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The Origin and Development of Jatra Theatre in Odisha

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ABSTRACTS

The performance Tradition of Folk Theatre and Traditional Folk Theatre forms of Odisha is as old as our civilization. There are many forms of Folk Theatre and Traditional Folk Theatre in the cultural sphere of Odisha. Jatra is one of the most popular forms of folk theatre that was originated and developed from the religious and spiritualistic base of Bhakti Movement. Now it has become a highly commercialized form of Odia Folk Theatre. It is all about its origin and gradual development.

Keywords: Folk Theatre, Traditional Folk theatre, Pravritti, Gita Govinda, Oudra, Khandagiri, Madhyama Bikrusta.

I. INTRODUCTION

The land of Odisha or Utkal is known for its richness of art, literature and culture. There has been a long tradition of performing art since time immemorial. Since the period of Vedic era Odisha has occupied a great position in the field of Indian performing art. So, the Indian scholar Bharata Muni has mentioned the word "Oudra" as one among the Pravritti's; the regional style of dramatic presentation. From the sources it can be said that there are eighteen forms of Folk Theatre and five forms of Traditional Folk Theatre in the cultural sphere of Odisha. Rama Leela, Krushna Leela, Rasa Leela, Bharata Leela, Radhaprema Leela, Gitinatya, Jatra, Dadhi Nata, Pala, Dasakathia, Harikatha, Galpasagara, Prahlad Nataka, Bhutakeli and others are called as Folk Theatre. Among all the forms of Folk Theatre Jatra is accepted as the most popular and commercial form of Folk Theatre. It has been playing a vital role in the field of folk theatre and Traditional Folk Theatre. It is also accepted as a highly popular form Folk Theatre in West Bengal.

Origin of Indian Jatra

Jatra is a most popular form of Indian folk Theatre. It has been performing since middle era to till today. Particularly Odisha and Bengal (West Bengal) were two famous states for the performances of Jatra. There are many descriptions regarding the origin of Indian Jatra. Some of those were given bellow.

1. The recent origins of the Jatra can be traced back to rise of Vaishnavism and the Bhakti movement especially in Krishnaism, in the 16th century propelled by the advent of mystic Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The Krishna Jatra evolved through the devotional singing and dancing of the followers of the Krishna Bhakti movement, inspired by Rasaleela and dramatic poetry like, Gita Govinda written by Jaydev in the 12th century and Sri Krishna Kirtan by Chandidas in the 15th century. Historians also mention that the existence of Nata Gita, an operatic folk drama for in medieval Bengal, filled with singing, dancing and music sans dialogue, which provided an early model for the Krishna Jatra.

2. Though Jatra is equally popular in Odisha and the eastern parts of Bihar (two bordering states), but it was originated from Bengal. In the fifteenth century, when the Bhakti Movement swept Bengal, devotees went singing and dancing in procession. They sang in temple courtyards, narrating the events of their patron God's life and expressed their devotion with frenzied acting. The collective singing amidst the clang of gongs and fumes of incense produced a mass hypnosis and sent these singers into an acting trance. This singing with dramatic elements gradually came to be known as "Jatra", which means "To go in a procession".

3. Phanibhushan Bidyavinod, a popular Jatra performer of West Bengal has stated that as per the beliefs of Indian mythology Jatra was evolved from the Vaishnavism of Bhakti movement of middle era. We know that Jatra concept was grew out from of the musical enactment of an episode in lord Krishna's life: Krishna is leaving his foster parents and milkmaids in the woods of Vrindavan to start for Mathura in order to punish his uncle King Kansha. His march has been celebrated in the Palas and this heart-rending separation became the favorite theme of singers and players. Later any Pala about Krishna's life or about any other mythological hero was called Jatra.

4. The roots of Jatra may be traced back in at least the 16th century. In Bengal, where there was a famous form of singing called the Carya, which was characterized by the distinct use of language. This was a kind of musical drama which was possibly prevalent at that time. Even Chaitanya and his followers contributed to a reawakening among the people and were responsible for bringing about a national integration in various parts of India at the cultural level, since Chaitanya himself played role of Rukmini in a drama. This drama perhaps the beginnings of the "Krishna Jatra" so, he is respected as the predecessor of the contemporary Jatra's of Bengal.

5. In older times, processions at a religious festival where a community of devotees danced and sang in several voices, perhaps while carrying idols, was such a specialized 'Journey'. Gradually the procession enveloped a wider sphere of action when it dramatically presented incidents in the life of popular incarnations like Krishna or Rama. Thus, Jatra was originated.

Origin of Jatra in Odisha

The fifth line of Khandagiri inscription of King Kharavela says that "Gandharva - Veda - Budha- Dapa- Nata - Gita - Vadita - Sandasanahi, Usava - Samaja - Karapanahi Cha Kidapayati Nagarim ." It means Experts in Gandharva Veda, King Kharavela arranged theatrical entertainment for their citizens. Items such as Dapa (Combats), Nata (Dance), Gita (Music), Vadita (Orchestra), Usava (Festival) and Samaja (Plays). Here The word Samaja means to the plays or Theatre. That was use during the period of ancient times.

If we discuss to the 13th line of Khandagiri inscription "Vithi - Catara - Palikhani - Gopurani- Siharani - Nibesayati. It means that King Kharavela had built roads (Vithi), Theatre (Catara or Jatara), Channels (Palikhani), gates (Gopurani) and temples (Siharani). The Anant cave of Khandagiri built by King Kharavela was accepted as the oldest theatre (Catara or Jatara) of ancient Odisha. It is also believed that Ranigumpha theatre was built as per the guidelines of Natyashastra written by Bharata. Scholar Dhiren Das has also stated that one of the Catara or Jatara built by King Mahameghabahan Kharavela on the Udaygiri hill of Bhubaneswar. It was shaped as a Madhyama Bikrusta Prekhyagriha.

The word *Jatra* was originated from the word *Ja*, that means *to march* and the word *Tra* means to the *place*. Many cultural and religious activities were presented during the observation of the religious festivals of Lord Jagannath at Puri. Subsequently those are named as Jatra like Snana Jatra, Gundicha Jatra, Bahuda Jatra, Sri Hari Sayan Jatra, Utthapan Jatra, Parshwa Paribartan Jatra, Dakhinayan Jatra, Parbana Jatra, Pushyabhishek Jatra, Uttarayan Jatra, Dola Jatra, Damanaka Chaturdashi Jatra and Akhaya Tritiya Jatra etc. It was evolved from the artistic and cultural activities of above-mentioned religious festivals.

A ceremony was being performed in Puri as Sahi Jatra. It was performed as a ritualistic and processional theatre as a dance dominated form of theatre. It was performed for a week during the period of Rama Navami. During the period of 10th century few enactments with spoken dialogues were added to Sahijatra to make this form more attractive. When Jayadev, the great Sanskrit poet of Odisha wrote Gita Govinda it opened widely the way of dramatic performance tradition of Odisha and started to promote the language theatre tradition of ancient Odisha. This tradition of theatrical performance could be able to transform the performance tradition of Sahijatra to a music dominated form of theatre. Gradually it was accepted as Jatra Theatre.

On the other hand, some scholars have also opined that during the period of 11th century a community of Charana were living under the patronization of kings to spread the news of victories as royal messengers. They were skilled in theatre. Gradually Nata and Nati were added to make the contents of Charana more attractive. It created a scope to introduce more characters to make its performance more dramatic. Gradually they played the vital role in the development of its performance being patronized by Kings and landlords. Religious and ritualistic contents of Vaishnavism were entered to its content with the support of dance and music. "The seed of Odia Jatra was sworn from the traditional performance of Jayadeva's Gita Govinda.

Development of Odia Jatra

Jatra was shaped from the landscape of our ritualistic and religious temple tradition, Sanskrit theatre tradition by Odia writers and from the strong influence of our literary tradition of ancient and middle era Odia literature. Mostly *Gauri Harana or Jalandhar Upakhyana* is accepted as the first Jatra play of Odisha. It was written during the period of Bira Kishore Dev - 1 (1736 - 1793 A.D.) and was performed in the premises of Jagannath temple, Puri. Another Jatra script *Padmavati Harana* was discovered from Puri. It has been written and performed in 1834. Basically Krupasindhu Mishra is accepted as the first dramatist of Odia Jatra. He was the disciple of Guru Shankar Mishra and born in 1832 at the village Devpala, Kanthi, Ramangar, Medina Pur, West Bengal. At first his Guru Shankar Mishra formed a theatre group in Puri and started to perform Jatra plays moving village to village. At that time disciple Krupasindhu Mishra wrote many plays for his guru. Again, dramatist Sri Krupasindhu Mishra formed his own Jatra Group in 1850 at Puri. Then a tradition of complete Jatra was developed by the eminent dramatists of that period. It was named as *Adi Juga* of Odia Jatra. It could be able to create a strong base in the field of folk and traditional theatre by the literary dedication of Jagannath Pani, Gopal Das, Jagannath Pani, Raghunath Paricha, Krushnakanta Das, Gopinath Nanda Sharma, Gopal Das etc. After this era the

Madhya Parva (Middle era) was started by the sincere effort of Ganakabi Baishnaba Pani, Kantakabi Laxmikanta Mahapatra, Jatrakabi Banchanidhi Mohanty, Kabi Manjula Krushna Prasad Basu, Mohan Sundar Goswami, Balakrushna Mohanty and others. Many permanent Jatra troops were formed in the parts of both coastal and North Odisha. They were performing their own written poetic dramas by their own theatre group touring from village to village.

The seed of professionalism was sworn from this movement. The period of Jatra from 1947 to 2000 (Modern Phase) was named as the Golden Era of Odia Jatra. The contents, style of presentation and stagecraft were started to change by the influence of modernity. Commercialism was also started from this period. Many Jatra troupes were formed aiming for commercial success. They were *Biraja Opera, Nilachakra Opera, Saruo Jatra Party, Baladev Jiu Opera, Odisha Opera, Parvati Gananatya, Janata Ganantya, Tulashi Gananatya, Satasankha Opeara, Sahani Opera, Baneswari Gananatya, Shibani Gananatya, Trinath Gananatya, Tarini Gananatya, Niyati Gnanatya, Sri Sri Uttarayani Opera, Kalinga Gananatya, Baghajatin Loka Natya, Konarka Gananatya, Dhauli Gananatya* and others. Then the second half of modern phase Odia Jatra was started. It was an important period from the point of view of commercialism and professionalism. During this period Jatra could be popular at every corner of Odisha. At that time a separate style of writing was created and developed to present the social contents. Many writers started to write plays permanently to popularize Jatra. They were Satyanarayan Shingh, Ramesh Prasad Panigrahi, Bijay Mishra, Sukant Dash, Keshab Chandra Behera, Kailash Mallick, Bichitranda Sahu, Kishore Mahapatra, Uttam Das, Hrushikesh Sadhangi, Anant Ojha, Chakradhar Behera, Sudhanshu Sekhar Nayak, Shirshananda Das Kanungo, Manmath Satpathy, Rabindra Sahu, Golak Maharana, Manoranjan Das, Purushottam Behera, Arun Barik and others.

II. CONCLUSION

Now a day it is performed by the high paid actors and actresses. Generally, a 1200 to 1800 square feet sized permanent stage covered under a big tent with seating capacity of 2500 to 5000 audiences was used for its performance. The style of makeup and costume is purely contemporary and realistic. The performances of modern Odia Jatra are started from mid- night and ended at early morning of next day. The price of ticket for Jatra is near about 250 rupees or more than it. The entire performance of Odia Jatra is divided into two parts like 1. Melody 2. Opera. Basically, Melody is performed in the first part with some popular devotional album, film songs, modern album and film dances. After the performances of Melody, the performance of Jatra or Opera is being performed. In this part modern social plots are performed by skilled and high paid artists of present era. It has also become a great source of earning the livelihood for talented rural artists of Odisha and the owners of Jatra parties. The status of Jatra theatre of Odisha can be compared with the artists of television and Film medium of present era.

III. REFERENCES

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