

Dynamics of Diasporic Odissi: Tracing Its Evolution and Impact in Global Communities

Abstract

This journal delves into the multifaceted presence of Odissi dance within diasporic communities across the world. Originating from the ancient temples of Odisha, India, Odissi dance has transcended geographical boundaries to captivate audiences and practitioners in diverse cultural contexts. Through interdisciplinary research, interviews, and critical analysis, this journal explores various aspects of Odissi dance in the diaspora, including its historical evolution, cultural adaptation, identity formation, community engagement, and the intersection between tradition and innovation. By fostering dialogue and exchange among scholars, practitioners, and enthusiasts, this journal aims to deepen understanding of the dynamic relationship between Odissi dance and diaspora and its significance for global cultural exchange and dialogue.

Keywords: Odissi Dance, Diaspora, Cultural Heritage, Identity, Community Engagement.

Introduction

One of India's most famous classical dance styles, odissi, has its roots in the Hindu temples of the state of Odisha, which is located on the country's eastern coast. The ancient Sanskrit Hindu treatise "Natyashastra" on performing arts serves as its theoretical foundation. Odisha Hindu temples and other historically significant locations connected to Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism are the source of the age-old Odissi tradition, the sculptures of which embellish the dancing postures of this art form. Its performance repertoire includes invocation, nrita, nritya, natya, and moksha. It is a type of illustrated story of legendary and religious stories, devotional poems, and spiritual ideas emoted by dancer with great body movements, expressions, impressive gestures, and sign languages. Themes from Vaishnavism as well as those connected to Hindu gods and goddesses like Shiva, Surya, and Shakti are used in this dance style. Odissi dance, with its fluid movements, intricate footwork, and expressive storytelling, has a rich cultural heritage dating back centuries. Originating from the temples of Odisha, India, Odissi dance has not only preserved its traditional roots but has also flourished in diasporic communities worldwide. This journal aims to explore the journey of Odissi dance in the diaspora, tracing its historical evolution, examining its impact, and shedding light on its significance within global communities.

Objective of the Study

The aim of study of this paper dynamics of diasporic Odissi tracing its evolution and impact in global communities.

Main Text

Historical Evolution of Odissi Dance:

This dance style's ancient origins can be found in the Sanskrit Hindu text "Natyashastra," which discusses many performing arts and dates back thousands of years. This art form is comparable to all 108 of the basic dance components explained in "Natyashastra." It is divided into several chapters and contains thousands of verses. In this literature, dance is separated into two distinct forms: "nrita" and "nritya."

"Nritya" is a solo expressive dance that emphasises the features of expressions, whereas "nrita" is pure dance that concentrates on the precision of hand gestures and movements. According to Russian researcher Natalia Lidova, the text illuminates various notions of Indian classical dances, such as the Tandava dance of Lord Shiva, standing poses, fundamental steps, bhava, rasa, acting techniques, and gestures. The book makes reference to four widely used vruttis styles, or techniques for expressive presentations: "Odra-Magadhi," "Panchali," "Dakshinatya," and "Avanti." Odra alludes to this performance art.

The Manchapuri cave is located in the heritage site of Udayagiri, the biggest Buddhist complex in Odisha. It dates back to the period of Kharavela, a Jaina monarch of Kalinga who belonged to the Mahameghavahana dynasty and ruled sometime in the first or second century BCE. There are engravings of dancers and musicians in the cave. Kharavela also included references to dancing and music in Udayagiri's Hathigumpha Inscriptions. The story of the researchers' discovery of a polished basalt lithophone with 20 keys demonstrates the antiquity of Odisha's musical heritage. It was discovered at the Sankarjang archaeological site, which is close to Angul, Odisha, and dates to approximately 1000 BCE.

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Dance inscriptions and carvings from the sixth to ninth centuries CE can be discovered at Odisha's Buddhist, Jaina, and Hindu archaeological sites, particularly in the Assia hill range. These include the Ranigumpha at Udayagiri and the temples and caves in Alatgiri, Ratnagiri, and Lalitgiri. Odissi is shown in dancing stances on Buddhist icons, Marichi, Vajravahni, and Haruka. Alexandra Carter stated that Oriya temple dancers, known as devadasis, and opulent dancing halls called nata-mandap were popular by the ninth century CE, or maybe even earlier. According to Kapila Vatsyayan, the cover and margins of manuscripts containing histories of Jain Tirthankaras and titled "Kalpa Sutra" were discovered in Gujarat. These manuscripts had ornamental depictions of Odissi dance positions, such as Chuaka and Tribhangi. This suggests that this dance style was well-liked throughout the Middle Ages, especially in parts of India that were remote from Odisha.

Hindu dance scriptures like "Abhinaya Darpana" and "Abhinaya Chandrika" provide a detailed explanation of hand and foot movements, various standing positions, and dance repertory. "Shilpaprakasha," an illustrated text about Orissan sculpture, architecture, and dance figures, also features poses from this dance style. Odissi dance is depicted in sculptures and panel reliefs found in Odisha temples, notably the well-known Jagannath temple in Puri, that date from the tenth to the fourteenth century. Two more nearby locations with statues of musicians and dancers are the Sun Temple in Konark and the Brahmeswara Temple in Bhubaneswar. The Maharis who used to undergo rigorous training in the dance form since early age and were considered propitious for religious services, performed it in temples, and enacted spiritual poems and religious plays. Compositions of the 8th century Shankaracharya or the 12th century Sanskrit poet Jayadeva's epic poem 'Gita Govinda' to a great extent inspired direction and development of present day Odissi. Historians also mention that group of dancers from Andhra and far away Gujarat was brought to Puri thus indicating mobility between west and east.

In addition to causing looting of these historic locations, Muslim armies' attacks on the temples and monasteries of Mukteswar Temple, Bhubaneswar, and other establishments in the eastern region of the Indian subcontinent after the twelfth century had a detrimental impact on the evolution of all artistic forms as well as the freedom of artists. One such instance was Sultan Firuz Shah Tughlaq's invasion of Odisha in 1360–1361 CE, which resulted in the destruction of multiple temples, including Puri's Jagannath Temple, which also involved damage to and destruction of the dancing statues and dance halls. The art forms declined during such period and whatever little survived, especially as court entertainments, was due to the patronage of some generous rulers. The Mughal and Sultanate period saw the temple dancers entertaining the family and courts of the Sultans and becoming some sort of concubines of the royals.

Under King Ramachandradeva's patronage, Odissi most likely continued to flourish in the 17th century, according to Alexandra Carter. Boys and young people received training in the Akhanda (martial arts) and athletics, which were formerly taught to women. Due to this development, the Gotipuas, or young boys and men of Odissi, have had the chance to train from a young age and get ready for the military in order to fight foreign invasions. The gotipuas tradition was encouraged, according to historical documents, by the Raja of Khurda in the fourteenth century, according to Ragini Devi.

Colonial rule began to take shape in the 18th century, and British colonial rule was established in the 19th century. As a result of these developments, several classical dance styles, like Odissi, witnessed a fall and were mocked and discouraged. In due course, the Devadasi culture's social and economic circumstances were combined with the scorn and deplorable behaviour of Christian missionaries and British officials. Additionally, in an effort to put an end to this behaviour, Christian missionaries started an anti-dance movement in 1892. In 1910, the British colonial government's Madras Presidency outlawed the Hindu temple dance tradition. In addition to being humiliated, the dancers faced economic repression as a result of pressure from their sponsors to stop giving them money.

The Indian community disapproved such ban and as the Indian freedom movement progressed steadily during the early 20th century, an effort to revive Indian culture and tradition became strong among Indians. Many classical art revivalists joined hands in reviving the ancient classical dance forms including Odissi. Oriya poet, researcher and dramatist Kavichandra Kalicharan Pattanayak was one such revivalist who not only made effort to revive the dance form but is also accredited for naming it as 'Odissi'.

Odissi dance and Diaspora

The journey of Odissi dance in the diaspora begins with its historical evolution within India. Tracing its roots to the ancient temple rituals of Odisha, Odissi dance has undergone various transformations over the centuries. From being marginalized during the colonial period to experiencing a revival in the post-independence era, Odissi dance has emerged as a celebrated classical art form in India. The diasporic spread of Odissi dance can be attributed to the migration of Indian communities to different parts of the world, where they carried their cultural traditions, including Odissi dance, with them.

Cultural Adaptation and Innovation:

In diasporic contexts, Odissi dance has undergone adaptations and innovations, reflecting the experiences and aspirations of practitioners in their new cultural landscapes. While some diasporic Odissi dancers adhere closely to traditional repertoire and techniques, others explore fusion styles, blending Odissi with other dance forms or incorporating contemporary themes and music. These adaptations highlight the dynamic nature of culture and the ways in which tradition and innovation intersect within diasporic communities.

Identity Formation and Cultural Belonging:

Participation in Odissi dance plays a significant role in shaping diasporic identities and fostering a sense of belonging among practitioners. For many diasporic individuals, engagement with Odissi dance is not only a form of artistic expression but also a means of connecting to their cultural roots and affirming their identity. Through performances, workshops, and cultural events, Odissi dance becomes a space for community-building, celebration, and cultural exchange, bridging divides and fostering mutual understanding.

Community Engagement and Collaboration:

Odissi dance initiatives within diasporic communities often promote community engagement and collaboration, contributing to the vibrancy of diasporic cultural spaces. These initiatives include dance schools, cultural organizations, and collaborative performances that bring together diverse communities and celebrate shared heritage. Through such collaborations, Odissi dance serves as a platform for fostering dialogue, understanding, and appreciation across cultural boundaries.

Challenges and Opportunities:

Despite its successes, Odissi dance in the diaspora faces challenges such as access to training, resources, and institutional support, particularly in regions where Odissi dance is less established. Additionally, navigating the complexities of identity and cultural authenticity in diasporic contexts can pose dilemmas for practitioners. However, these challenges also present opportunities for growth, innovation, and collaboration within diasporic Odissi dance communities.

Conclusion

Odissi dance continues to thrive and evolve in diasporic communities worldwide, enriching the cultural fabric of global societies. This journal has explored the vibrancy, resilience, and transformative potential of Odissi dance in the diaspora, highlighting its contributions to cultural diversity, identity formation, and community cohesion. Through rigorous research, critical analysis, and scholarly discourse, this journal aims to deepen understanding of the dynamic relationship between Odissi dance and diaspora and its significance for global cultural exchange and dialogue.

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