

Orissa

A veritable melting pot of art, tradition and religion, Orissa is a state rich in music, dance and festivals. Casaurina trees sway in the gentle breeze, the blue of the sky mirrors that of the sea, and the sun plays hide and seek on the golden beaches. Music and dance is integral to the lives of the inhabitants. Over the centuries, Orissa has nurtured distinctive styles of folk art forms, all both part of and influenced by the magnificent relief and traditions of the state.

Gotipua Dance

The Gotipua Dance emerged from the ruins of the Devadasi tradition: from the 14th century onwards, political unrest and social changes took a toll on the *Mahari* or Devadasi tradition. During this time, attempts were made to keep alive the beautiful tradition of dance in the hills of Orissa. Young boys were trained in singing, dancing and acrobatics in the village clubs or *akhadas*. They were dressed as girls and performed at temple festivals as well as various social and religious occasions- thus was born the Gotipua tradition. They also performed at special festive occasions relating to Radha and Krishna, like the *Doi Utsav* (or Spring Festival), the *Chandan Yatra* (or boat ride of Madan Mohan and Radhika on Chandan Pushkar) and the *Jhulan Yatra* (or Swing Festival).

It is believed that the Gotipuas began their performance in the later medieval period, during the reign of the Bhoi King Ramachandradev. The present forms of Odissi dance have been derived to a great extent from the Gotipua tradition. Though the dances of the Gotipuas are in the Odissi style, crucial differences exist in technique, costume and presentation. Interestingly, the Gotipua dancers are singers too.





The word Gotipua comes from the words 'goti' meaning one and 'pua' meaning boy. Gotipuas lead a life of rigorous training and exercise under the supervision of their gurus. Couples pray to Lord Balunakeswar Dev to be blessed with a male progeny. If the Lord answers their prayers, the child is dedicated to the Lord at the age of six years and becomes a Gotipua. He then stays with the other Gotipuas till he is sixteen years old. When small children fall seriously ill, their parents offer prayers at the temple of Balunakeswar Dev. If the child is cured, he too is committed to the temple. The philosophy of the Gotipuas is embedded in the Sakhibhava Culture where the devotees consider themselves to be consorts of Lord Krishna.

In its present form, the Gotipua Dance is precise and systematic in its conception. Its repertoire includes *Vandana* (prayer to God, or a guru), *Abhinaya* (the enactment of a song) and *Bandha Nritya* (rhythms of acrobatic postures), which is a unique presentation in which gotipuas dance and compose themselves in





various acrobatic yogic postures creating the forms of Radha and Krishna. *Bandha Nritya* is a demonstration of physical prowess requiring great agility and flexibility. Usually performed in adolescence, this dance form becomes increasingly difficult to execute with age. The dancers make extensive use of their hands and feet, and one cannot help but admire the expert contortions involved in this dance. Musical accompaniment to the Gotipua Dance is provided by the *Mardala* (a Pakhawaj), *Gini* (small cymbals), *Harmonium*, *violin* and *flute*.



Sambalpuri Folk Dances

Western Orissa, a land of myths which owe their origin to the legendary Goddess Sableswari, is known for vast and varied folk and tribal art forms. A wide range of percussion instruments are used as accompaniments to the Sambalpuri Dances. Hundreds of quaint musical instruments like the *Sanchar*, *Samprada*, *Ghumra*, *Madal* and *Ghanta Vadya* are also used. A variety of dance styles like the Dalkhai, Raserkeli, Nachnia, Bajnia, Maelajhara and Chutkachuta, explore the many moods and shades of human life.

The **Dalkhai Dance** is characterized by melodious songs and lilting music, and performed by the young unmarried girls of the village, who pray to goddess Dalkhai for the well being of their brothers. The daughters of the village fast the entire day and pray to the Folk Goddess in the evening. The songs describe the everyday life of the villagers and celebrate the beauty of the young girls. The traditional costumes and ornaments worn by the dancers, add aesthetic appeal to the dance. The "Dalkhai Geet" (song), "Dalkhai Nacha" (dance) and "Dalkhai Baja" (music) create an atmosphere of gaiety and merrymaking. The accompanying musical instruments include the *Dhol*, *Nishan*, *Tasha* & *Muhuri*. The dance is performed on the eighth day of the full moon night of *Ashtami*. "Dalkhai-re" is the oft-repeated word in the songs.

Nachnia, a dance usually performed by male artistes only, originated from the Sonepur district of Orissa. The dance is associated with the ceremony of marriage. The leader of the group of dancers is known as 'gahar' while his companions are called 'palia'. The music, which accompanies this dance is usually restricted to drums, and is played to a particular rhythm called *Kaharba*.

Bajnia is a traditional folk dance of Western Orissa. Music is an important element of this fast paced and cheerful dance form. The men use an array of musical instruments to provide accompaniment to the women dancers. Often the





men join in the dancing. The dancers wear colourful local hand-woven Sambalpuri sarees and dhotis.

Raserkeli is another folk dance of Western Orissa. In this dance too, the women are the dancers and the men provide the musical accompaniment. This dance is performed mainly during marriage ceremonies. It begins with a musical piece called 'Dulduli'. The player of the *Dhol* during this dance is called the *Dhulia*. The *Dhulia* and the dancers spread goodwill through their movements and their smiling faces.



Maelajhoda is another dance form of Western Orissa, which is performed by young unmarried girls. The technique of the dance and the musical accompaniments used are similar to the Dalkhai dance. Differences exist in the movements of the hands and feet.



The **Chutkichuta Dance** is also from Sambalpur in Western Orissa. This dance is dedicated to Goddess Sambleswari. Based on the various ragas of the Sambalpuri folk tradition and accompanied by melodious songs, this dance form reflects the rich culture of indigenous art forms in this part of Orissa.



Duria Nacha is another traditional folk dance of Western Orissa. The dance is an integral part of the marriage festivities of the tribal communities. On the morning of the marriage, oil and turmeric paste are first offered to the family deity and then to the groom and bride. Singing and dancing accompany the ceremony.



Samprada Dance

This dance is prevalent in Western Orissa and includes singing, playing a musical instrument that looks like the *Mrudanpa* but is larger in size, and dancing. The performer is proficient in *gayana* (singing), *badana* (playing of instruments), and *nartan* (dancing). This dance is an integral part of all social and festive occasions.



Dhap Dance

An ancient Adivasi tribe of Western Orissa, the Kandhas, perform the Dhap Dance. The dance is an integral part of all major festivals of the community, especially the Nirakhai festival. The villagers gather together, as one united family, to worship the village deity, followed by an elaborate village feast and merrymaking. The 'Mukhia' or village senior also joins the dance, carrying an axe on his shoulder. Through this gesture, he symbolically promises to protect the dignity of the women of the village.



Jhumar Dance

The Jhumar is another popular group dance of Western Orissa performed by both girls and boys. Typical Jhumar songs accompany the fast-paced dance. Characteristic movements of the hips and waist mark this dance form. It is performed by the Mahanta and Munda communities of Sundergarh district during Chaitra Parva, Karam Puja and Kali Puja.

Karma Dance

The ritualistic Karma Dance is performed in honour of Goddess 'Karma Sani Devi' or 'Karma Rani', literally meaning 'Queen of Fate'. The dance is popular in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Sundergarh, Bolangir and Dhenkanal. In the month of *Bhadra*, a branch of the Karam tree is cut and carried to the dancing arena in a ceremonial procession. The branch is planted and starting from Bhadra Sukla Ekadasi (the eleventh day of the full moon in the month of *Bhadra*), the boys and girls dance around it, to the beat of drums. Different tribal groups perform the Karma Dance differently. The dance presents a fusion of colour and elegance. The women wear bright sarees with jewellery made from shells and the men wear colourful turbans adorned with



shimmering blue peacock feathers. The women dance in concentric circles and the men move with characteristic steps. The indigenous instruments used are rhythmic and melodious.

Paika Dance

The word 'Paika' is derived from the Sankrit word *padatika* (infantry). The Paika Dance is a martial art form of medieval Orissa, one that has withstood the test of time.

As early as the 15th century A.D., The Ganga and Gajapati rulers were believed to have raised an army of Paika warriors. The brave Paikas raised their voice in rebellion against the British rulers as early as 1817, four decades before the Sepoy Mutiny broke out. Buxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar Mahapatra Bhramarabar Roy led the Paika Bidroha. The Paiks of Khorda did not allow the British to enter the region, which is why Khorda stood as the last freedom fort of India. The heroism of these warriors influenced the art, architecture and literature of Orissa. The carvings that adorn the Konark Temple depict the martial prowess of the Paikas. Many of the performing art forms of Orissa, namely the Mayurbhanj Chhau, Ghumura and Ranapa Dances have been influenced by this glorious martial tradition.

Till this day, most of the Paika villages of Orissa spread all over the state have maintained the older tradition of the Paika Akhada- the village gymnasium where the youths of the community assemble in the evenings,



after the day's hard work. Thereafter, along with traditional physical exercises, they dance with swords and shields in their hands, a harkening back to the days when this very same dance ritual was performed to generate excitement and courage among the infantry.

The Paikas have found pride in place in Oriya literature too. Sarala Dasa's *Mahabharat* written in the 15th century describes this martial tradition of Orissa. Poet Balaram Dash narrates the institution of warfare education in his literary work *Jagamohan Ramayan*.

The dance involves acrobatic movement with *talwars* (swords), *lathis* (sticks) and *dhalis* (shields). Not surprisingly, it demands an extraordinary level of physical fitness from its performers. Only through years of dedicated practice do these dancers master the precision and agility that is the hallmark of the Paika Dance. The dance is often an integral part of Dusshera and Kalipuja celebrations. The *Chagi*, *Nagar*, *Dhamsa*, *Mahuri* and large cymbals provide musical accompaniment.

Ruk Mar Nacha

Ruk Mar Nacha is another martial dance form of Orissa. "Ruk" means to defend and "Mar" means to attack. Thus, the dance is an extremely stylised mock fight. It is prevalent in the Mayurbhanj district of Orissa and is believed to be the rudimentary form of the highly evolved Chhau Dance of the region.

Each dancer holds a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left. The group of dancers is usually divided into two and alternately one group attacks while the other defends. The effortless leg extensions of the dancers belie the complex nature of the dance. The Ruk Mar Nacha stands out for its rhythmic intricacies. While the melodic base for the dance is provided by a double-reeded wind instrument called *Muhuri*, powerful percussion is provided by a *Dhol*, a *Dhuma* (a cone-shaped hemispherical drum with one face) and a *Chad chadi* (a short cylindrical drum with two faces but played on only one face with two lean sticks.)



Chaiti Ghoda

Chaiti Ghoda is a traditional folk dance usually performed by the Kaivartas or the community of fishermen residing in the coastal districts of Orissa. The dance has three main participants – the Rauta, the Rautani and the Horse Rider. The accompanists are a drummer and trumpeteer. The Rauta is the lead singer.

The themes of the Chaiti songs are culled from India's rich mythology. Various aspects of human relations also find a place in these songs. While the Rauta and the Rautani enthrall the audience with their soulful songs and witty exchanges, the horse rider entertains with his energetic dance on the dummy horse, performed to the musical accompaniment of the *Dhol* (drum) and *Muhuri* (trumpet). The horse represents 'Ashwini Vasuli' (believed to be one of the many manifestations of Goddess Durga and one of the sixty four Yoginis), the presiding deity of the fishermen. The Raja of Puri had provided land for regular worship of this deity.

The performance begins on a full moon night in the month of Chaitra and lasts for eight days, till *Ashtami*. The dancers wear traditional costumes complete with a turban. A bunch of feathers in the turban adds to the colour and flamboyance of the costumes. A form of healthy entertainment, this dance also serves as a powerful medium for the preservation of unity and communal harmony among the villagers.



Mayurbhanj Chhau

The Mayurbhanj Chhau is one of the three styles of Chhau Dance prevalent in the Eastern region of the country. While the other two styles- Seraikella Chhau of Jharkhand and Purulia Chhau of West Bengal- are performed with masks, the Mayurbhanj style does not use masks. The Chhau dance has a very distinctive character of its own. During its evolution and growth, it has freely imbibed techniques and movements from the prevalent folk and tribal dances of the region, creating a harmonious blend of classical, traditional, folk and tribal styles. The theme of the dance centres round tales from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and legends relating to Lord Krishna. The choreography of this ancient rhythmic dance is highly stylized.



This dance form flourished under the patronage of the Maharajas of Mayurbhanj for over a century. It evolved out of the martial art forms of the area and its ceremonial presentation formed an essential part of the annual Chaitra Parva Festival, which is held for three consecutive nights. The dancers are divided into two competing groups, each trying to outdo the other. It has a wide range of intricate movements with acrobatic displays. The dance presents an amalgam of dynamism, precision and elegance, which is at times indistinguishable from visual poetry.



Ghumra Dance

Ghumra is a folk dance of the Kalahandi district of Orissa. Performances begin fifteen days before Gamha Purnima (full moon night in September), and end with a ceremonial performance on that night.

It is named after the main musical instrument, a pitcher-shaped drum called the "ghumra", which is tied around each dancer's neck. The dancers play on the drum while dancing. It is performed to the accompaniment of songs, the content of which is varied, ranging from stories of hunting to everyday joys and sorrows of the people. The dancers execute intricate movements, jumps and pirouettes in a fast tempo. The Ghumra is also popular in Bolangir, Sambalpur and Cuttack. With love as its main theme, the ghumra is a common dance at social functions such as marriages. The Saora tribes and other aboriginal tribes mostly perform this dance.



Bamsarani

The Bamsarani, literally meaning 'Bamboo Queen', is a popular folk dance from the district of Puri. In this dance, little girls exhibit acrobatic movements on a crossed bamboo bar and on the floor with admirable agility.



Naga Dance

The Naga dancers of the district of Puri perform with a heavy load of weapons, to the accompaniment of battle drums. The dancer carries, among other things, a sword, a *kukri*, a whistle made of horn, an iron shield and bows and arrows. The dancer's body is covered with *rama raja* (a yellow paste). A vermillion *tika* on his forehead and an artificial moustache and beard imparts a look of valour to the dancer. This highly energetic dance displays the strength and skills of a warrior.

Ranapa

The Ranapa dance, which has its roots in martial arts, is popular in the coastal areas of the Ganjam district of Orissa. In this dance, the artistes walk and dance on the Ranapas or stilt. Mock fights choreographed to the rhythm of drums make this dance form unique. The dancers exhibit their skills by balancing on stilts all through the dance.





Pasu Nritya

The Pasu Nritya or the Animal Mask Dance belongs to a majestic folk dance tradition of Orissa, particularly the Ganjam district. Ma Byaghra Devi and Ma Thakurani are the popular Goddesses of this area. During festivals, when the idols are taken out on the streets (Thakurani Yatra), the masked dancers lead the procession in their colourful costumes.

Pasu Nritya is also an important part of marriage ceremonies; the dancers lead the bridegroom and his family to the bride's house. The different kinds of Animal Mask Dances include dances wearing the masks of lions, tigers, bulls, horse, deer, goats, peacocks, ducks etc. The movements vary according to the kind of animal the dancers represent. The animal's body is made out of a cane frame, which is richly decorated. Two dancers wear the cane frame representing the animal's body, while their legs become the quadruped beast's legs. The ring master (director) leads the animals around the stage accompanied by the drummers.

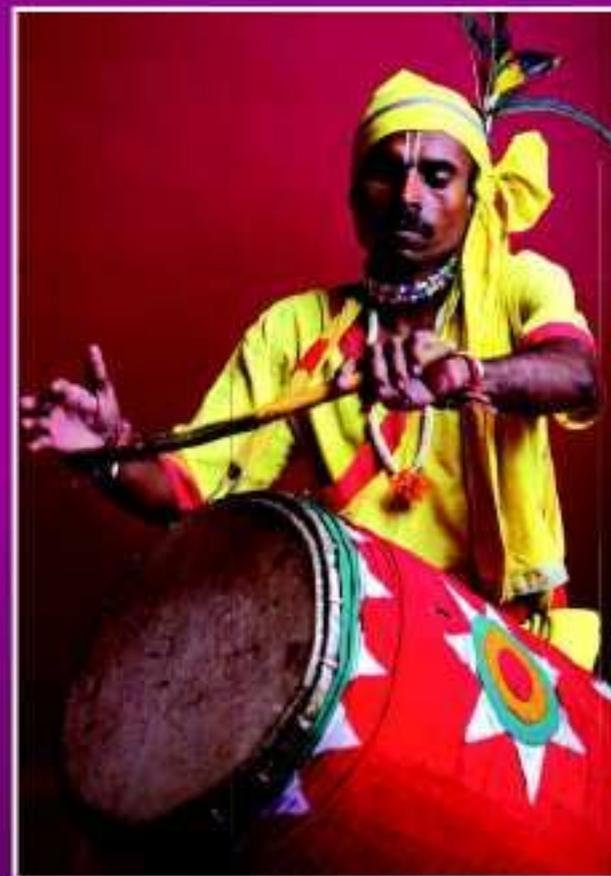


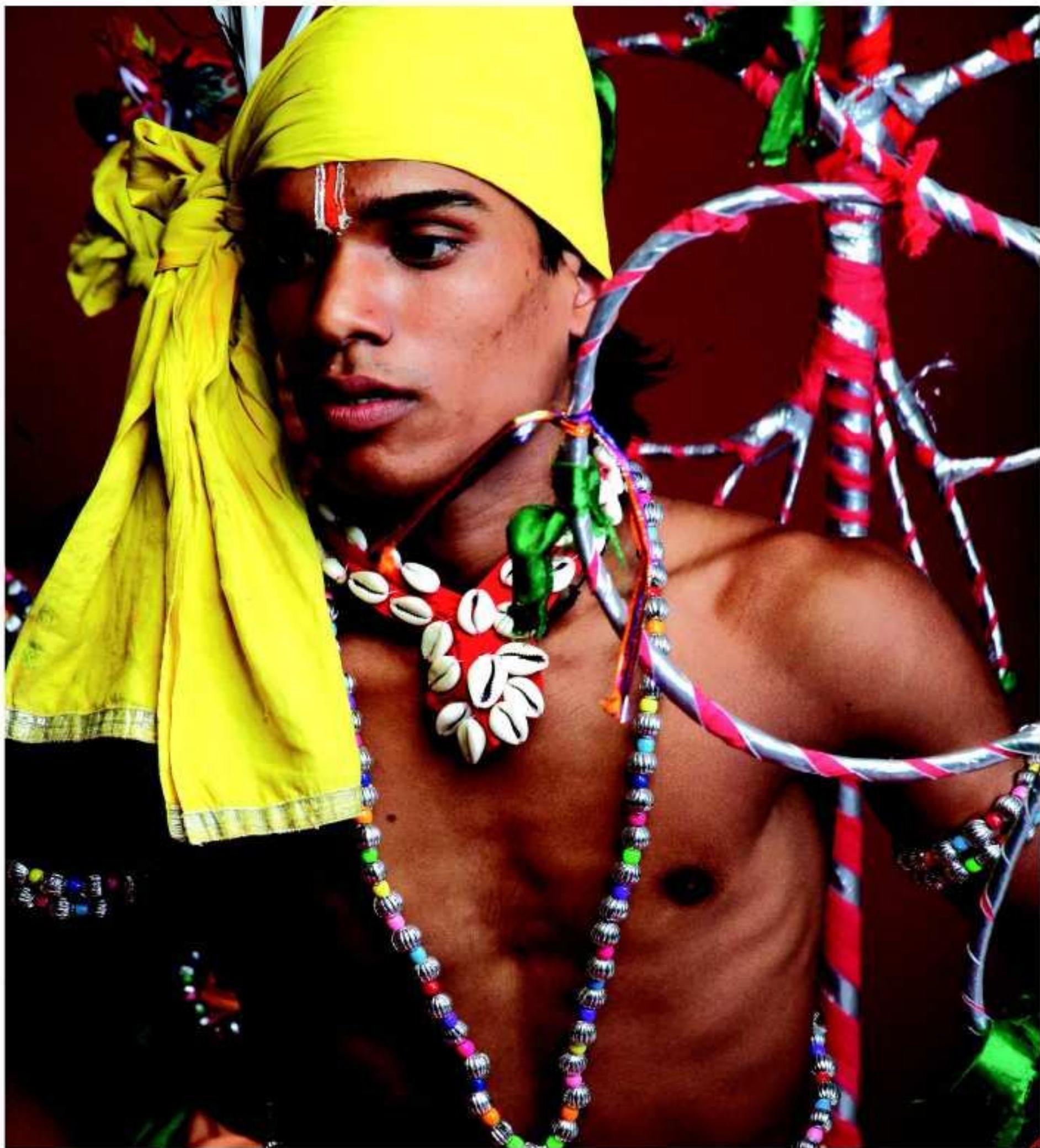


Danda Nacha

During the 6th century AD, the King of Boudh in Western Orissa made several attempts to prevent the rise of Buddhism in his kingdom. To popularise the worship of Lord Shiva among his subjects, he used a special form of folk dance called Danda Nacha. This dance, which originated as a tool to strengthen Hinduism in the kingdom, is now a very popular folk dance, retaining its religious character at the same time.

Danda Nacha, also known as Danda Jatra, is performed in the month of *Chaitra*. This ritualistic dance that propitiates Lord Shiva and his consort Gauri, is prevalent in the Dhenkenal, Bolangir, Cuttack, Puri and Ganjam districts of Orissa. This dance also invokes the blessings of Vishnu, Krishna, Ganesh, Durga and Kali, among others. The ritual is celebrated through dances, songs and physical feats. The dance derives its name from the Danda, or the pole, which symbolically represents Lord Shiva. The artistes tune their steps to the vigorous accompaniment of drums, winning acclaim for one of the best drum dances of the world. The Danda is a unique performing art form, in that it is a synthesis of pure dance, song and drama,





comparable to the Jatras of Bengal. This dance form attained its peak in the 16th century AD. The dancers depict sections from the Hindu scriptures through recitation of verses, singing, narration and enactment. The presentation is nightlong affair and the artistes keep their audience glued to their seats for a long stretch of 8 – 9 hours.

This dance form has a varied repertoire, including:

The **Parbha** serves as the prelude to 'Danda Nacha'. It is performed in the 'Prathama Prahara' of the night as a sanctifying gesture to set the stage for the main pole dance. No songs are sung during the Parbha Dance. The main Parbha dancer, assisted by two supporting dancers, move to the rhythmic beats of the *Dhol* and *Ghanta*. The main dancer personifies Lord Shiva through this performance, which has some similarities with the 'Tandava Nritya' and 'Biravasa'. The dancers fast from morning until the completion of the performance in the evening. The rigorous stepping movements and acrobatic feats are the characteristic features of this dance. This exhausting dance can only be performed for about ten minutes at a stretch. The fragrance of sandalwood and incense sticks adds to the atmosphere of holiness.



Chadheya Dance is also a component of the Danda Nacha tradition of Orissa. The leg extensions of this dance form are similar to those of the Mayurbhanj Chhau. Like the Chhau, this dance form contains elements of martial art. The accompanying music too, resembles that of the Chhau Dance. The dance depicts a tribal tradition of hunting and selling birds. The Chadeya or bird catcher carries a stick in one hand and a noose in the other. He and his wife, the Chadeyani, perform the dance to the accompaniment of enthralling music.

Tribal Dances

Tribals consist one quarter of the population of Orissa, and have many beautiful dances. Nature has always been their greatest inspiration, and is incorporated into their dances, performed with graceful movements and artistic skill. Along with the dances of the Santhali tribes, the Spring Dance of the Bhattaras, the dances of the Koyas (who wear a bison horn headdress), the Sua dance of the Sambalpur tribes, and the Jhadia Paraja (courtship dances) of the Ho community, the main tribal dances of Orissa are:

This is a popular dance form of the nomadic tribes of Koraput district and is performed during festivals like Dushera, Poush Purnima, Chaitra Parva and Gatar. The Gadaba women dance with unusual steps using their heels. Men playing the *Dhol*, *Tamak*, *Khirdi* and *Mahuri* provide the musical accompaniment.



Koya Dance

The members of the Koya tribe perform this dance during Chaitra Parva (March–April). The Koya girls wear elaborate jewellery made of beads and sport decorative caps. The Koya boys wear traditional costumes and jewellery. Their head gear is fitted with a bison's horn. Koya drums and the flute are the main accompanying musical instruments.



Gond Dance

The Gond community of Koraput district performs this dance in honour of the deity Bhimsen, accompanied by several musical instruments like horned drums, flutes, and many clarions. Silver jewellery and decorative turbans form an essential part of the costume of the dancers. The Gond dance is not restricted to any particular time of the year.



Oraon Dances

Both boys and girls perform these dances of the Oraon tribes of Sundargarh and Bolangir districts. The dance, with its own characteristic features, is performed by artistes wearing heavy tribal jewellery of the region.



Kond Dances

The dance is performed by unmarried boys and girls of the Kond community. Dressed in special costumes, the intricate movements of the dancers resemble the movement of serpents. This dance is fittingly called the 'Snake Dance of Orissa.'

Kela Keluni Dance

The Kelas are a nomadic clan from Orissa. Except for a few months in a year, they mostly remain out of their homes. Originally snake charmers and bird catchers who roamed the countryside to earn their living, they are also experts in tightrope walking and other gymnastics.

Only two people are involved in the dance- the Kela and the Keluni. The Kela plays a peculiar stringed instrument called the *Ghuduki*, and is also the singer. The Keluni's accompanying dance is fast-paced with swaying movements. Love and humour are the predominant themes of the songs.



Kathinacha

The stick dance is common all over India. In Orissa, there are two variations of this dance: one with short sticks and the other with long sticks.

The cowherd community of coastal Orissa performs with the long sticks on all important occasions, like Dusserah or Dol Yatra. The accompanying songs describe the childhood pranks of Lord Krishna.

The dance form using the smaller sticks is popular in Mayurbhanj and Bolangir and is performed during Makar Sankranti and the Nua Khai Festivals. The sticks are two feet in length and made of resonant wood. When struck against each other, they act as a percussion-like instrument. Following the rhythm of the *Madal*, the dancers increase the speed of various movements until the dance ends in a crescendo of sound produced by the sharp taps of the sticks.

Changu Dance

The Changu is a rural variety of the tambourine. It is played by the male members of the Bhuiyan, Bathudi, Kharia, Juang, Mechi, and Kendha communities. The men sing while playing on the Changu and also perform vigorous stunts like leaping into the air and making wide, circling movements. The women cover up their person in long, locally made saris, making a very visually interesting picture as they sway joyously, with only their bangled hands and feet showing.

Medha Nacha

This is a masked dance performed at religious processions in the coastal districts of Orissa, during Dusserah, Dol Purnima, Kalipuja, Ram Navami, Sahi Yatra and other festivals. Idols are carried in processions, led by these masked dancers. The processions halt at market places and road crossings to perform. Huge masks of demons, Kings and Queens, made of paper pulp, are worn by the dancers who move to the rhythm of the *Changu and Dhol*.



Prahalad Nataka

Prahalad Nataka, as the name implies, is the story of Prahalad, who was born in a family of demons, but was a devotee of Lord Krishna. The story of the play is taken from the Nrusingha Puran. The language used is a mixture of Oriya and Sanskrit. This highly spectacular and dramatic presentation includes loud music, vigorous dancing, dialogues and acrobatics. In this unique folk theatre form, which is sometimes performed as just a dance, we see the combined tribal folk and classical traditions of Orissa.



Sankha Badan

The Bay of Bengal that bathes the golden sands of eastern Orissa has had a beautiful impact on the lives of the people of the region. The Blowing of Conches or Sankha Badan during festivals and religious ceremonies (like Ratha Yatra and Chandan Yatra) is a



very common ritual. In the olden days, conches were also used as bugles in the battle fields. The exponents of this art form can blow two conches at a time for five to six minutes without a break, while simultaneously performing intricate body movements.

