



KOTHISALA DANCE OF GANJAM: A SYMBOL OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF THE DALITS OF ODISHA

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ABSTRACT :

Osakothi or Kothisala dance is an amazing dance of the Dalits of Ganjam district. Osakothi generally begins on eight day of bright fortnight of the month of Aswina (September-October) and lasts till Dasahara the tenth day of the same fortnight. This dance is remarkable effect on the rural mass and bears profound ethical and social values.

KEYWORDS : *Kothisala dance , amazing dance , bears profound ethical.*



INTRODUCTION

Endowed with rare scenic beauty by its dense forests, soaring mountains, murmuring springs, gurgling rivers, secluded dales, deep valleys, captivating beaches and sprawling lake, the district of Ganjam is a kaleidoscope of past splendour and present glory.¹ Being the meeting place of Aryan and Dravidian cultures, with delightful assimilations from the fascinating life style of the tribals, the district retains its distinct identity in the form of folk dances, music and arts.

The district is the cradle of many folk dances of Odisha, which are the life-blood of the rural people. Among the folk dances, *Prahalada Nataka, Bharata Leela, Radhaprema Leela, Ramaleela, Kurshna leela, Danda nata, Dasakathia, Osakathi* and *Ranapa nacha* are famous. In these dances there is the naturalness and spontaneity. The folk dances of Ganjam are so lively and colourful that they can captivate the minds of all the art loving people. These folk dances are not only simple in its form and composition, but carries the deep message of human values.

Ganjam occupies a distinct place in the folk cultural heritage of Odisha. The geographical location, the topographic feature, the religious and literary background, patronage of the *Rajas* and Zamindars of the region, blind beliefs and superstitions of the people, rural background, conservativeness of the people, the *Purana Panda* tradition, the beauty and bounty of the nature, all have contributed significantly to the growth and development of a number of folk dances in south Odisha.²

Among them *Oshakothi* or *Kothisala* is most prominent another folk dance of south Odisha which is mainly confined to the lower caste people of the society. Osa means wish-fullfilling ritual for the attainment of dhana (wealth), Jana (off-spring), gopa (landed property) and laxmi (fortune) and kothi in Oriya means a square or rectangular diagram. Thus Osakothi dance centering round in Osa or vow and a kothi or mandala which meant for accommodating *tetisikoti devata*.³ It is based on ancient tradition of *sakti-cult* prayer to goddess *Kali, Chandi* and *Mangala*. It is said that *Oshakothi* is originated from Boirani (Kabisuryanagar) of Ganjam district.⁴ Chaudhury Parida of Kabisuryanagar had great contribution to the enrichment of Oshakothi. Dance, music and ritualistic performances are some of the

salient features of this folk-dance. Goddess Mangala is worshipped in this folk-dance. The dance is performed during the month of *Aswina* (September).

LEGENDS CONCERNING THE ORIGIN OF *OSAKOTHI*

Although there are several legends explaining the origin of the *Oshakothi* tradition, they all have in common, the character of a low-caste woman settled among the under privileged groups who began worshipping the Goddess Mangala after a conflict with the royal house. Arakshita Bisoi, a priest of *Mangala Kothi* (i.e. *Osakothi*) of Routpeta Street in Berhampur, in 2000 A.D. opined that, "Once there was *chandaluni*, an underprivileged woman named Shriya, who had seven sons. She was the sweeper in the king's palace. When she was sweeping the street near the palace, the queen who was a barren lady expressed her displeasure because it was her (untouchable) face she had seen first in that day". Equally, Shriya also replied that, "it is inauspicious to have seen the face of the queen because she was *anthukudi* (a barren woman)".

"The queen wanted to take revenge and reported the matter to the king. The king took away the five sons of Shriya and had them killed in the forest. Shriya went into the forest to search for her sons. Seeing them dead, she cried aloud. That was the time when *Siva* and *Parvati* wondered around in the wilderness. They heard Shriya and asked her to observe *Osakothi* by erecting a *Chhamundia*. She replied that she could only do it with all her sons alive. *Siva* ordered her to turn her head away. Then he sprinkled water on the dead bodies, and the sons came back to life. As instructed by the goddess, they joined their mother and worshipped goddess Mangala. After that, she observed *Osha* for twelve years. When the queen saw the seven sons of Shriya. She was told to perform *Oshakothi*. Then she herself began *puja* of the goddess and was subsequently blessed with seven sons. Since then, *Oshakothi* was performed by the people to be blessed with sons".⁵

A second legend was collected by Arabinda Patnaik from an unknown old *Harijan* informant which is as follows, "On the way to heaven, the five *Pandava* brothers rested on the verandah of a Brahmin house in the kingdom of *Avanti*. In that house, no one was ever blessed with the birth of a child; no child lived longer than one night. The sympathetic *Pandavas* became worried. *Arjuna* prepared himself to protect the household. He erected a *kothi* and a *chhamunda* with the help of arrows. Thus, *Yama* the God of Death, was barricaded out. At night, the messengers of *Yama* appeared, but had to leave unsuccessfully. Consequently, an agreement was reached with *Yama* that whoever worships this *Oshakothi* will bear sons, and all children will remain alive.⁶ Everyone will become fortunate.

"The news spread fast throughout the kingdom and (the sweeper woman) Shriya *Chandaluni* heard it. When she was sweeping the streets near the palace of *Avanti*, the next day, the queen expressed her displeasure because it was her (untouchable) face she had seen first that day. Equally, Shriya thought it inauspicious to have seen the face of the queen because she was *anthukudi*, a barren woman".

The legend was recounted to us in 1999 in a similar fashion by *Uchhava Naik*. "There was a sweeper-woman named Shriya. The queen of the kingdom where Shriya lived had no sons. Shriya said: 'I will not take anything to eat, if I see the face of that barren woman (every day)'. The queen heard this and became very sad. She slept on the ground that was not even plastered with cow-dung, keeping her face downwards. When the king returned to his palace, he searched for his queen. The queen wanted the king to make a promise before she would talk to him. The king agreed. Then the queen asked him to kill all the sons of Shriya. The king sent out seven *paika* soldiers to kill them. When her sons did not return, Shriya went into the forest and cried aloud. *Siva* appeared and restored the sons to life by sprinkling water on them. As instructed by *Siva*, Shriya made a *kothi* on the *ghat*, from the cremation ground. She collected the pot and a *sieve* from the *ghat* and prepared a *dhanakolia* instrument. She worshipped *Siva* and *Parvati*.

"*Siva* appeared in the king's dream and asked him to go to Shriya and beg for her forgiveness. The king acted accordingly, touched the feet of (the untouchable) Shriya, and learned the performance of *kothi* from her. Then he was blessed with sons".⁷

PERIOD OF OBSERVANCE

Osakothi is generally begins on *Aswina sukla astami*, the eighth day of the bright fortnight of the month of *Aswina* (September/October) and lasts until *Dusserah*, the tenth day of the same fortnight. It may also extend until *Aswina Purnima*, the following full moon night. *Osakothi* is observed in the month of *Aswina* because this is the *Sakta masa*-month of the Sakti, the 'all-pervading Powers of the Goddesses. Similarly in south *Odisha*, the month of *Chaitra* is considered best for *Sakti* worship. The period of observance is not fixed to specific dates because the performing groups depend largely on (a) the availability of a painter, (b) the consensus of the people observing it, and (c) the economic viability of the performers. Nowadays, the core of the rituals generally coincides with the *Durga puja* of the urban and Brahmanical society.⁸

Although rituals connected with *Sakti* are performed throughout *Odisha*, *Osakothi* is peculiar only to south *Odisha*, or *khai kothi*, which is performed in Western *Odisha*, specifically in and around Sambalpur.

Thus, in all legends, the *Osakothi* tradition starts from the untouchable group, the upper castes joined later. The propitiation of *Siva* and *Parvati* was to avoid the death of sons. About five to ten artists perform this dance. The Performers of the *Osakothi* are (1) *Adhikari*, (2) *Jani*, (3) *Gayeni* (Singer), (4) *Bayeni* (Instrumentalist), (5) *Hadi Baja* (Drummer), (6) The *mangala* performers, (7) *Devata*. They sing the episodes from *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagavata* and other *Puranas* based on *Malasree Rag*. Dance music and ritualistic performances are some of the salient features of this folk play. "*Dhana kolia*" a peculiar type of instrument is used in this folk play.⁹ Choudhury Parida of Kabisurya Nagar was the most famous *Gayaka* (Director) of this dance.

The folk dances had a remarkable effect on the rural mass and bears enormous ethical and social relevance. The triumphs of truth over evil-, the cardinal maxim are presented in a lucid and imperative manner in this dance. *Osakothi* like other folk dances are fast disappearing from the society due to the lack of patronage and onslaught of radio, cinema and T.V.

The irony of the fate is that the folk dances, folk theatres, folk songs, tales, folk art, folk festivals which provided recreation, entertainment and subsistence to thousand and thousands of the rural people and spread the ideas of morality, universal brotherlihood, truthfulness, honesty and victory of righteous over evil forces are declining fast. These folklore traditions which are the valuable wealth of our society are not given the due recognition that they deserve.

But it should be the duty of the public, philanthropic organizations and the Government to take steps for the revival and survival of them, which are either extinguished from our society or on the verge of extinction, otherwise the traditions of the century and precious wealth of the generations will be disappeared from the society forever.

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LBP PUBLICATION