses on culture exchange on international, national and local scale. In their diversity, they engage both artist ad visitors as participants sharing specific cultural perceptions arising from history and tradition, cuisine and beverages, music and dancing.

Challenges and Preservation Efforts: It is great challenge at present because of globalization, culture can be both stable and changeable. A culture is formed through accumulated effort and organised ties between generations who maintain social stability and security of shared experiences within society and dominate nature with strength against other culture. However at the twenty first century existence of different social groups with varied cultures generally leads to cultural transfers or cultural change. At such situation it is great challenge to preserve the folk dance like Ranapa nacha(dance). Cultural preservation plays a critical role in safeguarding the distinct identity, traditions and values of indigenous community



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worldwide. The Ranapa dance is found in the Ganjam district only among some communities. It is performed its enrich cultural and historical traditions amidst the challenges posed by modernisation and globalisation.

Conclusion: The Ranapa dance is a one of the folk dance of Odisha which is particularly originated in Ganjam among the few folks. The tradition is a unique artistic, social and spiritual essence of its people. It embodied both physical dexterity and deep rooted traditional value. It is primarily performed by the Odia warrior community, is just a source of entertainment but also a symbolic representation of strength, courage, and devotion. Despite modernisation and changing entertainment preferences, efforts to preserve and promote this traditional dance form through cultural festivals, and community participation are crucial. By recognising the significance of Ranapa Nacha and other folk dance traditions, we ensure that the artistic expressions of Ganjam remain an integral part of Odisha's cultural landscape, inspiring future generations and fostering a sense of identity and pride in the region's heritage.

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