

# Evolution and Genres of Odissi Music

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## ABSTRACT:

Utkal, also called Odisha, the holy land of Lord Jagannath is known for its excellence in the sphere of the arts. The pursuit of excellence in art, sculpture, music and literature is one of the defining features of the Odishan culture. Rich in musical tradition, the fertile land of Odisha has produced rich harvest in the form of Odissi Dance and Music. Exuberance of human feelings has always sought expression either in rhythmic movements of the body or in melodious modulations of the voice. Historical evidences suggest that in Odisha, music and dance were being seriously pursued under royal patronage right from 2nd century BC and that by around 10th century A.D. Odissi music had crystallised into a distinctive classical form. The treatises unmistakably point to the fact that Odissi is one among the few schools of Indian classical music and it has a distinctive system of Raga and Taala and a characteristic style of rendition that is lyrical in its movement with wave like ornamentations. The tradition has always two components, the written and the oral. Of the many treatises written on this distinctive tradition of music, the bulk were written between 16th and 18th century. Five of these treatises, such as, Geeta Prakash, Sangeeta Narayan, Sangeta Kalpalata etc are now available in parts and two are in the form of palm leaf manuscripts.

**Keywords:** Odissi, Music, Antiquity, Dance, Song, Utkal, Gamak, Kalinga, Raga, Saint Poets, Lord Jagannath

The history of Odisha's musical tradition goes back to the 2nd century B.C. as is evident from the documentary records of historic arts explicitly reflected on the rock edicts of Hatigumpha (elephant cave) of King Mahameghavahana Kharavela in Uayagiri (hill) at Bhubaneswar. Drawing conclusion from the available archeological evidences, historical facts,

literary and documentary proofs as well as oral tradition handed down from generation to generation along with style of presentation and grammatical and technical aspects, it is not difficult to see why "Odissi" is significantly one of the important streams of Indian Classical music with a rich treasure of musical renderings like Chhanda, Champu, Choupadi, Chautisha and the lyrics of Geet Govinda of Jayade among many others.

Odissi Music is the finest reconciliation of harmony with melody, which loses nothing of the essential quality of the classical music. The individualist character of Odissi Music makes every recital an enjoyable exercise in interpretation and self expression.

Odissi music is very subtle. It characterizes and distinguishes itself by the elements of spontaneous creativity and embellishment of the melody and rhythm with a vibrated movement. Text is the body of an Odissi song and Bhava or mood is the soul. In Odissi music the insistence is more on the emotion and lyrical impulse. An elegant blend of text and mood (Bhava) and proportionate musical elements is abundant in Odissi music. The use of "Gamakas" (basic technical rendering style) give a special flavor and a special colour, as well as a special entity and distinctiveness to Odissi music.

Geographically, Odisha is so situated that for centuries it has been the meeting point of the cultures of the North and the South. It is therefore natural that the Odissi tradition has not only been influenced by the two major schools of Indian Classical music, it has also influenced them to a large extent.

The rock edict of the caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri hint at the existence of a music which had a class of its own. It clearly indicates through the sculptural art that Kharavela was a great patron of cultural activities. Bharatamuni, in his *Natyashastra* also has mentioned about the music the *Udrmagadhi*, *Prabruiti*, which people name as “Odishi Music. But around 9th and 10th Century the Buddhist saints had written the first ever poems or songs written in different Raga and Raginis known as *Charyageeti* or *CharyaPada*. The songs written in this style with mention of the name of the Ragas are considered to be the first such exercise in the history of literature and music in India. A few Ragas are *Pattamanjari*, *Debakri*, *Deshakhya*, *Bhairabi*, *Dhansashree* and *Baradi*. Most interestingly, Sri Jayadeva has mentioned some of the Ragas of *Charyapadas* in his *Ashtapadis* written in the 12th century. This demonstrates the class of singing of Odishan music right from such ancient times. *SangeetaRatnakara*, a great treatise of Music-Dance and Rhythm, written around 13th century by Sharangadeva has also mentioned about Raja Paramardee, which indirectly shows the richness of Odissi music as history has it that Raja Paramaree was a flautist and was related to Odisha through his wedding. Then comes *Sarala Mahabharata* followed by the great literature of *Panchasakha* and the great poets like *Kabisurya Baladev Rath*, *Abhimanyu Samantasinghara*, *Kabi Chandra Kalicharan Patnaik* and many more, who have enriched music of Odisha through their timeless literary contribution.

It is significant to observe that the rich tradition of Odissi Music, Odissi Dance and Odissi Percussion is interwoven, from time immemorial, with the temple rituals. It has been a wonderful symbiosis between the devotion and the artistic expression of the people of this blessed land. Out of this relationship has emerged an aesthetics that has ensured the continuation of musical tradition, almost intact, through the centuries.

Lord Jagannath stands at the apex of Odishan culture. Everything centres around him. Out of 36 servitors of the temple, the servitors for dance, music and percussion have always held a very important place. The morning services start with music *seva* and also end with music when the deity goes to sleep. Odisha is famous for its rituals and festivals. So it is said, in twelve months there are thirteen festivals in Odisha. Needless to say that in all these festivals and rituals music takes a prime role upholding the age old tradition and class of Odissi music.

The art and architecture of Odishan temples and caves are not only wonderful but also unique in respect of their aesthetic appeal. The images of dancers, instrumentalists and the royal couple enjoying music, dances, play or procession stand as the testimony of rich musical tradition of ancient Odisha and profoundly signify a long religious legacy.

The literature and music of Odisha go hand in hand. Perhaps this is the stream of music where the language, the content and the *Rasa* are given more importance. The language is generally very rich with ornamentations. But the content is devotional, religious and also romantic. Mostly it describes the divine love play of Sri Radha and Sri Krishna through the lyrics, songs and *Prabandhas*. Sri Jayadeva's *Geeta Govinda* in Sanskrit, *Kabisurya Baladeva Rath's Kishore Chandranana Champu* and epics of many great poets depict the same theme.

The rendering style of Odissi music is unique. It is structured in several different ways depending on the context and according to several genres and divisions of its vast repertory. The salient features of Odissi music are that:

1. It has an ancient tradition
2. It has a system of Ragas along with its core Ragas.
3. A system of Taal, which is unique
4. It has a distinctive rendering style.

But keeping in view the language, literature and rendering style, further division has been done for guiding the performances. The special features in its rendering style is its medium pace in singing.

1. Raganga- The Odissi Prabandha is based on a Ragaora melody which follows a proper grammar. Within the parameter of that grammar the rendering is be done through Alaap (Introduction of the Raga through notes without any rhythm accompaniment) without distorting the language and the content followed by the musical expansion of different words or a phrase called 'Pada Binyasa'. It depends on the artist's own innovations with ornamentation to elevate his/her presentation. Variations of swaras in the format of Sargams and Taans are done to add to their beauty.

2. Bhabanga-As its name suggests Bhava or the mood of the song is well expressed and emphasized. It is based on a Raag but the vocalist has the liberty to mix other Ragas to evoke the appropriate ethos of the song.

3. DhruvaPadanga or Dhruvadanga- The lyrics or the prabandhas are written for this style of presentation where taal takes the upper hand over the them or the content. For example 'Malashree' comes under this style of rendering. Mostly Malashree is written in praise of different Gods and Goddesses.

4. Natyanga- As the name suggests it has the elements of theatre or drama. The subject of the Prabandha is well expressed in a lighter vein, very lilted and entertaining.

Then come the other genres which come under the repertoire of Odissi.

Champu- KabisuryaBaladevaRath's, Kishore ChandrananaChampu is the most popular epic which describes the love play of Radha and Krishna with a literature of high order, where the particular Ragas for each lyric has been prescribed. This epic contains 34 songs or Champu corresponding to 34 Odia alphabets from "Ka" to "Khya" and each lyric is unique in its own way. And the best part is that the techniques have been transmitted orally over the ages and the same tune is sung at all parts of the state.

Chhanda- It's a special type of writing which establishes a particular metrical pattern and the tuning is ascertained from the particular metrical pattern. Meter is confirmed by counting the letters used in a particular "Chhanda". Theme is again devotional and also sometimes it describes the romance of imaginary characters etc. Chhandas are basically very long poems.

Choutisha' or Choutirisha-This song is written in 34 stanzas corresponding to 34 Odia alphabets and sung in some particular tuning, which expresses devotional feelings or the philosophy of human life.

GeetaGovinda' - Sri Jayadev'sGeetaGovinda speaks about the Keli Katha or the divine love play of :3dha-Krishna, which is a very popular theme. Everyday Sri Jagannath listens to GeetaGovinda through

“appointed seva. Odissi dance or Odissi music performance is incomplete without the rendition of Ashtapadi from GeetaGovinda, where again the Ragas and Taals to be used have been specifically directed by the poet.

Bhajan and Janan- The literary tradition of Odisha contributes to music and vice versa. The artist sings about the glory of the Lord and prays or appeals for redressal of his/her miseries.

But Odissi music is marked for its melody, lucidity, expression and special taal system and the accompanying instruments make it unique.

Mardala is the accompanying percussion of Odissi music. It's playing style, sound, rhythm patterns make its accompaniment very special. From among many Taals “Ada-Taali” makes its taal system stand apart.

The techniques of rendering lies in the use of special Gamakas (the treatment of notes in various ways) and the expressions of ‘Padis’ (special way of writing which is in a different meter in a Prabandha) through a complex system of Taal.

The great Gurus and musicologists, who have toiled hard to bring this rich tradition to this stage, definitely need a special mention. It is only their effort which has strengthened the roots of Odissi Music in many ways i.e., - training of the students, writing of books, performances through solo and duet, lecture-demonstrations or by accompanying Odissi dance performances.

The great pioneers of Odissi music are Kabichandra Kalicharan Patnaik, Singhari Shyamsundar Kar, Sri Nrusinghanath Khuntia, Pt Apanna Panigrahi, PtTariniCharan Patra, Pt. Upendra Tripathy, Pt. Nilamadhav Panigrahi, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, Sri Narayan Tripathy, Sri Narayan Behera, Sri Markandeya Mohapatra, Sri Kashinathpujapanda, Smt Binapani Mishra, Sri Jiban Pani, Sri Shyam Sundar Dhir, Sangeet Sudhakara Balakrushna Das, Pt. Bhubaneswar Mishra, Pt. Raghunath Panigrahi, Dr. Damodar Hota, Guru Gopal Chandara Panda, Sri KirtanPadhi, Sri Biswanath Pujapanda, Sri Sukadev Patri, Guru Banamali Moharana, Sri Harmohan Khuntia, SmtShyamamani Devi, Sri Rakhil Ch. Mohanty, Sri Padmacharan Panda, Guru Mahadev Rout, Sri Banamali Maharana, Prof. Ramhari Das, Smt. Binapani Nayakand many more. With the individual efforts of the Gurus, writers and performers, Odissi music has taken a shape which has attracted the music lovers even beyond the boundaries of Odisha.

The support of the Govt. Institutions like Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya and Odissi Research Centre has undoubtedly created a number of Odissi musicians and carried forward this legacy to the outer world by organizing programmes and providing scholarships. The contributions made to this field by Kala Bikash Kendra, Cuttack, National Music Association, Cuttack, Utkal Sangeet Samaj, Jaga Akahadas of Puri and Kalinga Bharati, Cuttack definitely need a special mention.

A number of books have been written in Odia, Hindi and English for the reference of art lovers. It is really very interesting to observe that people from abroad and musicians other than odias are coming forward and showing their interest to learn Odissi music. Many foreign students are also doing research on the subject.

Vocal and instrumental Odissi Music are getting prominence through a number of festivals organized throughout the country. Odissi recital has already got a place in the classical music festivals namely, Haridas Sammelan, Mumbai, Kalke Kalakar, Mumbai, in the music festival organized by

Sangeet Natak Akademices (both centre and the state) and in a number of other festivals organized in the country and abroad. A number of CD's of Odissi music repertoire are available in the market which has a great demand. The youngsters are showing a lot of interest to pursue this as a career and the parents are quite interested that their children may learn Odissi music.

A few leading artists of this generation are Dr. Suchitra Mahapatra, Sri Bijoy Jena, Sri Dheeraj Kumar Mohapatra, Sri Keshab Chandra Rout, Sri Binond Bihari Panda, Smt. Sangeeta Panda, Sri Chandramani Lenka, Mohapatra Minati Bhanja, Dr. Mitali Chinara Smt. Bandita Ray, Smt Bharati Jena, Sri Rupak Kumar Parida, Sukanta Kumar Kundu, Sri Nimakanta Routray and Sri Himanshu Sekhar Swain and many more, including this author.

So, the effort of the Gurus and artists continues. Odissi music has an universal appeal in its rendering style may it be vocal or instrumental. From among the instruments, 'Mardala' the only percussion instrument used in Odissi music enjoys a pride of place as an accompaniment in a solo or duet or a group presentation. A few scholars and Gurus who have been responsible for taking the torch further are Guru Kelu Charan Mohapatra, Guru Banamali Moharana, Guru Dhaneswar Swain, Guru Satchidananda Das, Guru Niranjana Patra and Guru Janardan Das etc.

Odissi music is deep rooted in its soil, flourishing and getting greater appreciation day by day by the music lovers and critics all around.

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