

TRANSFORMATIONS IN ODISSI:
A CASE STUDY IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF DANCE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research embodied in the present dissertation entitled, **"Transformations in Odissi: A Case Study in the Sociology of Dance"** is an original research work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Vinod K. **Jairath**, Department of Sociology, **for** the award of Master of Philosophy **in** Sociology from the University of Hyderabad.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this dissertation was earlier submitted for the award of research degree in part or full to this or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Amruta Priyadarshini has carried out the research work embodied in the present dissertation entitled "**Transformations in Odissi: A Case Study in the Sociology of Dance**", for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Sociology is prepared under my supervision.

I declare to the best of our knowledge that no part of this dissertation was earlier submitted for the award of research degree in part or full at any university.



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CHAPTER I

FOR A SOCIOLOGY OF DANCE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In a culture there is always a distinction between the traditional, intellectual and aesthetically appreciated 'high' culture and the 'low' popular culture, catering to the 'light' entertainment of the general masses. The cultural products have often been assigned **their** positions depending on their appeal- whether they manage to suit the tastes of the so-called intellectual upper strata of the society, or they only remain as a means of popular appeal. Dance is one such cultural product.

However, dance studies continued to be marginal within academic scholarship. While dance has made many original contributions to cultural life, the study and analysis of those contributions have been ignored, as 'social histories of dance' are for the most part considered 'descriptive' and 'atheoretical'. In sociology of culture, dance appears only in small-scale empirical studies of particular companies or groups of dancers that provides little scope for a more complex understanding of how it operates in the social sphere. Sociology of art continues to privilege literature and visual arts and, in the newer interdisciplinary arena of cultural studies, dance is discussed only in the context of social dance as part of youth culture. This neglect called for a sociology of dance, which would be concerned with demonstrating the social facticity of dance, making it a legitimate topic of sociological inquiry. This activity, which we commonsensically understand as 'dance' does in fact take into account a number of different forms and occurs in a variety of social contexts which straddle the spectrum of the high art/popular culture divide. Within this kind of a dance scenario, there is a distinct place for 'classical' dance tradition which is often associated with tradition of high culture.

Encounter with the Other, modern Western culture, during colonialism drew responses from colonized cultures; generally, a choice was made from among the following alternatives:

- **giving** up tradition in favour of the Western cultural forms, reforming the existing tradition, and
- resurrecting an 'authentic' 'uncontaminated' tradition.

This study examines the issues involved in the resurrection of the classical dance of Odissi as the 'authentic' tradition.

1.2 DANCE IN SOCIOLOGY

As an art form, dance has largely remained a minority concern - participated in by a minority and viewed by a minority. Nevertheless, it is a cultural product, qualifying it to come under the gaze of sociology. But unfortunately, the sociological tradition had its eyes closed to the subject for a long time.

1.2.1 PROBLEMS WITH SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF DANCE

One of the central problems in analyzing dance from a sociological perspective is that it expresses itself non-verbally through gestures. Here, 'the dance and the dancer cannot be separated, the body being the primary instrument and means of representation' (Hanna cited in Thomas 1995: 6). In part, the key to understanding sociology's neglect of dance lies in the way the body and dance have been perceived within the modern Western culture. In a rationalized and technocratic culture, mind and body stand in binary opposition, with the mind being placed under the category of *culture* and body being placed under the category of *nature*. Western cultural thought since the Enlightenment has been dominated by the privileging of rational thinking mind and the relegation of the 'Other' to a subservient position - rationality takes precedence over the emotions, idealism over materialism and culture over nature.

The perceived nearness of the body and thus dance to nature emerges out of its association with formal rituals and rites of passage in simple traditional pre-literate cultures. This takes it all the more away from sociological focus, which is concerned with modern complex industrial societies. Thus dance was pushed into the domain of anthropology, which gave

importance to dance as an essential component of primitive culture whereby the primitive people could hardly perform any task without dancing. (*Ibid*: 8) In addition, the assumption that as cultures developed and became more civilized and rational, dancing would become less important towards the marginalization of dance within sociology,

Another problem in treating dance within the purview of sociology was seen to be that it made no contribution either towards understanding or establishment of social order. In no way was dance addressing or offering solutions to the problem of modernity. All forms of art including dance became increasingly marginalized with the march of industrialism.

The studies on youth culture have indicated dance is not only an important leisure activity **for** young people; it is also bound up with the processes of gender roles and identification particularly in relation to girls and young women. (Frith 1987, McRobbie 1984) The female performers have been the central protagonists in the classical ballet despite their negative puritanical sexual connotation, and this was one of the few areas in public life affording women an opportunity for self-expression and limited social advancement. (Thomas 1995: 5) Nevertheless, the neglect of dance in sociology finds an echo within feminist studies. Although feminism has been concerned to open the categories of gender, dancing has not been used as a significant resource. It seems rather intriguing that this women's realm of activity was not given more than a passing glance. On the other hand, mainstream sociology, which is a reflection of male perspectives, has always cornered dance as typically feminine disqualifying itself for the gaze of sociology,

So, within sociology, dance has been marginalized three-fold: first, as a practice which places the body at the centre of its discourse. Second, as an art form and third, as an activity which is viewed as a predominantly feminine mode of expression.

1.2.2 NEGLECT OF DANCE AS AN AREA OF ACADEMIC INQUIRY

The marginality of dance within sociology is also reflected in other academic fields. The philosophy of art has paid scant attention to dance due to its transient quality: as you see it, so it has gone, rendering it more elusive than painting and literature. 'In order for a

philosophy of art to emerge, it is necessary that the art should occupy at the relevant time a culturally relevant position, or that the ideology of the art could be integrated with a culturally prevalent ideology' (Sparshott 1988: 95). However, dance unlike the other arts at various times, has never fulfilled the above criteria, and therefore, has not generated a significant corpus of philosophical literature. Moreover, the absence of a universally accepted system for the recording and preservation of dances also contributes to the difficulty in fixing dances' identity and of grasping a strong sense of its tradition.

Dance's peripheral status in sociology and philosophy reflects its marginal institutional position within contemporary culture too. Thus, art or performance dance remains largely a minority concern inspite of the so-called "dance boom" and attempts at mass marketing aspects of it.

The marginal status of dance within Western academia remained so until 1970s-80s. It was only with the growth of cultural studies that there evolved a celebration of the hitherto denigrated form of popular culture. With Simon Frith's recognition of dance as playing an important social role in the lives of young people and the cultural analysts' fascination with youth culture and their dancing, dance emerged as an area of academic inquiry. 'In this context, the works of David Robins and Phil Cohen (1978) on disco dancing, Geoff Mungham (1976) on the role of dancing in working-class youth culture, owe considerable significance' (Thomas 1995: 3). In spite of all this there was hardly any highlight of the analysis in any detail of the activity of dancing in relation to the flow of urban life. Dance was only analyzed as a leisure activity or at the most these analyses embodied the influence of black music and dance on the dancing of white youth. Thus the specificity of dance was not addressed in a sustained and systematic manner. An attempt was made to analyse dance through challenges to mainstream sociology emerging from Postmodernism, Poststructuralism and Feminism.

1.2.3 SHIFT IN FOCUS

Postmodernism represented a cultural break or shift in sensibilities, practices and discourses stressing the collapse of the boundaries between high art and popular culture, between art

and life, and a celebration of eclecticism through a mixing and matching of styles and genres during late 1960s. Being a relative term, post modernism heralded a heightened awareness within marginalised popular culture whereby the minority groups began to explore their hidden, silenced traditions thus providing an impetus to the critique of high culture and a generation of alternate forms. The advocates of cultural postmodernism reject traditional grand or meta-narratives as authoritarian because they offer a single unitary view of the world.

Post structuralism, on the other hand, was seen as response to the failure of the political left in Europe after 1968. Central to post structuralism is the critique of the *cogito*, the concept of the individual as a formally free, rational thinking, acting, unified self. Post structuralism rejects the idea of a fixed subjectivity 'in favour of a dislocated, fragmented subjectivity which is not fixed but is constituted through language on each and every occasion on which we speak' (Thomas 1995: 15).

Similarly, feminism, in its various strands and theoretical perspectives has sought to bring women into the realms of visibility of sociology as 'knowing subjects' and has advocated a reflexive practice. The concern to bring women into the discourse of sociology and to enable their voices to be heard entailed, firstly, a critical re-appraisal of the dominant patriarchal representations of women in sociology and the wider cultural formation and secondly, a consideration of those areas which had been traditionally associated with women and which had received little attention in sociology and cultural analysis. (Thomas 1995:12) By insisting that women be brought into the critical frame, feminist writings have helped to push new and different aspects of cultural experience to the centre of these discourses.

Thus it is seen that post modernism started out as an aesthetic project in the 1960s and permeated into the discourses of philosophy, social sciences and cultural analysis and later post structuralism in the 1970s and feminism in the 1980s contributed towards a trend which challenged the dominant cultural hegemony of modernity. These theoretical shifts echoed changes characterized by *a series of crises of representation* where 'the older modes of defining, appropriating and recomposing the objects of artistic, philosophical, literary and

social scientific languages are no longer credible and in which one common aspect is the dissolution of the very boundary between language and its objects, this in turn being related to the acceptance of the inevitability of a plurality of perspectives and the dissolution of various older polarities and boundaries'(Boyne and Rattansi 1990:12).

Prior to mid-1970s, sociologists who were interested in arts and culture were situated on the margins of the discipline as these interests were often considered eccentric. There were also little cross-over between different disciplines like sociology of art and culture, art or literary criticism, aesthetics and art or cultural history. Whenever sociology did examine art, it approached the work extrinsically, that is, it viewed arts in terms of a reflection of something outside itself such as social conditions of existence, thereby missing out what Herbert Marcuse called the 'aesthetic dimension'. According to Marcuse, 'when art is treated in a definite and somewhat mechanical relation to the society, the examination becomes overloaded in the direction of content to the neglect of the form' (Marcuse 1979). The specific qualities of art form were not discussed because the nature of aesthetic was not considered sociologically significant. But subsequently it was argued that as the very notions of aesthetic are in themselves historically constructed; they have a social dimension. (Wolff, 1983) Therefore, the realm of art and culture became a legitimate area of sociological inquiry. Cultural questions and aesthetic considerations have been propelled into the sociological stage by post modernism's aestheticism. The elevation of culture to the centre of sociological theorizing and the interest in pursuing interdisciplinary frameworks have helped to make way for dance as a cultural product to emerge into sociological framework.

This emergent space has also been given an impetus by an upsurge of interest in the topic of the body in a range of disciplines. Although sociology has been slow to theorise on the body in comparison with other academic disciplines, nevertheless, the body is being dragged into its theoretical sights. (Featherstone et al 1991, Turner 1984). Post structuralism, Post modernism and Feminism have instigated their respective attacks on the human subject, the Enlightenment project and patriarchy by focusing their telescopes on the body. They have revealed the centrality of the body as a site of social control. (Foucault 1977) By elucidating how bodies have been objectified and subjectified through a range of discourses, post

structuralism. Post modernism and feminism have contributed further to the possibility of dance being afforded a more substantial cultural voice.

All through this kind of a discourse, there has been a constant attempt to demonstrate dance's sociality and in doing so propose it as a legitimate area of sociological inquiry. Although the central tenets of these frameworks offer dance the possibility of a new found legitimacy, it is not obligatory that the examination of dance should be launched from within a post modern or post structural sociology. It is because, as Featherstone has argued, any attempt to construct a post modern sociology would ultimately be doomed to failure as it could not be other than a flawed attempt to construct another grand narrative.

1.2.4 SOCIOLOGY OF DANCE

With this background, Helen Thomas, a senior lecturer of sociology at the University of London, began to direct serious attention towards formulating a sociological framework for analyzing dance during the early part of 1980s. 'The concern was to generate an approach that, on the one hand, would attend to the specificity of the performance dance as a reflexive practice **with** movement at its centre and on the other hand, to demonstrate the social facticity of dance' (Thomas 1995: 21). She believed that there were very few places in dance scholarship for a budding sociologist of dance to go to directly draw inspiration for theorizing the relations between dance and culture. So, she directed her attention towards setting out a basis for the formulation of a methodology and ultimately she figured out the direction through two main avenues: first, the idea of the text or image etc. being more than the sum of the parts that comprise it, that was also gaining credibility in the sociology of art and culture through the increasingly pervasive influence of structuralism and semiotics; second, the contention that the body is a symbol of the society that stemmed from the Durkheimian tradition of thought which situated the body firmly in the domain of culture and as a sight for sociological investigation.(Siegel 1996)

The approach that Thomas was attempting to develop was interdisciplinary drawing on from related areas such as dance aesthetics, dance theory, movement studies, dance cultural history, dance anthropology, phenomenology of dance and social study of the body and

everyday movement. The concern was not simply to set out a theoretical framework for sociology of dance, but also to indicate the use of this framework for analyzing dance form. Helen Thomas was basically trying to formulate a sociology of dance for examining the development of modern dance in USA. Nevertheless, this theoretical framework is equally applicable for the analysis of other dance forms, in this case Odissi, but of course with little alterations.

In the present work on Odissi dance, however, I have basically approached the study from anthropology of dance, phenomenology of dance and social study of the body perspectives.

Anthropology of dance was initially concerned with the search for the origins of dance followed by a consideration of the function of dance in society, which emerged almost simultaneously from two different traditions of thought: British structural-functionalist school of Anthropology spearheaded by Evans-Pritchard and Radcliff Brown & American cultural relativist school supported by Franz Boas. (Thomas 1995: 169). According to the structural-functionalist school, dance was governed by a definite structure and this structure integrated the dance form, and this structured structure in turn has definite social roles. The American cultural-relativist stressed that the body in movement and dance was socially constructed and varied cross-culturally. The 'body' in dance was expected to speak to something outside itself (audience) and it was to be done through formal principles. Drawing from these two strains of thought, the basic idea was that, dance was structured by certain formal principles, it was an instrument of communication to the audience and in doing so it performed a function for the society. (Thomas 1995)

So, during 1960s-70s, there were attempts to uncover the meanings in the various forms of dance under study through the application of communication-linguistic models and consideration of the structure of human movement. Efforts were made to analyse and understand the deep structures of dance by focusing on its generative grammar, which is, uncovering the structures that make any kind of dance possible and decipher its meaning. Nevertheless, the concern is not simply to read the codes but to understand the context. According to Kaepler, in dance anthropology, 'the dance is examined in order to say

something significant about the society in question in terms of its intensions, meanings and cultural evaluation' (Kaeppeler 1991: 16). Dance anthropology is instructive because it directs attention towards dance as a serious topic of socio-cultural inquiry. It establishes that dance can be treated as a form of 'cultural knowledge' and thus an appropriate area of socio-cultural inquiry.

Phenomenology of dance basically takes on from Husserl's phenomenology where his aim was to arrive at a method that would enable philosophy to grasp the essences of phenomena by the suspension of belief in the life world, which is, bracketing out the objective reality. Here what remains is the phenomena in consciousness; subjectivity takes precedence over a pre-given objective reality. Dance from this perspective is seen as a consciously created movement phenomenon presented through the lived experience, existing in its own time and space and creating its own life-world. The central part of this theory elaborates upon Langer's conception of dance as a symbolic form. Here, human beings are seen as endowed with a symbol seeking mind and it is this that distinguishes human beings from animals. The role of language (here dance) is not to name a pre-given reality, but to construct and inform it through conceptualization and articulation. This articulation and hence communication undergoes a "transformation"- the substance of the material force of dance is body movement and this movement is transformed into expression through gestures. (Langer 1953) Only those understanding the symbols would be able to decipher the significance of the expression, while for the others, it would appear plain stylization of movements. Thus, the phenomenology of dance approach, at some point can be utilized to point out the phenomenon of covert communication.

Body symbolism focuses on the ways in which we perceive our bodies and reveals that the ways in which we move are not just natural facts of existence but rather they are socially constructed. (Adair 1992) This means that the bodily behavior is learnt rather than 'natural' and meanings which may be attributed to the body change over time and according to social circumstances. While the social context is significant, it is also important to recognize the subversive potential of the body. Such a stance offers a challenge to the traditional

interpretations of the body and so it is of particular advantage to the status of dance and women too. (*Ibid*)

This analytical approach to the sociology of dance proposed by Thomas is situated within the broad span of what is generally referred to as the 'interpretive' tradition of the social sciences. (Thomas 1995: 23) The intention was to maintain the integrity of an interpretive sociology as a mode of seeing and analyzing the social world on the one hand and, on the other, the specificity and reflexive character of dance as an art form. 'This framework incorporates a sociological approach from two perspectives: *extrinsic* and *intrinsic*. The extrinsic approach examines the social context of the development of a dance form. It considers dance as a social fact and as such generated from within a particular social milieu and on a number of different but interrelated levels. Dance is seen as standing in a social relation to the wider cultural formation, to the other arts, and to the tradition of dance itself. The intrinsic approach, on the other hand considers the qualities that are specific to dance itself and this addresses the aesthetic component too' (*Ibid*: 23). Through its interpretive and connotative features, dance is reflective upon the social world. This means that dance is being viewed as not only speaking of the social milieu in which it is created and performed but also speaking to it. Therefore, the extrinsic perspective involves analyzing the social and denotative features of dance while the intrinsic perspective considers the aesthetic and connotative features.

It follows from this that, if the dance itself can provide a point of reference for interpretation of culture it becomes necessary that a sociological inquiry be extended to an examination of the dance works.

An examination of dance works within sociology can be approached from various angles/paradigms. Here are illustrations of certain Western empirical studies which enables a sociologist of dance to build a point of reference for a sociological understanding of dance.

1.2.5 WESTERN EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Jane Desmond, a former dancer and choreographer, currently Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Iowa, tries to carve out an important place for dance within **the** interdisciplinary embrace of cultural studies by placing the "kinesthetic activity" under scrutiny. She has focused on the kinesthetic activity to understand 'how social identities are formed, signaled and negotiated through bodily movements' (Desmond cited in Carter 1998: 154). After establishing the credibility of kinesthetic semiotics, Desmond argues that 'movement style is an important distinction between social groups and its articulation signals group affiliation. Movement serves as a marker for the production of gender, racial, ethnic, class and national identities' (*Ibid*: 156). The meaning that dance projects is situated both in the context of other socially prescribed and socially meaningful ways of moving and in the context of the history of dance forms in specific societies. Looking at the dance can enable one to identify the socially constituted and historically specific attitudes towards the body in general, towards specific groups' usage of the body in particular, and about the relationships among variously marked bodies as well as social attitudes towards the use of time and space. So, if dance styles are symptomatic and constitutive of social relations, then the history of dance styles and their spread from one group to another or from one area to another, along with changes that occur with this transmission can be traced and they can in turn help in the uncovering of the shifting ideologies attached to the bodily discourse. In studying the transmission of a dance form, it is not only the path way of that transmission, but also the form's reinscription in a new social context and resultant change in signification that provides an important point of analysis. (*Ibid*: 156) On the whole, Desmond has tried to highlight the relationship between the micro level of activity such as dancing body with the macro reading of that activity such as its social, historical and ideological signification.

Similarly, Susan Manning's analysis of dance (Wigman's Totenmal) reflects on the location of dance within a particular political context and it also examines how the dance work advocates for a particular kind of political ideology within an apolitical aura. 'Totenmal modeled a prototype for Nazi theatre- in its theme, the cult of the fallen soldiers; in its format, the combination of a movement choir and a speaking choir; and above all, in its

strategy of not appearing political'(Manning cited in Carter 1998: 260). It also tries to evoke the audience to adhere to it. Here dance is seen as a medium of propagation of an ideology,

Richard Dyer and John Mueller's analyses of "Dancing in the Dark" is yet another work which highlights dance as the most effective means of communication. It reflects how by the use of certain gestures and body language dance can communicate much more than words do. (Carter 1998:293)

Apart from all these, almost all dance choreographies have the potential for readings informed by gender perspectives. As Ted Polhemus' work, *Dance Gender and Culture* suggests, gender is a primary and insurmountable existential division which must inevitably define cultural experience and the perception of cultural reality. 'Logically, because life can only be experienced from the perspective of one particular gender and because culture exists only in the mind's eye of two particular individuals, all the worlds' culture must be multiplied by two - the male culture and the female culture' (Polhemus cited in Carter 1998: 176). Dance- the distillation of culture into its most metaphysical form always embodied and identified this gender generated division of cultural realities. 'The man's dance style is a crystallization of what it means to be a male member of a culture and the women's dance style is a crystallization of what it means to be a female member of that culture. Here, dance might be seen as a second stage of the process of crystallization- a schema, an abstraction or stylizing of physical cultures'(Ibid:174). Another important fact commands for attention is that in a duet dance, whether fast or slow, the dance steps are commonly male led. The male usually chose with whom to dance, male determined the rhythm and style etc., while the female, as in real life followed the lead. There is always a vivid depiction of the way in which the male physical support for the female in reality is translated in the activity of dancing wherein the male supports the female ,sets the pace and style of dance and is also the centre of attention. There is a reinforcing of male domination that is very well projected through the medium of dance.

1.2.6 INDIAN STUDIES

In the Indian context and within cultural studies too, dance studies particularly have been rarely analyzed from a sociological perspective. Though one encounters numerous works on dance as such, all of them are either pure historical narration of the evolution of dance, or are discussions on the technicalities involved in dance. For instance, Kapila Vatsyayan's work, *'Indian Classical Dance'*, is a rich source of facts pertaining to evolution of all Indian classical dances but lacks in sociological insight. Nevertheless, it is perhaps the most acclaimed works on Indian classical dance.

Similarly, D. N. Patnaik's *'Odissi Dance'* also gives a detailed account of the dance form since its inception along with an elaboration on gestures, postures etc. and their significance. But this too is not very Convincing from a sociological perspective.

On the other hand, V. Subramaniam's article, *'Gender Monopolies in Indian Classical Dance'*, does throw some light on the categories of gender and how these operate within dance in relation to their significance in society.

Similarly, Oopalee Operajita, in her article, *'Innovations in the Classical Dances: The example of Odissi'*, tries to question the stagnation that has crept into Odissi dance owing to its strict adherence to the initial form and content. This piece of work also offers an insight into the structure of dance and also highlights the possibility of innovation within the codified structure.

The above discussion sets the stage for a sociological study of dance. Helen Thomas has applied sociology of dance for tracing the development of American Modern Dance; nevertheless, it can be equally applicable to Indian classical dances. All these dances have a social context with certain sociological factors, which has compelled them to take their present form. An investigation into this domain can build new insights for the study of Indian classical dances rendering them all the more meaningful for the social milieu, apart from their mass appeal. Sociology of dance offers the basis for a paradigm for sociological **inquiry** into the relation between dance and society.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

My study is an attempt to examine '*Odissi* dance', the classical dance tradition of Orissa and highlight the transformations that this dance form has undergone with the passage of time. It is essentially an examination of the social conditions that have brought about a transformation within the '*classical*' *Odissi* dance. The '*classicism*' of this dance is attributed to that form and content which was strictly structured according to **the** prescriptions given in the normative texts on dance. But the new classicism of *Odissi* was also a construction of a specific point of time by a set of specific individuals. The effort in this study is therefore, is to interrogate the following:

- What changes are permissible within the definition of '*classical*'?
- When does a dance form ceases to be '*traditional*' and become a different form altogether?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main focus in this study is to interrogate the status of the "*classical*" in a dance form like *Odissi*. In order to do this, I have identified the following objectives:

- To examine the socio-historical evolution of the *Odissi* dance tradition as a part of the larger tradition of Indian classical dance and its changing pattern over a period of time;
- To probe into the representation of women within the institutional arrangement of *Odissi* dance since its inception;
- To examine the changing content or the text of the present day *Odissi* dance.

Given the broad theoretical framework, the statement of the problem and the objectives of the study, my effort, then, is to examine the historical evolution of *Odissi* dance within the Orissan social structure with emphasis on the social forces influencing the dance form at different time periods.

15 METHODOLOGY

In the present study, I have utilized Qualitative Research techniques that have been extremely useful in obtaining greater insights into the socio-cultural scenario of dance. This is basically a case study employing 'exploratory' research design, since there is hardly any research on sociological examination of dance in India. I have used both secondary and primary data for the purpose of my study. Through a review of secondary data comprising mainly the historical materials, I was able to build a background for my study. I have procured some video clippings, which give a glimpse of the ancient *Devadasi* dance tradition. *Gotipua* dance, the classical Odissi dance and its improvised versions in the recent times. I have collected primary data through interviews conducted with key personalities from the field of Odissi dance and Odissi Research Center situated at Bhubaneswar.

I spent about a month for my fieldwork. During this time I conducted interviews with nine personalities associated with the field of Odissi dance. The following is a list of respondents that I have interviewed:

- D.N. PATNAIK- Former secretary, Orissa Sangeet Natak Academy; a dance scholar involved in the revival of Odissi dance in 1955.
- KUMKUM MOHANTY- Director, Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar; senior Odissi dancer.
- PRIYAMBADA MOHANTY-HEJMEDI- Senior Odissi dancer belonging to the first batch of female Odissi dancers in Orissa.
- SUSAMA PATNAIK- Senior Odissi dancer belonging to the first batch of female Odissi dancers in Orissa.
- RABINARAYAN RATHSARMA- Dance critic, hailing from the family of priests associated with the Jagannath temple at Puri.
- RAHUL ACHARYA- Dance critic, Odissi dancer and recipient of the ICCR fellowship.
- ILLEANA CITARISTI- Odissi dancer and choreographer.

- KASTURI PATNAIK- Odissi dancer and faculty at Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar.
- MUKTI PAL- Odissi dancer and sociologist.

1.5.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are certain methodological problems encountered in the selection of dance as a field of investigation:-

1. Firstly, dance being a transient art form cannot be frozen into a concrete shape that could speak for itself- about the social milieu that has led to its emergence and transformation.
2. Secondly, the Western conception of the Sociology of Dance cannot be applied as it is in the Indian context. American modern dance is very different from the Indian dance forms. The difference being, they do not employ any lyrics. As a result, they are liable for Postmodernist or Post structuralist interpretation without any problem. But in case of any Indian dance forms, in this case Odissi, lyrics, form an essential part of the dance tradition. It is In fact through the structural analysis of the content of these lyrical dance performances that one can attempt an intrinsic study. But here again there is a problem, these lyrical dance performances, or '*abhinayas*' cannot be categorized as performed exclusively during particular time periods. So, at times it becomes difficult to trace or unearth the kind of ideology that a dance form attempts to propagate.
3. Thirdly, in order to conduct an intrinsic study of Odissi dance, one requires a lot of time to examine the details of the '*abhinayas*' choreographed during a particular time, to highlight the connotative features.

In my study, I have not been able to examine, in any detail, the intrinsic changes due to time constraint. Nevertheless, I have not completely ignored the aspect as will be evident in the course of my work.

1.6 PLAN OF THE STUDY

The inaugural chapter introduces various facets of the thesis. This chapter includes the statement of the problem, objectives, methodology, structure, limitations of the study, and so on. A large part of the literature review is exhausted with introducing the Sociology of Dance approach in the Western context. Literatures on Indian dance forms are numerous but the study of dance with a sociological insight is a rarity. The first chapter is an attempt to open up a sociological inquiry of Odissi dance within the framework of the sociology of dance. Through this section, a whole new approach to the domain of dance has been focused from within a sociological perspective.

The second chapter tries to explore the issues of gender in dance. The social construction of the body, which is equally relevant in the domain of dance, has also been discussed. The present study is an attempt at highlighting the representation of women within the institutional set-up of dance - may it be dance production or other institutional practices.

The third chapter is basically an account of the historical evolution of Odissi dance within the larger tradition of Indian classical dances, with special emphasis on the shifts that have triggered off transformations within the dance form.

The fourth chapter is an account of the major findings of the study. Here, an attempt has been made to unravel and explain the issues that have led to the transformation of Odissi dance, which is a direct manifestation of the prevailing social conditions.

The final chapter embodies a summary of the conclusions derived in the course of the present study. The major findings of the study have been discussed in relation to the significance of the study. It basically comprises the understanding of the whole problem of transformation and the efforts of suggesting a framework for the comprehension of Odissi's trajectory and opening it up for further research.

CHAPTER II

GENDER IN DANCE

The Sociology of dance has attempted to create a distinct space for dance studies within the academia. Nevertheless, it seemed increasingly anomalous that dance was ignored within critical studies, especially at a time when the focus of analysis of ideology, representation and social relation was the 'body'. Not until the time that Foucault revolutionized the way in which we understood politics and culture, that the body gradually became central to the operation of power and knowledge in various fields. This indicated that now not only do we have immediate access to a new analysis of what the dancing body might mean in contemporary culture, but we can also discuss the very marginalization of dance and dance studies in a new light. However, in our culture, the subversive possibilities of the moving body are safely contained by institutional and ideological strategy, which in turn renders the dance harmless.

Women's physical expression is a key question in relation to dance- whether bodily expression is 'natural' or 'socially constructed' In this regard there have been two major traditions of dance study:

First, is the *universal tradition* following Darwin, which holds the view that bodily expression is either innate or inherited and is cross-culturally universal. This assumes that similar behaviour pattern can be understood by people everywhere without any reference to the social context. This reinforces the 'natural' without offering any potential for social change.

Second, is the *interpretative symbolic tradition* following Durkheim, presenting the view that movement is learnt and culturally variable offering the women potential for change as learnt behaviour can be clearly modified (Adair 1992: 32).

Similarly, Mauss holds that bodily techniques are governed by what we learn in society and dance as a symbolic art form consciously attends to its bodily technique through its encoded system. (Mauss 1972)

Mary Douglas further develops Mauss' work and maintains that there is a reciprocal relationship between society and the body with each symbolizing the other. All societies have a form of bodily symbolism and there is a natural tendency for the body to express society. "Social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body is always modified by the social categories, through which it is known and sustains a particular view of the society"(Douglas 1973: 93). For example passivity is a common characteristic of women's physical experience and it is reflected in the restricted movement of women in the society.

Nancy Henley, in her work *Body Politics*, recognizes that although the body can be studied in isolation, the main concern is to understand bodily behaviour in its social context. People are concerned about this form of communication because there is an assumption that it can reveal our 'true selves' in ways that speech cannot. (Henley 1977)

This chapter basically explores the issue of gender in dance. The social construction of the body, which is equally relevant in the domain of dance, has been discussed along with the representation of women in dance production and other institutional practices with reference to Indian dances. At a later stage, this section also draws attention towards the changes in attitudes and social conditions following the repositioning of women in society.

2.1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE BODY

It is well known that the body, which is central to dance, is socially constructed. This means that bodily behaviour is 'learnt' rather than 'natural' and meanings that may be attributed to the body change over time and according to social circumstances.

It is seen that the Western society projects paradoxical messages about the body. On one hand, there is the urge to keep fit, be healthy and enjoy physicality, while on the other hand,

physical education and dance are generally perceived to be of less value than academic subjects and 'manual' work is often viewed as less significant than 'intellectual' work. The same view is reinforced in the Indian scenario where academics are given priority over the pursuit of any art form. The latter is usually pushed into the domain of 'extra-curricular activity'.

The body is socially constructed through concepts such as *dualism*, *the natural*, *the essential self* and *the feminine*. These are evident in the institutional practices such as family, education and the arts. While the social context is important in the construction of movements, there is also the existence of the subversive potential of the body, which ultimately is diminished by ideological and institutional strategies and codifications (Adair 1992:24).

2.1.1 DUALISM: Dance as Movement of a Physical Body versus Thinking Body

The concept of dualism comes into play with the division of the world into a set of binary oppositions like good/evil, mind/body and culture/nature. This dichotomization is based on the principle of separation and dominance of one category over the other. In the process, the good, mind and culture reign over the evil, body and nature. Dualism is an obstacle to reclaiming women's power because women are traditionally denigrated through their perceived association with evil, the body and the nature. At the same time, their perceived association with good, the mind and culture traditionally elevates men.

References in dance classes and dance literature in the West to 'body as an instrument' and the need to be 'present with both mind and body' also reinforce a notion of separation. Such references encourage dancers to view dance training as purely physical. This results in a perception of the body as a machine, an object to be worked into shape. This approach can lead to damage through injury when dancers push themselves too hard. But dance also offers the potential for an anti-dualist stance with the recognition that the body is not something people possess to dance with, to order to bend here and whirl there and to move. 'The idea of *my dance is my body and my body is myself* gradually gained prominence. Dancers

realized that they were people first with new attitudes and feelings about life in a world of vast sociological, psychological and historical change' (Cohen 1972: 118),

The modern American women dancers of 1920s -30s created movement from themselves as 'thinking bodies', recognizing the futility of a practice which attempted to separate physical and thought processes. Thus they attempted to transcend the duality with the creation of thousands of roles for women. The earlier dances were based on myths and narratives and often portrayed the world as balanced between the harmony-discord dualism. Moreover, the various images of men and women within these myths emphasized on either the positive or negative character traits like *goddess/witch*, *virgin wife/whore*. However, there emerged a change in orientation in the early 1960s whereby an additional category, the non-mythic, human, female figure evolved, with shift away from the narrative and towards matters of symbols and structure. (Banes 1998) This was a reflection of the parallel changes that occurred in the economic, political, social, scientific and technological climates in America. It came about with women's growing awareness of a right to instigate changes.

In addition to all this, it is often seen that bodily connotations are more identified with women than men because of their bodily cycles and reproductive abilities. This closeness to the body is a potential source of danger in a rational and technically oriented culture where nature can be seen erupting into the culture in the form of erratic or irrational behaviour whereby women tend to foreground their organic activities in the performance works. This potential subversiveness of the body offers a rich resource for women for social change. However, the fear of a possible eruption of nature into culture brings about a wide variety of social controls. (Thomas cited in Adair 1992: 26) .

Indian classical dances, however, transcend such dualistic representations of women. Because of its religious orientation and thematic content that largely draws from the mythologies, the portrayal of women has been in an appealing role having positive elements. Such a representation of women, in a way, tends to reinforce status quo and, at the same time, it attempts to contain the possible potential subversiveness of the body. In this case,

the control is already given in the form of *Natyashastra*¹ prescriptions which structure and codify movements for dancers, undermining which, one seizes to have a classical recognition. But, as Patricia Uberoi comments, in case of popular culture in India, particularly Indian cinema, there has been a collapse of the long established cinematic opposition of 'good girl'/vamp, wife/whore with explicit display of female sexuality. The heroines of the present day tend to express themselves almost entirely through their bodies (Uberoi 1997).

2.1.2 THE NATURAL: 'Accepted' Bodily Postures and Behaviour

It is now generally recognized that the so-called 'natural' way of doing things is culturally defined and specific and not 'natural' at all. The difference in bodily postures and behaviour between men and women are culturally constructed and ideologically justified as 'natural' differences. In the interplay of nature and culture, it is culture, which dominates and defines nature and 'natural'. It follows that whatever is associated with men has status and power and that which is associated with women does not. The construction of gender identity within the family and education system has further resulted in the internalization of this difference and hence leads to the submissiveness of women. According to the Western perception women have often been represented within dance with 'object-status' as performers. Women are found learning 'acceptable' bodily postures and behaviour, which is different from that of men. Actually the socialization of women has instilled in them the idea of difference in such a manner that it has led to their separation from the so-called and defined masculine domain and thus their dominance by men.

Marianne Wex, in her photographic study of female and male postures and gestures in dance, highlights this by an example of photograph of men's and women's standing postures. The entire image reflects the patriarchal hierarchy. The men are all standing with their legs apart and hands clasped behind and the women are standing with their legs together and arms crossed in front of them. The differing attitudes to their bodies and the amount of space used are very illuminating. (Wex cited in Adair 1992: 28) Men are

¹ *Natyashastra*- first Indian treatise on dramaturgy

portrayed as taking up a good deal of space whereas women are portrayed as shrinking from the space and enclosing themselves. Wex argues that 'this male-female distinction of body language is derived from the respective tasks of men and women. This, in turn is rooted in the socialization processes, through which young people learn what is expected of them. (*Ibid*: 28) In fact, both ideologically and economically, women's dependence on men is perpetuated as natural.

2.1.3 THE ESSENTIAL SELF: Emphasizing Difference

Theories of 'natural body' and 'essential self' have an appeal that has attracted some feminists. Here the question arises, does an 'essential self' really exist? It is indeed tempting when faced with a restrictive, oppressive set of social structures and practices to seek for a core untainted by such social confinement. (Adair 1992: 28)

A reconsideration of the body from a feminist perspective actually entails a re-evaluation of the meaning of biology and its relation to social, psychological and cultural factors. Analysis of the body, which resists binary opposition, offers a challenge to conventional perceptions and possibilities of new identities. Some French feminists, following from Derrida's deconstruction, reject the belief of fixed gender identities and a polarized opposition between male and female and offer instead a more fluid interchange of diverse elements. But, this brings about the danger of essentialism, which discusses women universally without taking sufficient account of women's differences.

However, the idea of the body being a means to discovery of the unconscious, 'the real-self' is evident in some new dance practices, which desire to free the dancer of social construction by a challenge to oppressive behaviour, action and patterns. The value of such an approach is that it can offer a vision of women's creativity. This was the vision of Isadora Duncan, the pioneer of American modern dance.

Similar attempts have also been undertaken in the context of Indian dance forms. Much experimental choreography has come forward, which break away from the stereotypical construction of women within dance. For example, the Odissi dance choreography, 'Sri',

based on the *savitri-satyavaan* myth, depicts the exploration of the female energy, which challenges the God of Death. This particular piece has been choreographed by Surupa sen from *Nrityagram*².

The focus on expressing 'the essential self' and on the issue of whether women dance differently because they belong to the category 'women' leads back to biological essentialism with absolutely no room for social change. So, the important point over here is that, 'women' do not dance differently by virtue of being born with wombs but because they have learnt to become women. The concept of social construction of the body opposes both biological determinism and essentialism. (Adair 1992: 30)

2.1.4 THE FEMININE: Female Body in Patriarchal Order

'Since the dancing body is often discussed in terms of the 'feminine', it follows within the logic of patriarchal social order that its power and the power of the body must be controlled, constrained, disguised or denied'. (Dempster 1988: 38) Part of this control is women's social role in which they learn to defer to others rather than be the main actor in their life. So, female dancers accept male choreography and reinforce this view and take subdued positions. The social taboo against being an autonomous woman is internalized. Women are socialized as 'women' to please others and their training essentially encourages them to be performers rather than creators. The reason for most women not challenging this image can be understood when one recognizes how much woman's socialization complements the female dancer's role and how much most dance images epitomize the 'feminine'.

However, McRobbie points out contradictory aspects of women's role within dance where there are aspects of dance providing space for resistance. (McRobbie 1984: 135) Physical

² *Nrityagram*- A dance village near Bangalore. Protima Gauri established *Nrityagram* in Hesaraghatta village, 30km outside Bangalore, with the aim to preserve and revive the Indian classical dance forms. *Nrityagram* was inaugurated in 1990. *Nrityagram* is an idyllic dance village with idealistic, hardworking, extremely talented and dedicated young dancers.

movement is one way of resisting rigidity and many women in dance have challenged restricted bodily expression. Through redefinitions of the 'feminine', some women have presented their own viewpoints. However, the oppression of women in all its manifestations from the socialization processes, the control of women's bodies and the commodification of women's bodies has serious repercussions on women's lives and on women's dance opportunities and experiences.

'Humanness had been defined solely in terms whereby man is "subject" and woman is "other" ' (Beauvior cited in Adair 1992: 3). In this context, it becomes interesting to note that women have rarely been the creators of art and they usually encounter their images through the male eyes. Whenever women create art or analyze it from their position as women, they have frequently faced challenge from the status quoists because they present a challenge to the so called universally accepted and 'gender-neutral facade'. This construct, however, is essentially the androcentric view. Response to women's work has always been in terms of either marginalization of the work or ignorance towards it. (Adair 1992: 4)

However, since the 1970s, there has been a growing feminist analysis of art and culture. The issues of defining women's art, such as what roles are available to women within a particular medium and how women are presented, have become important areas of feminist focus. There had already been much discussion on the representation of women in the visual arts. A little earlier, music had also been analysed in terms of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' and an influential music critic held that women's role in music could be summarized as one of being a source of inspiration or at the most a singer but could never create or write music. (Neuls- Bates cited in Adair 1992: 5)

In recent years, feminism has informed dance studies through a reconsideration of the social structure and through emphasis on the personal as political, taking seriously women's personal experiences of the world and connecting them to wider issues (Adair 1992: 5). This has led to a reconsideration of the women's role and their representation within dance.

Representations of women are constructed in major works of the dance canon written by both men and women in definite socio-political and cultural context. Choreographers have created images of women that are both shaped by and shape society's ongoing arguments about sexuality and female identity- 'The dance stage has often reflected and reinforced conceptions of women's bodies and identities. In fact, men's attitude towards women and women's attitude about themselves is literally given body on stage' (Banes 1998: 2).

Women's position and representation in dance is affected by a complex set of historical and cultural factors. The many aspects of dance production, which includes dance training, organization of dance institution, funding policies and critics' response to dance work, all influence women's role in dance. A brief historical account of dance, together with an analysis of the production of dance gives a framework for the consideration of women's representation in the art.

2.2 DANCE AND HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION

In the case of Europe, beginning from the Renaissance, movements of men and women differed in particular ways (Adair 1992: 7). These were not arbitrary differences, but rather in line with moral laws and upheld social conventions. 'Women learnt to weave lively, earthbound steps and to hold sensual poses while men were taught to use the air space, as well as the ground with vigour' (Blais cited in Adair 1992: 8). Moreover, social class background influences were also evident in the typecasting. In fact, some of the higher class dance movements were generally modifications: refashioned and moderated movements of the vigorous and crude movements belonging to the lower social groups. (Desmond cited in Carter 1992: 159) On the whole, the dance styles reflected and embodied the overall culture of the society. The dance style constituted the 'natural' expression of the cultural system within which they were found. The Women dancers were projected as either noble, demi-character (bourgeois) or folk character (peasant-plebian) and, it was to the latter category that most black dancers were assigned to if they joined a white dance company. (Jackson cited in Adair 1992: 8)

However, the 20th century gradually saw the breaking away from this tradition. In the climate of change for women after the First World War, women challenged the European ballet and created their own form of modern dance. There emerged an emphasis on creative independence, a rebellion against their stereotype ancestral tradition. This was an attempt to narrow the gap between audience and dancer and to locate dance within the contemporary changing and empowering society.

In India, beginning from the pre-industrial *gemeinschaft* tradition, dance has been part and parcel of community activity, be it marriage, childbirth, harvest or victory or sometimes even a mode of defying or alleviating pain and grief after death or warding off evil spirits. Both males and females have participated in dance in different ways with allotted roles according to the prevailing custom. For example, the *Bhangra* in Punjab, *Chau and Gotipua* in Orissa are some of the dance forms performed by males, while a few others like the *Ghoomar* in Rajasthan, *Gidda* in Punjab and *Garba* of Gujrat are exclusively the female dances. On the other hand, a few others like the *Raas* of Gujrat and many tribal dances are widely performed by both male and female. One notices that, as dance evolved into a more sophisticated activity, there developed sharper differences between the male and female roles and gradually there evolved a dominance of female performance in dance, which consequently came to be considered generally as a feminine art form.

In the context of Indian Classical Dance, there are differences in the movement pattern for men and women. According to the prescription of the *Natyashastra*, there are two forms of dance, based on the typology of the general movements: *Tandava*³, representing the vigorous masculine dance and *Lasya*⁴, the gentle feminine form of dance. While the *tandava*, derived from Shiva is supposed to be the standard way of male performance, the *lasya*, with all its grace, derived from Parvati, is supposed to be a distillation of the typical female expressions. The *tandava* dance is a pure dance sequence requiring a lot of space and energy while the smooth, soft and graceful earth bound movements comprise the *lasya*. Though some Indian classical dances like *Kathakali* embody predominance of the *tandava*

³tandava- vigorous and energetic dance of Shiva, usually performed by men

⁴lasya- graceful feminine movements

form, and dances like *Odissi* and *Bharatnatyam* have more of *lasya* elements, nevertheless, most of the other forms are a mixture of the *tandava* and *lasya* temperaments. This in fact makes it complicated to adjudge an Indian dance as purely masculine or feminine. Whatever the case may be, the Indian dance forms are an embodiment of the overall culture of the Indian society with its gender based socialization.

2.3 DANCE PRODUCTION

The position and representation of women in dance works can be clearly understood in relation to the production of dance. Here, it becomes important to recognize how hierarchies and power relations operate within the organizations, which are involved in the production of cultural forms. Whilst dance is socially produced, it is not reducible to social and political factors. In certain conditions, dance as an art can play a part in social change and the existence of state censorship is recognition of the realizable power of the arts. 'Therefore, art is socially and ideological constructed and artistic and cultural intervention in politics is a huge possibility' (Wolff 1982: 75).

Dance gives both insights into itself and into aspects of the society in which it is made. The materials it draws on are the everyday movements and special events, which then become transformed through the choreographers' and dancers' viewpoints according to the values and attitudes, which they hold. These values and attitudes are in turn social constructions, derived from the culture of a society and gendered accordingly.

In order to understand the context of dance production, it is necessary to consider the ways in which different styles, forms and genres have been ascribed particular values by specific groups in certain contexts. Research reveals that different access which men and women have to dance production is a result of economic and ideological structures. The general oppression which women experience in society is reinforced within dance through processes such as stereotypes, compensation, collusion and recuperation that operates in a number of cultural practices. (Barrett 1984) Therefore, it is seen that, being a feminine domain with female majority, it does not necessarily offer more creative opportunities to women.

23.1 IDEOLOGY

In terms of ideology too, the social class structures are reinforced by the dominant ideology. The system of values, attitudes and opinions held by particular group or class influences their action, serves their interests and frames their view of reality.

There are many facets of ideology which influence dance in a complex way. For example, gender, race, class and age, all contribute to the statements of meaning within the dance product. The dance may reinforce the status quo and, therefore, women's role within it. In fact, statements of meaning in dance make reference to what exist outside of dance and in this way embody 'world views' of particular values. (Adair 1992: 13) Hence, in the cultural production of dance, conventions, genres and accepted methods of communication rule forms of representations. For example, in India, a dance drama depicting a typical rural set up portrays men as working in the fields while the women are rarely seen helping men, but always seen as bringing food for them, waiting for them while they work etc. On the whole, women are generally projected in a passive role. This leads to depiction of women in stereotypes and role reversal does not really work because of the power relations between men and women.

2.3.2 DANCE TRAINING

In the field of dance training too, which is a particularly rarefied world, traditional gender relationships are seen to be reinforced. While it is socially acceptable for women to undertake dance training because it reinforces 'the feminine' it is not so acceptable for them to portray their own perspectives through choreography. The hard work, repetition and structure of the daily class frequently result in 'unthinking' dancers, trained to accept unquestioningly the professional requirements (Adair 1992: 15). For women this structure mirrors women's expected role of passivity. Through repetitions, images begin to be internalized or accepted. In dance the romantic myth of a man being central in a woman's life and supporting her is a familiar image. In the Indian context, through the repetitive portrayal of the love-lorn Radha pining for Krishna while Krishna continues having his

share of enjoyment with other *Gopis*⁵. An image is constructed whereby a man is projected as a very important element in a woman's life and a woman is both physically and mentally dependent on man.

Gender is a determining factor of particular steps and movement qualities used within both classical and contemporary dance technique classes. (Adair 1992: 15) Whilst, women were required to be represented with more suppleness in their legs and backs, men were expected to achieve spectacular jumps and turns. The strength and control, which the women embody, is often shrouded compared to the men's display of strength and control. The Indian classical dance tradition also has similar differences in the types of steps recommended for men and women. As discussed earlier, the women's dance style is *lasya* dominant full of *shringar rasa*, while the male choreography is loaded with *tandava* movements.

The women are often trained and represented with a 'male-on-female' dependency- the idea of women confidently flowering in the grounds of male support, the male lifting the woman who is required to appear to float effortlessly into position (Dyer and Mueller cited in Carter 1998: 288). In fact, women are portrayed as decorative and dependant both in the Western as well as the Indian context. For instance, in a typical Shiva-Parvati or Radha-Krishna dance sequence, it is usually the men who lead the dance and have been projected as better dancers; as both Shiva and Krishna are supposed to be adept in dancing.

2.3.3 DANCE INSTITUTIONS

Another important facet, which requires attention in relation to the representation of women, is the status of women within dance institutions. The power relations within dance are quite clearly not in the hands of women, despite many women's remarkable achievements in performance. It is a reality beyond doubt that there are more dance masters than mistresses in the dance institutes. Moreover, in the administrative setup too, there are a majority of males. The status of women in administrative positions in dance always varied over time, within the regions of the field and among institutions. It was not until the second and third

Gopis- friends of Radha

decades of the 20th century that women had access to the direct shaping of destiny in case of Western ballet. (Banes 1998: 10) From this information, it can be seen that the structure of dance mirrors that of society, with man in the most powerful roles and women frequently doing 'back-up' works.

In case of many Indian classical dances, and Odissi dance in particular, since the time of its revival, majority of its teaching fraternity have been males. The dance masters have composed and choreographed dance items and the women have merely followed. The emergence of women choreographers having total autonomy is a recent phenomena dating back to a few decades, till about the emergence of institutes like Odissi Research Centre towards the end of 20th century, having a woman as its director.

Therefore, the power relations of the society within which dance is produced affect women adversely because the social construction of gender places women in a less powerful and more vulnerable position than men. And all these representations, which are assigned to women, are actually related to the way the body is socially constructed.

2.4 INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES

The representation of women in various dance styles is also reflective of their position in institution and institutional practices. Thus changes in the institutions and practices of religion, education, medicine, family and art have brought about corresponding changes in dance styles.

This can be discussed by taking off from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, where he argues that the economic changes of the 18th century which triggered off popular dissent, led to a requirement for more systematic control over individuals. This led to the invention of prisons and legal hierarchies for the purpose of social control with an emphasis on 'reforms' rather than punishment that resulted in training individuals to be docile and useful (Foucault 1977). This can be applied to dance training too, where traditional dance classes emphasize control of the body, working for stamina, flexibility and strength at the same time creating automatic responses. The power employed in such training is not only repressive but also

productive. The discipline of the above institutions is in addition to the learnt behaviour within the family. Within the family are learnt what is socially acceptable and what is not, including bodily control.

Today, however, the scenario has changed. The potential power of the body is controlled and limited by the commercialization and commodification of sex. With growing consumerism, there is the message that sex and body exist to be consumed. Consumerism works by creating everlasting desire in the consumer and much of this is focused on the body. Foucault suggests that the revolt of the body is no longer controlled by repression but rather by stimulation. Now there is an emphasis over the display of bodies as much as possible, provided they are attractive and slender for the pleasure of the audience (Foucault cited in Adair 1992: 36). So, there is a continuous production and reproduction of what Laura Mulvey calls the 'male gaze', where woman is viewed as an object of male desire (Mulvey cited in Storey 1993). Hence, it follows from this that female dancing is probably for the entertainment of the androcentric world.

However, in the case of Indian classical dances, the commercialization and growing consumerism has not yet gone as far as in the west, but is fast catching up. There is no rampant display of the bodies. But at the same time, one cannot deny the fact that attractive and slender bodies have been considered 'more suitable and appealing' than the rest. Hence, there is an attempt to keep the body in perfect shape. There have been numerous instances wherein the audience flock to the dance performances just to have a glimpse of the performer and not her performance.

2.5 CHANGES IN ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

In the European and American context dance roles are very much influenced by the prevailing views of societies that change over a period of time, as do attitudes to the body. A hierarchical model of the body has existed from ancient times to the 18th century. This model exhibited women's body as inferior and an inverted version of the male body.

Since the inception of modern dance in the western world, new choreographic generations have emerged every ten to fifteen years and the ways that women are portrayed have changed. From 1920s to 50s mythic women were prevalent, during 50s- 60s they started sharing the stage with non-mythic figures, and from 1960 onwards, dancers began to be presented as pedestrian human scale character concerned with doing rather than performing and informing rather than entertaining (Friedler 1997). The women characters were no longer portrayed as mere decorative pieces but as women engaged in various activities. Apart from being a source of entertainment only, womens choreography also embodied a lot of connotative undertones.

In the Victorian society, class and gender differences were consolidated through notions of correct behaviour, which were partly realized through the body so that by their external behaviour, 'ladies and gentlemen' were clearly distinguishable from each other and from other classes (Stone 1977: 257). As Bourdieu argues in his work *Distinctions*, that taste' is an acquired 'cultural competence' used to legitimize social differences, similarly, the movement pattern ascribed to different sections of the society differed widely. Social class indeed prearranged tastes and interests. (Bourdieu 1984)

The dominant views about women have permeated all forms of knowledge and scientists have generally reinforced the idea that nature is a basis for social inequality. The study of women's anatomy revealed that the women were to the depth of their bones unsuitable for intellectual labour. Moreover, their reproductive abilities further marginalized them and subdued them within society and also within dance. As a symbol of this kind of marginalization, the female dancing body on stage was portrayed as silent.

However, with the recent wave of feminist thought and political practice, there has been an emergence of exciting new trends in cultural criticism within which is an ongoing investigation into how social roles both literally and symbolically construct bodies and how physical bodies serve to reinforce those social identities. It was during this time that modern and post modern dance were pioneered by women and these were probably the only major dance forms to derive so much of their energy, their inspiration and indeed their imagery

from the feminist movement. The silent images of women attracted many powerful interpretation and women in the new dance recognized both the potential and the need to connect their dancing with the wider social context. They were concerned not just to create another 'look' but also to express their own viewpoint.

So, contemporary dance not only reflects culture, but it is capable of creating one too. Although women dancers' bodies had been historically over determined by prevailing social assumptions, it is important to realize that dancers can consciously take responsibility for reshaping the modes in which that body is represented. (Albright 1997)

According to Christy Adair, in the Western world, ballet was oppressive to women while modern dance became liberatory which took up the gender question quite sensitively. However, Sally Banes departs from Adair's victimization-celebration agenda to suggest yet another method of feminist analysis of dance works. Banes takes on from the French feminist historian Arlette Farge, who discusses the sterility of both what she calls the 'miserabiliste' and 'celebrationist' interpretation of women's representation whereby women are either projected in terms of victim-heroine or negative-positive images. In fact, Banes attempts to sensitize the gender aspect by focusing the telescopes closely at the evidence of the works themselves so that a more complex range of representations is highlighted than had been previously suggested. (Banes 1998: 2-3)

This kind of an approach required analyzing choreographies in historical and materialist context where images emerged as produced by historical conditions and a dialogic tradition of artistic practices. (Banes 1998: 4) Here the particular themes and issues of each dance, and the interrelations among the dances emerged in the course of close analysis and contextualization. This kind of an insight enabled Banes to come up with certain conclusive remarks in the Western context. Firstly, over and over again, women characters were enmeshed in the 'marriage plot' in both ballet and modern dance. Secondly, there has always been the privileging of plot descriptions over performance description. Justifying her first remark, Banes said that, 'there are historical reasons for dance's association with the marriage plot as ballet's origin lies in dance entertainments at royal weddings during the

Renaissance Europe. As theatrical dancing became public and professional in the 17th century, representation of weddings and marriages or, tragically, of broken nuptials, by the 19th century, became obligatory in the ballet, rather than as social context of performance. That is where dances were first embedded in weddings and weddings came to be embedded in dance' (Banes 1998: 5). Banes felt that by looking at women's role and marriage plot it is possible to examine kinship networks and analyse how women fit in according to community's rules. These dances could be a rich source of information about 'whom one should marry or should not marry, especially in terms of class, but also in terms of incest taboos, endogamy versus exogamy, physical attributes and disposition' (Banes 1998: 7).

Regarding the second remark, she says that as very often choreographic texts are elusive, being transmitted orally like *Homeric epics* than *Chekov's plays*, dance historians relied on literary plots to make their critical interpretations. However, privileging plot over performance missed out the most crucial aspect of dance as bodies which can impart different meanings, sometimes diametrically opposed meanings, than words suggest. For example, the plot may verbally describe a female character as weak passive, while the physical prowess of the dancer performing the role may separate it with agency. (Banes 1998: 8) Therefore performance should be considered seriously while analyzing representation of women in dance.

2.6 GENDER REPRESENTATION IN INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCES

In the case of Indian classical dance, the evolution and allocation of male and female roles in dance is very complex. In particular, the position of the male dancer is paradoxical. Though Shiva has been glorified as the king of dance or '*Natraja*', and his icon adorns the stage in case of *Bharatnatyam* performances, a majority of *Bharatnatyam* dancers are and have always been women. In contrast, *Kathakali* performances are mostly male dominated, with men taking up both the male and female roles till recently. These paradoxes cannot be argued for, either in terms of male/female anatomy or in terms of religious reasons. In fact, the reasons for gender-dance relations in Indian are more or less socio-historical, as argued by V. Subramaniam.

Interestingly, from the time of the Dharmasastras, one encounters in the texts, a perception where dance has been viewed as a feminine art form and also posing possible dangers and distractions for those promoting them. However, it can be argued that this is an androcentric view and the male monopoly of the text completely undermined the role of women as artists and even suspected their conduct.

Similarly, the justification of the male monopoly in the dance-drama tradition of *Kuchipudi/Kathakali*, has been derived from a convoluted priest versus dancer rivalry and ritual versus art and the interpretation of dance as *yagna*. In the *Natyashastra*, there is reference of *Natya*⁶ being performed as a *yagna* or sacrifice. However, in the later centuries, this *yagna* metaphor along with its symbolism and rituals involved, gradually led to the exclusion of women from the *natya-yagna*, labeling them as 'unclean'. It was in this context of treatment of *natya* as *yagna* with austere attributes of ritual purity, that the exclusive male tradition of *Kuchipudi* emerged. Perhaps, the *Gotipua*⁷ tradition in *Orissa* also emerged due to similar reasons. In this case, Chaitanya's advocacy against female dancing and the promotion of male dancers, performing even the female roles, could also be understood in the same light of male/female - clean unclean dichotomy. In fact, it is believed that Chaitanya had also formed a '*Sakhi Sampradaya*' or a cult of transvestites, solely dedicated towards the propagation of *Bhakti Srungara* or devotional eroticism.

The participation of women in dance was inspired by aesthetic and socio-political factors in Tamil Nadu, especially with the emergence of the Bhakti Cult. The *Bhakti* tradition in Tamil Nadu began in poetry with the expression of direct communication of intimate relation with God. Adopting this as a model, the *Vaishnavite* poets cast themselves in transvestite roles of the pining lovelorn beloved of Krishna. (*Ibid*: 7) The emotional intensity and beauty of their hymns thus created '*Bhakti Srungara*' or devotional eroticism. As it was impractical to build an institution of male dancers interpreting erotic songs. Female dancers, be-fitting the task of interpretation, came into the picture. Moreover, it was grossly

⁶ Natya- drama

⁷ Gotipua- a class of male dancers in Orissa.

incongruous to interpret in dance the transvestite metaphor before the royalty, a practice that had developed simultaneously with the idea of *Bhakii*.

The Shaivite poets in glorifying Shiva as a king, and the temple as his palace, shaped the *Devadasi*⁸ institution. The *Vaishnava* poets followed this practice, and dance and music was offered in temples as a sensuous offering to the munificent king-god. This 'institution' also catered to the royal court as the temple which was also equated metaphorically. (Subramaniam 1995: 10) Thus, the king at the royal court attached to a temple was considered to be the deity in 'flesh and blood' as in case of the *Jagannath* temple at Puri. In addition a politico-economic support factor assumed importance when many dynasties in order to be legitimized by the temple institution, made huge grants to support the temple and its dancers. The *devadasi* institution received royal patronage, and strengthened the female dancer syndrome over the centuries.

Other socio-economic developments like the emergence of a *Zamindar* class under the British rule contributed to the female participation, because it encouraged dance recitals at weddings. (Subramaniam 1995: 11) The trajectory that Subramaniam has followed cannot be limited to the Tamil Nadu context only; similar developments can be traced in *Odissi*. Female performers blossomed under the watchful eye of male teachers.. In the case of *Odissi* dance, great performers like Late Sanjukta Panigrahi, Kumkum Mohanty, Priyambada Mohanty, Susama Patnaik, Sonal Mansingh, Madhavi Mudgal, Aruna Mohanty etc. evolved under the guidance of Late Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Late Guru Deba Prasad Das and Padmabibhusan Late Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra.

It follows from this account that gender monopolies in Indian classical dance are actually dependent on a variety of competing and converging socio-historical factors, sometimes under the garb of religion and sometimes political reasons.

The non-verbal practices have often been relegated to the realm of the asocial, the natural the hysteric, and obviously, then, within this model, non-verbal practices cannot be seen to

⁸ Devadasi- female temple dancers'

produce cultural change. And for women, alignment with these non-verbal practices serves only to reinforce their marginality. So, women have often been seen as doubly marginalized - firstly, because of their gender and secondly, because of their association with marginalized practices. Hence this model, highlighting a dichotomy between the verbal/non-verbal, can be seen as essentially raising the fundamental issue underlying any cultural theory of dance, including gender-based cultural theory of dance. Gender based research has challenged the way dance history is defined, theorized and written with respect to the dominant 'male gaze' theory. This puts forth the androcentric view, thus calling for interrogation of feminist theory to generate new sets of questions and to break open a whole new way of looking at the so-called 'facts' within the discourse on dance.

CHAPTER III

A HISTORY OF DANCE IN INDIA

Dance in India is rooted in an age-old tradition. This vast sub-continent has given birth to varied forms of dancing. These pristine forms have been preserved through centuries and frozen into distinct styles to become a part of our present culture, a living heritage which is both our pride and delight. In course of time though, there have been multiple 'little traditions' or styles of dance, each shaped by the influences of the environment around it. Nevertheless, all of these have been unified into a single distinctive 'great tradition' by virtue of the '*Natyaashastra*', together giving a glimpse of the rich, strong and vibrant art form of India.

3.1 HISTORY OF INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE

The earliest evidence of dance can possibly be traced back to the period of *Mohenjodaro-Harappa* civilization. The 'dancing girl' from the *Mohenjodaro* excavation site, is suggestive of a dance pose. That apart, there are also beautiful metaphors and similes in the Vedas based on the art of dancing, like the description of "*Ushas*", the dawn. Moreover, dance as a profession and as a social activity, has been associated with all significant moments of the life cycle. (Vatsyayan 1997: 1) There are celebrations at the time of birth and also during marriages and other functions, and in all these, dance occupied an integral position. It is also noteworthy that in the 'epics' and '*puranas*', the princes were taught the art of dancing; both *Rama* and *Arjuna* were supposed to be adept at it and, of course, *Krishna* was the Supreme dancer. Moreover, only an existing tradition of the art of dance could inspire and enable, "*Bharat Muni*", the author of the '*Natyaashastra*', to come forward with his monumental work.

For the purpose of my study, I have heavily relied on Kapila Vatsyayan's works (1974 & 1997) that are extremely comprehensive giving a clear picture of the historical background of Indian classical dance forms as well as the distinct individual forms.

Kapila Vatsyayan, in her work, "*Indian Classical Dance*", (1997) mentions that the history of dance can be divided into four phases:

- a) Pre-historic and Proto-historic
- b) 2nd century B.C. to 9th century A.D.
- c) 10th or 11th century A.D. to 18th century A.D.
- d) Late 18th century A.D. to contemporary India.

3.1.1 PRE-HISTORIC AND PROTO-HISTORIC

This period comprises the evidences found from the cave paintings, engravings, excavated remains of the *Mohanjodaro* and *Harappan* civilization and literature such as the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Brahmanas* and Epics. All these materials suggest a strong presence of dance.

3.1.1 2ND CENTURY B.C. TO 9TH CENTURY A.D.

During this time, the evidence of the prevalence of dance is revealed from the sculptures. Carved out in the Buddhist *stupas* such as those of Bhahut, Sanchi, Amravati, Nagarjunakonda, the Ellora caves and temples in different parts of India, especially those at Bhubaneshwar, are beautiful figures depicting various dance poses. However, if one goes back to this period around 6th century A.D., one is bound to discern strong secular orientations in music and dance. The dance sculptures dating back to this time do not indicate the propagation of a particular religious faith. But, as time passed, distinct religious orientations began to seep into the art and consequently there came about a glorification of these faiths through art. (Subramaniam 1994: 4) For instance, the sculptures in *Orissa* between 6th century A.D. and 10th century A.D. suggest a glorification of *Shaivism*. One

notices during this time numerous sculptures with the depiction of the *tandava*¹ pose of Shiva that hints towards the predominance of the *Shaivite* faith.

In fact, it is only in this second historical phase that a self-conscious understanding of dance was articulated. During this second period, one comes across an effort at stylization, though not a stereotyped convention merely to be followed or repeated. At many Buddhist sites, one encounters many '*Yakshas*' and '*Yakshinis*'² in typical dance poses. And all these have finally crystallised into the dance of Lord *Shiva* or Lord *Krishna*. This is also the era of the emergence of the sculptural figures of gods and goddesses, especially *Shiva*, *Durga*, *Saraswati* and *Ganesha*; each significant of a distinct dance posture or '*nrittamurti*'. (Vatsyayan 1997: 2) From this sculptural evidence, one realises the important position which dance occupied in the Indian culture, to have inspired the sculptures significantly to arrest it in stone.

The evidence available in Sanskrit literature of the ancient period further reinforces the impression of the popularity of the dance motif. Epics like *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan* embody many dance performances. Similarly, the compositions of poets like Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bharavi and others, till the time of Harshavardhana, around the middle of the 7th century, also embodied precise descriptions of dancers and dance recitals. And also, the communication systems used by the writers took into account, not only the verbal communication but also communication through gestures, costumes, decor and above all, the inner states of being, which were reflected in involuntary expressions. (Vatsyayan 1997: 3) This is reflected in the codification of these communication techniques in the first treatise on dramaturgy, i.e., the '*Natyasashtra*', composed between 2nd century B.C. and 1st century A.D. Creative writers and poets were perhaps very sensitive to the relationship of the word and the gesture, the gesture and the design, and the system of correspondence, signs and symbols which was prescribed in Brahmanical rituals. (*Ibid*: 3) A lot of the gestures prescribed in the '*Natyasashtra*', owes their origin to the Brahmanical rituals. For example, in case of *Odissi* dance, the earliest gestures used in the dance form along with the theme

¹ tandava- vigorous and energetic dance of Shiva, usually performed by men

² Yaksha and Yakshini- heavenly beings

utilised, was largely derived from what is known as the "*nitis*" or the daily rituals performed in the *Jagannath* temple at Puri. (Rathsarma 2004)

Besides the archeological remains, sculptural reliefs, paintings and Sanskrit literature, yet another rich source of textual evidence of dance in India are the manuals or treatises. About the 6th century A.D., two distinct types of texts appeared:

- (1) Purely theoretical works discussing the nature of aesthetic experience, the artistic work and the evocation of an analogous aesthetic experience in the spectators, readers and participators.
- (2) Works concentrating on the techniques of communication. (Vatsyayan1997: 4)

All the "*puranas*", especially the early ones, like the *Agni* and the *Vishnudharmottara puranas* comprise valuable sections on poetry, music, dance, painting and drama. In addition special texts devoted to dance also evolved, like the *Abhinaya Darpan* by Nandikeshwar. Apart from these, commentaries on '*Natyasashtra*' also started emerging during the third historical phase.

On the whole, this was a phase when for the first time the secular domain of art confronted the religious domain, leading to the religious orientation of the former.

3.1.3 10TH OR 11TH CENTURY A.D. TO 18TH CENTURY A.D.

This period witnessed the emergence of some regional styles. There was an overall development of regional art, architecture, sculpture as well as literature. There also emerged a distinct stylization within music and dance. Along with the emergence of these regional variants, there was a continuation in the trend of religious orientation. However, this time the inclination was towards glorifying *Vaishnavism* with the emergence of the *Bhakti* poets propagating '*Bhakti Srungara*' or devotional eroticism. (Subramaniam 1994:4)

At the practical front too, one discovers that in the second and the first half of the third historical phase, the temples and the courts maintained a large number of dancers.

(Vatsyayan 1997: 6) In the temples, dance had become a part of the ritual or *seva* towards the deity. Thus came up a class of temple dancers known as *Devadasis* at many places in India, to whom a concrete dance tradition could be traced.

Devadasi literally means 'at the feet of the God' and basically refers to the class of women who through various ceremonies of 'marriage' dedicated themselves to the deities of the temple. These wives of the God lived in and around the temples. They performed some duties at the temples and participated in the religious functions. They were an integral part of many large Hindu temples. They were attached to temples in various parts of India like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kerala, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Orissa, etc. and were known locally by different names. In Andhra Pradesh they were known as *dogmas* and *sanis*, in Tamil Nadu as *devaradiar* or *dasis*, in Maharashtra as *jogtins* and in Orissa they were called *maharis*. In addition to their religious duties, the *Devadasis* were a community of artists (www.samarthbharat.com). They presented dance and music performances in the temple. It would not be an overstatement to say that the development and preservation the classical dance tradition of India can be attributed wholly to the *Devadasis*. *Bharatnatyam* and *Odissi* are actually the modern incarnation of the *Devadasi* dance.

However, contrary to the common reference in the colonial literature, of the *Devadasis* constituting a 'caste', the *Devadasis* is essentially a 'a way of life' or 'professional ethic'. (Srinivasan 1985: 1869) It is basically passed on from one generation to the other. Moreover, this tradition was not confined to a particular caste. For example, in Orissa, the *Devadasis* were selected from the *Brahmin*, *Karon* or *Khandayat* castes, each of which is prestigious enough. (Acharya 2004) They were a respectable community and even offered seats alongside figures of royalty. (www.samarthbharat.com)

In south India, especially in case of Tamil Nadu, the *Devadasis* received invitation to perform at marriages and other auspicious ceremonies in the elite homes and they did cater to this requirement. (Srinivasan 1985: 1871) But in Orissa, the *Devadasis* dedicated themselves exclusively to the Lord and the temple services. Thus they never danced outside the temple precincts for public entertainment except in certain religious ceremonies of Lord *Jagannath*.

Initially, the *Shaiva* section of Hinduism fancied the *Devadasi* custom, as the *Shaivites* believed that Shiva being the 'King of dance' should be endowed with the gift of damsels well versed in dance and music. However with the passage of time, other sects of Hinduism like *Vaishnavism* also adopted this tradition. This tradition reached its pinnacle during the 10th and 11th century A.D.

Between the 11th and 12th century A.D., there appeared to be a sharp turn towards *Vaishnavism*. It was around this time that Jayadev composed *Gita govind in Orissa* . Practically, in all parts of the country, *kirtans*, *bhajans*, *padas*, *harikathas* were widely held which provided an immense scope for interpretation through dance. (Vatsyayan 1997: 7) For example, in case of *Kathak*, whose origin has been traced back to this historical phase, the lyrics of the *abhinayas* are closely associated with the *Vaishnavite* tradition; whether it was Jayadev's *astapadis* or *bhajans* of Mira Bai and Surdas. Similarly, in case of *Odissi* dance, this period saw the *Maharis* perform to *Gita govind* and later on during the 17th century, a section of male dancers called *Gotipuas* performed to Oriya *Vaishnava* compositions. In fact, the *Vaishnavite* tradition provided the various styles of dance with an essential thematic unity at this time as all dance compositions revolved around *Krishna* and his romantic endeavours with *Radha* and the *Gopis*.

From the 13th century onwards, there has been presence of dance manuals from practically every region of India. By this time, many regional variants of the 'core *Natyasashtra* tradition' had emerged. The recognition of regional styles, in turn, contributed immensely to the development of the individual, distinctive, classical styles of the various regions, each having a distinct vocabulary which led to the formulation of different classical styles in India. 'It is noteworthy that the beginning of all contemporary classical styles of India, be it *Bharatnatyam*, *Kathakali*, *Kathak*, *Manipuri* or *Odissi*, can actually be traced back to the developments in the medieval period, roughly dating from about 1300A.D. to 1800A.D. In the content and theme, the growth of regional literary tradition as well as the socio-cultural setting has conditioned all dance forms, which in turn were influenced by shifts in religious emphasis' (Vatsyayan 1997: 7).

3.1.2 LATE 18TH CENTURY TO CONTEMPORARY INDIA

This was a period of great political turmoil and at the same time a period in which the arts were resurrected from fragments to make up a new artistic whole. The 20th century saw the revival of the different classical dances of India and their re-orientation and re-establishment,

With the passage of time, the Indian society encountered a period of political upheaval. The different elements of the Indian culture and tradition had to pass through a difficult and trying phase. Even during this time, some creative artistes in the different regions of India practised and preserved the art form without any kind of social patronage. Thus family traditions called '*sampradayas*' grew within the styles and the masters preserved and nurtured the style. (Vatsyayan 1997: 7) They significantly contributed towards its growth despite lack of basic education or academic knowledge and unfamiliarity with the Sanskrit language.

With the ascendancy of the British rule, dancing in the temple came to be forbidden but the art form continued in seclusion, in the private domains of the devotees. Apparently, the art form had almost disappeared by the 20th century. The only remains were a degenerated style known as the '*nautch*' in the north and '*sadif*' in the south. (Vatsyayan 1997:8)

It was only with the nationalist awakening and the corresponding attempts of the national leaders at glorifying the indigenous art and culture, that a revival of the dance forms took place. The 'Classical' recognition was attached to the dances, once these forms underwent a thorough textualisation wherein they were strictly structured and codified according to the prescriptions in the classical Sanskrit texts. Having gained a classical status, these dance forms began to develop as a symbol of national pride. Thus dance, which evolved from antiquity to its present form, travelled through various epochs to finally carve out a distinct place for itself in Indian culture and tradition.

3.2 HISTORY OF ODISSI

Odissi is one of the classical dance forms in India, which having originated as a regional variant in *Orissa* has now established itself firmly, not only in the dance map of India but also of the World. "*Odissi* may well claim to be the earliest classical Indian dance style on the basis of archaeological evidence . . ." affirms an eminent dance scholar, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan. (Vatsyayan 1997: 49)

Inextricably linked with the religious movements of *Orissa*, *Odissi* shows traces of *Buddhism*, *Tantrism* (Buddhist and Brahmanical), *Shaivism*, and *Vaisnavism*, not only in the figures depicted but also in the messages conveyed. From its earliest evidences, *Odissi* was a dance performed by women (*Maharis*). Around 1600 A.D., male dancers dressed as females, known as *Gotipuas*, gained prominence.

The dance remained an oral tradition through the beginning of the twentieth century, in possession of semi-literates who were not aware of the existing Sanskrit texts on dance. Consequently, the movement patterns, body positions, and hand gestures existed in diluted, even debilitated forms without the technical terminology that structures a dance format. The dances were passed down, in the case of *Maharis*, from mother to adopted daughter, and, in the case of *Gotipuas*, from teacher to the dedicated boys. Dance by *Maharis* was totally stopped in the temple of Lord *Jagannath* much before independence due to the opprobrium attached to the female dancers. Lack of patronage made it difficult to continue the *Gotipua* dance tradition in *Orissa*, and financial duress drove the young *Gotipuas* to *jatras* or roving theatre groups. (Vatsyayan 1974, 34) They earned their living by dancing interludes to dramatic acts. *Odissi* had begun its move from temple to stage.

Yet another stream, which is relevant for tracing the evolution of *Odissi* was the tradition of the martial dancers or the "*Chau dance*". (Vatsyayan 1997: 59) In addition, the acrobatic tradition like the "*Bandha nritya*" also had a strong impact on the dance form as young boys and girls executed artistic acrobatic movements of gymnastics. (*Ibid*: 59)

Odissi was revived in post-independent India, as a neo-classical form, by a group of scholars and dance practitioners and teachers. Each one of the dance teachers, revivalists of an old dance tradition, Pankaj Charan Das, Kelu Charan Mahapatra and Deba Prasad Das, were characterized by a love of the dance, a struggle through poverty and adverse conditions in pursuit of their loved art form, and an exposure to the art of stagecraft.

3.2.1 2ND CENTURY B.C TO 5TH CENTURY A.D

The carvings in the *Rani Gumpha* Caves at Udayagiri in *Orissa* from the 2nd century B.C depict the first traces of dance, much earlier than the writings of *Natyashastra* according to some scholars. Whatever may have been the dance style prevalent at that time, it is obvious that the traditions codified in the *Natyashastra* composed between 2nd century B.C. and 1st century A.D. took cognizance of the particular regional style known in eastern India. The *Natyashastra* mentions 4 types of *vrittis* or regional varieties: *Avanti*, *Dakshinatyā*, *Panchali*, and *Odra Magadhi*. *Odra Magadhi* is identified as the earliest precursor of the present *Odissi*. (Vatsyayan 1997: 49)

Orissa has been a home for many kingdoms, *Buddhist*, *Jain*, *Shaivite* and others between 2nd century B.C and 5th century A.D. During the 2nd century B.C., the Jain king Kharavela ruled over *Kalinga*. Inscription found in the caves at Udayagiri state that in the third year of his reign, Kharavela, himself an expert dancer and musician arranged a performance of *tandava* and *abhinaya*³ for the delectation of his people. Here, there is also a carved panel showing a king witnessing the performance of a dancing girl and her accompanying musicians. (Khokar 1986: 175) The Udayagiri and the Khandagiri Caves dating back to 2nd century B.C. are thus the first records in stone of the historic period where dance scenes have been found carved in the caves.

Similarly, Tantric temples such as the Hirapur Shrine depict many of the *yoginis* especially in poses reminiscent of present day *Odissi* (Vatsyayan 1997: 49).

¹ abhinaya- emotive dance

Therefore, the history of *Orissa* between 2nd century B.C. and the 7th century A.D. is an interesting and complex amalgam of the development of different schools of *Buddhism*, *Jainism* and *Tantric Buddhism* before the establishment of *Shaivism*. However, these dance postures are not indicative of any kind of religious orientation, as the dance poses themselves are suggestive of any particular faith.

3.2.2 6TH CENTURY A.D TO 10TH CENTURY A.D

The *Shaivite Cults* took strong roots in *Orissa* in the 7th century A.D. But their beginnings can be traced back to the 4th century A.D. One encounters during this time some of the first dance reliefs of the *Nataraja*. It is an inscribed image of Lord Shiva with 8 hands holding a *veena*⁴, *trishula*⁵ and *akshyamla*, a *damru*⁶ with a *pataka* and a *varda hasta*⁷. It belonged to the king of the Bhanja dynasty, Shatrubhanja, who constructed the shrines for Shiva. (Vatsyayan 1997: 50) This was the first instance of religious orientation of dance where Shiva as projected as the 'king of dance', thereby encouraging the art form.

From the 6th and 7th century onwards, there is a massive evidence of dance as part of worship and presumably this had inspired the sculptors of the early medieval temples of Bhubaneswar. The temples include the *Bharteshvara* temple belonging to the 6th century A.D. depicting Shiva's marriage with an orchestra and a group of women in a dance composition. A little later in the 7th century was built the beautiful and impressive temple of *Parsurameshvara*. Soon after were built important temples namely the *Vaital Deul*, *Sisiresvara*, *Muktesvara*, and *Raja-Rani* temple and the grand *Lingaraj* temple. Each of them is a jewel of architecture in them built with perfect balance and proportion. Also, the sculptors have not only carved the poses but also the execution of the dynamic movements. These carvings include deities like *Shiva*, *Durga*, *Ganesh*, *Nayaka-Nayikas* on the walls in beautiful dancing poses and dance compositions. There are the full groups of dancers and the *Tandava* of Lord Shiva. A full and systematic documentation of all these corpus of

⁴ veena- a stringed musical instrument!

⁵ trishula- trident

⁶ damru- a musical instrument

⁷ pataka and vardahasta- hand gestures symbolising blessing

sculptural evidence in *Orissa* is a clear proof of not only the permeation of the *Shaivite* cults, but also of a very self-conscious understanding of the movement of the dance. (Vatsyayan 1997:51) There is also a reference to an inscription in the temple of *Brahmeswar* at Bhubaneswar of Kolavati, mother of the Kesari King building a temple for Lord Shiva and dedicating dancing girls to it. (Khokar 1986:175; (Panda 1997: 92) So, the earliest reference to the dedication of dancing girls in *Orissa* is in the form of an inscription belonging to the Kesari Kings around 9th century A.D. By 8th century, dance had already achieved a very distinctive stylization in *Orissa*. There were already the traces of the *Tribhanga* poses, one of the most essential postures in *Odissi* dance.

The *Shaivite* influence over the domain of dance during the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th centuries almost comes to a close around 11th and 12th centuries when changes take place in *Orissa*. (Vatsyayan 1997: 51) There is a gradual shift in the religious orientation with simultaneous shifts in the art form due to the influence of the greatest work of Sanskrit Poetry, *Gita Govinda* by Saint Jayadev. The Kesari period till the middle of 11th century A.D. saw the ascendancy of Bhramanism in *Orissa*, and this paved the way for the emergence of the cult of *Jagannath* as the "Lord of the world." (Khokar 1986: 175)

3.2.3 11TH CENTURY A.D TO 16TH CENTURY A.D

After the Kesari kings, the Ganga Dynasty came to power around 1038 A.D. (Das 1985: 14) Simultaneously, there was the emergence of a *Vaishnavite cult* distinctive to *Orissa* with the Ganga patronage. Chodogangadeva, a most illustrious ruler, began the construction of the temple of *Jagannath* sometime between the second half of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th century. He ruled from 1077 A.D. to 1147 A.D. (*Ibid: 51*) He was followed by Anangabhimadeva. Between the rulers of Chodogangadeva and Anangabhimadeva, was built the Temple of *Jagannath*. (Vatsyayan, 1997) The temple itself was outstanding in its architectural plan, its sculptural reliefs and its special hall of the dance called the *Nat Mandir*. Cumulatively, *Jagannath* temple at Puri was not only a temple but it was the beginning of a new socio-cultural movement in India. This was around the time when the *Bhakti* movement was gaining ground throughout India. No part of India remained unaffected by all that the *Jagannath* temple stood for.

According to popular belief, between the 11th and 12th century A.D., Chodogangadeva also introduced the *Mahari seva* or the institution of *Devadasis* in the temple that was supposed to be the earliest precursor to the *Odissi* dance tradition. Although no definite date can be conclusively ascribed regarding the practice of dance as an indispensable part of the ritual of the worship, but from chronicle records of the temple called *Madal Panji*, it is clear that it was certainly co-terminus with the *Jagannath* culture. (Vatsyayan 1997: 52) In fact, the *Madal Panji* is a traditional work preserved in the temple of Lord *Jagannath* at Puri in palm-leaf manuscripts and mainly dealing with the affairs of the temple. It is the richest storehouse for reconstructing the socio-economic status of the temple dancers and an elaboration of the different categories of the men and women dancers. There are vivid descriptions of the occasion, time, and the ritual practices of the temple where dance was an essential part of the worship. (Panigrahi 1985: 122) The consecration of females to the service of temple began in the *Shaivite* temples and continued in the *Jagannath* temple in service of the Lord *Jagannath*. Many inscriptions speak of the dancers who were dedicated to the deity Shiva or Vishnu and their socio-economic organization. (*Ibid*: 52) These female attendants were known as *Maharis* (great women) or *Devadasis* (servants of the lord) and have been considered the wives of Lord *Jagannath*. The *Maharis* were supposed to be there for a certain class of rituals for Lord *Jagannath* because *Jagannath* was treated as a king and a king was served by *dasis*. *Odissi* basically developed through their art. However till the compilation of the *Gita govind*, the *Maharis* just did an abrupt kind of pure dance sequence. There was no formal training and they did whatever appealed to them. Slowly *abhinaya* was inculcated after the *Gita govind* was introduced into the rituals and performed. This was also quite abrupt, as they just understood the *bhava* or emotion and not the exact meaning. The *Maharis* were of two kinds: *Bheetar gauni* and *Bahar gauni*. The *Bheetar gaunis* constituted an exclusive group who were permitted to enter the sanctum sanctorum of the temple and it is they who were privileged to dance and sing at the time of the ritual adornment of the Lord. (Citaristi 1987: 52) The *Bahar gaunis*, on the other hand were not permitted to enter the innermost sanctuary. They either performed in the *Nat Mandir*, which is a part of building, or near the ceremonial flagstaff outside the temple. From the time of Chodogangadeva, it has also been the practice for the *Maharis* to dance on the occasion of

the several annual festivals held in honour of Lord *Jagannath* like the *Dola Jatra*, *Rath Jatra*, *Janmashtami* and many others. (Khokar 1986:177; Vatsyayan 1997: 58)

There was another category of the *Devadasis* in the Puri temple called the '*Nachunis*', whose actual function was to dance during the daily rituals of the Lord. However, this category has often been misconstrued as a community of dancers not attached to the temple, but performing for the ordinary masses. A few dance scholars argue that the *nachunis* were a sect of *Devadasis* who also had the privilege to dance before the Lord. They hold that the dance rite was exclusively their domain. The *gaunis* mentioned above only sing. On the other hand, *Ganika* was the term they attributed to women who were meant for public performances. But here too, it is argued that they did not perform *Odissi* but some kind of cheap body movements to allure the masses. However, the existence of this category, their functions along with the domain in which they performed are debatable.

The *Devadasi* tradition continued into the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th century as a kind of ritual within the temple premises. Having traced the effect this tradition had over the present day *Odissi* dance, now we shift our attention towards simultaneous developments occurring in other domains, which are also reflective of the dance tradition.

In fact, the real literary history of thematic *Odissi* dance begins with the composition of the greatest work of Sanskrit Poetry, *Gita govind* by Saint Jayadev. Its composition was almost contemporary with the construction of the *Jagannath* temple. This was a very significant work as this was an integral part of *abhinaya* in *Odissi* dance recital. As discussed earlier, it was only with the introduction of *Gita govind* that *abhinayas* got incorporated and a concrete thematic content of dance could be discerned. Moreover, the acceptance of this poem as a text for worship to the Lord rendered it all the more important. In addition, the kings of *Orissa* enjoined that the worship to the Lord would be done through the singing of the *Gita govind*. The *Gita govind* was essentially a collection of poetry in the praise of Lord *Krishna*. It was yet another work glorifying the *Vaishnava* faith that was gradually bewitching the whole of *Orissa* with its charms.

From 15th century onwards, scholars observe that there was a shift in focus towards the artists who channelized into writing of manuscripts, the illustrations of manuscripts and paintings on the walls of temples where dance was a central preoccupation. (Vatsyayan1997: 54) It is from these earliest illustrated manuscripts of *Orissa* and the wall paintings in some of these temples that we are made to realise that the artists must have experienced a very special style of dance to inspire them. A comprehensive study of the illustrations of dance in *Orissan* manuscripts reveals the great fascination of the art for both the writer and the painter. Simultaneously, many texts on dance were also written during this time. Some notable ones are: *Abhinaya Chandrika* written by Maheshvara Mahapatra which is a detailed study of the various movements of the feet, hands, the standing postures, the movement and the dance repertoire. It also includes illustrations of the *Karanas*⁸ mentioned in *Natyashastra*. (*Ibid*: 54)

That apart, manuscript *Shilpaprakasha* also comprises an elaborate analysis of the manner in which the *salabhanjikas* or the feminine figures called the *alasa kanyas* are carved in the temple. The illustration of *Shilpaprakasha* reinforces the evidence of sculpture in temples. (Vatsyayan 1997: 54)

In addition, many of the *Orissan* Literature works also contain description of dance like *The Oriya Mahabhart*a by Sarala Das (15th century), *Dandi Ramayana* by Balarama Das (16th century) and *Niladri Mahodaya* of Lokanath Vidyadhara (17th century) which allude to dance in many ways.

A rather unexpected source of evidence of the prevalence of *Odissi* dance is the *Jain Manuscripts*, especially the *Kalpasutra* and *Kalkacharya KatMs* of the 16th century, that lughlight traces of *Orissan* dance style although they were being executed in Gujarat. The marginal figures of dancers show women in poses and movements similar to the distinctive style of *Orissa*. For example, in one of the famous illustrated Jain Manuscript called the

⁸ karana- basic dance unit of *Odissi* consisting of a pose, hand gesture and movement.

Devasanpada Kalpasutra, there is depiction of the *samapada*,⁹ the *tribhangi*¹⁰ and the *chowka*¹¹.

From all this one gathers that there was a great deal of mobility between east and west and many migrations took place. According to some historians, there were groups of dancers who were brought to Puri from Gujarat and also from Andhra. (Vatsyayan, 1997: 54)

By the end of the 16th century A.D. *Orissa* had lost her independence and successively came under the rule of the *Bhois*, *Pathans*, *Mughals*, *Marathas* and finally the British. For over 300 years the political life of the region remained in turmoil, which greatly affected the religious, social and cultural aspects of life. (Patnaik 2000) The *Devdasis* ceased to be respected as they took to easy virtues. The technically mature and well-codified dance that demanded long labourious training began to wane. The voluptuous dances of the '*Gotipua*' took its place catering to the lowly taste of the fun loving public. (Patnaik 2000)

3.2.4 17th CENTURY A.D. TO 19th CENTURY A.D.

During the early part of the 17th century, a class of boys known as '*Gotipuas*' came into being. These *Gotipuas* were the boy dancers in women's garb who danced outside the temple. The *Gotipua* tradition began in the early 17th century when a class of boys known as *Gotipuas* came into being - *Goti* means single and *Pua* means boy. These boys dressed themselves as dancing girls and danced in the temple and also for the general entertainment of the people (Khokar 1986: 177). The *Gotipua* tradition basically emerged after Sri Chaitanya's visit to Puri in the 16th century. Chaitanya was on his mission of preaching *Bhakti*. He was actually propagating a devotional love for Lord Krishna. However, he was against the idea of women dancing. Hence, the *Gotipua* tradition began. But more than being just a dance form, it was In fact a religious-literary movement with the dual motive of propagating *Vaishnavism* and promoting the literary development of the young boys. (Mohanty 2004) The *Gotipuas* were supported by the *akhadas* or gymnasia that were

⁹ samapada- an *Odissi* dance posture depicted by simple standing with the feet together

¹⁰ tribhangi- triangular pose created by the dancers hips, waist and head.

¹¹ Chowka- quadrangle posture of the body created with the help of shoulders, hands, knees and legs.

established in several parts of the district. Later, certain *Zamindar* families of *Orissa* also encouraged them. Some of them maintained their own *gotipua* parties. (Ibid: 177) The dance of the *gotipuas* was more lively and spectacular having acrobatic elements. The *Odissi* dance, as it developed in course of time, absorbed a good deal from the *gotipua* style too

Between 17th to 19th century many texts became available on music and dance written in *Orissa* in the local dialect for the easy comprehension of the masses. This was possibly an attempt to educate the Oriya masses in the basics of dance so as to place them in a better position to understand the gestures and the connotations that the *Gotipuas* utilised in their covert propagation of *Vaishnavism*. There are texts which were written in *Orissa* and which are convincing proof of the dialogue and interdependence of theory and practice. Some of them include "*Sangitanarayan*" by Narayan Dev Gajapati which consists of one section on dance called as the *Nritya Khand*, the *Nritya Kaumudi* and *Natya Manorama* by Raghunath Rath in 18th century, and the *Abhinaya Darpana* by Yadunath Sinha written around 17th-18th century, etc. There are also manuscripts which deal with the dance of Shiva, describing in details the *tandava* of Shiva.

All these multiple streams and the interaction of literature, sculpture, painting and music, religious, rural and temple milieu were determining factors and from these many strands presumably emerged a dance style, a style which could be distinguished from any other but which was not restricted only to the temples. It was connected to the world outside, to the country life by the *Gotipua* tradition. *Odissi* had finally made a move from the temple precincts to the public sphere. Altogether, it was both worship within the temple and art and entertainment immediately outside the temple. (Vatsyayan 1997: 59)

Apart from the influence of the above multiple streams and interaction, two very significant structural changes that occurred within the *Orissan* society also have a bearing on the *Odissi* dance tradition. The *Gotipua* tradition and its subtle religious propagation was actually a product of the first change that *Orissa* encountered in the form of Muslim invasion of *Orissa* during the middle of the 16th century.

3.2.5 THE MUGHAL ERA

During the *Mughal* invasion of *Orissa*, it is believed that a certain degree of degeneration and moral laxity crept in, affecting not only the *Devadasis* but also indirectly the system of rituals and duties connected with the Puri temple. The integrity and reputation of the *Devadasi* system began to suffer as the invaders apparently obtained favours from the former by offering large amounts of money and other things. They became associated with concubinage and ceased to be respected solely as servants to Lord *Jagannath*. On the other hand, the *Mughal* invasion of the temple also signified a kind of religious encroachment - trying to assert the supremacy of Islam over Hinduism. Under such circumstances, the *Mahari* seva at the temple was hampered. The *Maharis* were house arrested by the *Mughal* army as they wanted to bring an end to the *Jagannath* culture by disrupting the daily ritual. Moreover, being very conservative about their women, they could neither appreciate nor understand the idea of women dancing before the Lord with devotion. They could only associate women dancing with court dancing and the '*Baiji tradition*'. (Acharya 2004)

Thus the ancient *Devadasi* tradition suffered and was suppressed. Nevertheless, the people of *Orissa* were not ready to let this dance tradition wane off and so there emerged the *Gotipua* tradition to maintain a kind of continuity with the *Mahari* dance practice. Had the *Gotipuas* not emerged into the scenario and spearheaded the art form, the dance tradition of *Orissa* would have been lost forever. Some *Gotipuas* who had some linkages with the *Maharis* also managed to acquire training from the *Maharis*. It was in reality this section of the *Gotipuas* that later on pioneered the neo-classical *Odissi* dance in 1955.

3.2.6 THE BRITISH PERIOD

The second significant influence that disturbed the social scenario of *Orissa* and also affected the dance tradition to some extent was the British rule in *Orissa*. A decline and degradation occurred in the entire Indian classical dance styles during the British period too; especially when a bill was passed prohibiting temple dancing. This was part of the Anti-Nautch movement that was against the institution of *Devadasi*. The *Devadasi* was an artist and was appreciated and respected in the society for her skill. She commanded a respect that

even some male members of the temple establishment could never get. Unfortunately, this custom degenerated them to a very low status. The institution possibly degenerated into prostitution as the temples fell to bad days. The destruction of temples by invaders started from the North Western borders of the country and spread to the whole of India. As the temples became poor and lost their patron kings, the *Devadasis* were forced into a life of poverty, misery and in many cases prostitution. It may be concluded that prostitution was forced upon the *Devadasis* at a time when the society was going through structural changes and upheavals caused by external aggression.

Towards the end of the 19th century, there was a spurt in social movements in India against the *Devadasi* practice, conceiving it as a social evil associated with prostitution. Indian reformists drawn from missionaries, doctors, journalists and social workers urged the abolition of the dedication of dancing girls to the temple. Thus emerged the 'Anti-nautch' campaign that began their attack from 1892, with an appeal to the Viceroy and Governor General of India. (Srinivasan 1985: 1874) In the then colonial context, the reform movements were strongly supported by the British government as they were committed towards the abolition this "evil" practice, which according to general impression was a cover for religious prostitution. Actually since the Europeans first arrived in India, they were surprised to see girls who sang and danced in the temples. They called these girls as 'nautch-girls'. For a European mind, a dancing girl could just be an entertainer performing for the pleasure of rich men. The idea of art as an offering to God was unknown to them. To their medieval mindset, a dancing girl was no better than a prostitute. So, they made every attempt to curb this tradition. 'The British officialdom's stake in encouraging regionalism and cultural divisiveness directly linked them with those who pressed for its ban. (Srinivasan 1985: 1874) Moreover, as the Indian reformists' arguments were based on western rationality and reason and not the authority of the *Sanskrit Shastras*, the English rulers were all the more pleased to support it. The vigour of the anti-nautch campaign ultimately led to the suppression of the 'sadir' and its secular performance in the south in the early 20th century. However, this did not affect the *Devadasi* tradition in *Orissa* as temple dancing in *Orissa* had already suffered and stopped during the Mughal era, in reality much before the formal legislation of the Anti-nautch Bill in 1947.

Had it not been for the Indian reformists campaigning against the *Devadasi* tradition, once again it could have gained prominence and recovered its lost glory. Had it been so, the resurrection of *Odissi* would have been a much easier job because the *Devadasis* were a learned lot. (Srinivasan 1985:1874) On the other hand, the *Gotipuas* were relatively less learned and so had to depend on other scholars for the interpretation of the Sanskrit texts.

After lying dormant or being fragmented or certainly underground for about approximately 100 years, *Odissi* dance arose again as a new whole after independence. The story of reconstruction of *Odissi* is parallel to the story of the reconstruction of *Bharatnatyam* in the 30s of this century and reconstruction of *Kathakali* .(Vatsyayan 1997: 59) What we recognize as *Odissi* dance today is actually an attempt at reconstruction of a dance form from all these fragments of the *Mahari* tradition, the *Gotipua* tradition, the *Bandhanritya* tradition and the *Chhau* tradition of *Orissa*, and the inspiration drawn from the sculptural relief and pictorial image.(Ibid:59) Thus on one level, *Odissi* is perhaps the oldest as suggested by the sculptural evidences, on the other level ,it is the youngest because its revival or its neo-classical format emerged only in the 1950s.

3.2.7 REVIVAL OF ODISSI DANCE

The aggressive Anti-nautch movement campaign was followed by a complete suppression of the *Devadasi* dance tradition. During the early part of the 20th century, there also emerged simultaneously, a movement urging the revival of the traditional dance of the *Devadasis*. The nationalistic leaders instigated the cultural renaissance and regeneration of India including the revival of the Indian dances. These revivalists feared that the emergence of the Anti-nautch movement would lead to a ban on classical dance tradition of India. Gradually, girls from respectable families started learning the almost extinct dance styles. During the time of independence, only *Odissi* was yet to be rediscovered. It was a tremendous ordeal for the pioneers. In the course of their revival, certain modifications were introduced in the Indian classical dance tradition. The modifications introduced into the content of the dance style were a consequence not so much of its 'purification' but its re-birth in a more proper and acceptable class. The new features included an increased textualisation of the dance. The classical Sanskrit literature was invoked as a means to purifying the classical tradition

as also reviving the lost form. (Srinivasan 1985: 1875) The discovery of *Abinaya Chandrika*, the code of *Odissi* dance written in 15th century A.D. by Sri Maheswar Mohapatra specifically for easy understanding of *gotipuas* and *maharis*, gave the ground for its re-establishment. (Patnaik 2000) Within few years *Odissi* could be revived and put in the traditional map scenario of India. With the help of many, including Padmabibhusan Late Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, Late Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Late Guru Deba Prasad Das, and D.N. Patnaik as the lone scholar, *Odissi* was revived as a classical art form in 1955 and its dance style structured. What was significant in this entire revival project however was that these modifications were considered authoritative and were carried out in the name of 'improvement' of the art or the regeneration of its lost classicism.

In the matter of technique, the *Odissi* dance is a highly stylized dance. It is based, to some extent, on the most revered texts of Indian dancing and dramaturgy, the *Natyashastra* and the *Abhinaya Darpana*, (Khokar 1986: 177) It also makes use of technical elements that are found in certain Oriya manuscripts on dance and related arts. The dance has an exhaustive and a thoroughly systematized technical vocabulary.

Actually, in the *Odissi* tradition there was no such thing as a repertoire. There was only one long number, lasting about forty minutes, which began with an invocation and concluded with a climax of pure rhythmic dance. (Khokar 1986: 179) It is only since about three decades that this long sequence has been broken up, and the different items thus created were considered to constitute the repertoire of the art.

In the very recent years a somewhat new and different repertoire has been devised for the *Odissi* stage. In this a typical present day performance opens with a *Mangalacharan*, an invocatory piece, followed by *Batu-Nritya*, then *Pallavi*, based on a particular raga, followed by a couple of *Abhinaya* pieces, finally concluding with *Moksha*.

Although *Odissi* moved from temple to theatre and lost some of its spiritual quality, except as a dramatic device, without this coining together of the great pioneers and the move into a theatre venture, the dance would have been totally lost to posterity as an art form.

In the present context, *Odissi* dance is no longer limited to its strictly prescribed repertoire. In their attempt to market *Odissi* dance globally, the new generation of choreographers have come up with a number of innovative choreographies. These days, one hears of *Odissi* choreography on "*Leelavati*" based on Bhaskaracharya's 12th century mathematical treatise, choreographed by Jhelum Paranjpe from Mumbai; "*Yagnasenf*" based on Pratiba Ray's award winning novel choreographed by Kumkum Mohanty from Bhubaneswar ; "Sri" based on a contemporary interpretation of the '*Savitri-Satyavan*' myth, essentially focusing on a traditional exploration of female energy within the framework of *Odissi*, choreographed by Surupa Sen from *Nrityagram*, to name a few. However, these choreographies, though intensely creative, have not managed to displace the traditional ones. So, there is a simultaneous co-existence of both the old and the new choreographies.

Having traced the development of *Odissi* as a distinct form, the task now remains in the hands of the sociologists to propose a Sociology of *Odissi* dance that can reflect on how the dance form can be understood as a feature of the socio-cultural context of its creation, and also how the dance constitutes reflexively a significant resource for understanding the context itself. (Thomas 1995: 30) By the analysis of the specific dance works choreographed at particular time in history, it is possible to get into the intricacies of its connotative features. For example, in the earlier times, the themes of *Odissi* dance usually revolved around the element of devotion - taken either from the *Gita govind* or from the composition of poets like Banamali Das, Salabega etc. But with the passage of time, the themes have undergone a transformation. In addition to the traditional themes, today, one confronts more secular themes like the '*Six Seasons, Pollution in Chilika lake, National Integration, Kargil War, etc*' All these point towards a purpose or mission which the art form is trying to address and project through its stylized movements.

Odissi, the classical style of today in India, has developed overcoming all growing pains. It has finally come into its own and taken India's dance stage by storm. However, the dance needs to move forward beyond the reconstruction and technique. It needs to thematically encounter the 21st century. First and foremost, the dance needs to be secularized while

maintaining the spirituality. Also, new themes have to be created, or old themes have to be repackaged for global tastes whereby they can create a meaningful space in today's society.

CHAPTER IV

TRANSFORMATIONS IN ODISSI: THEMES, PERFORMANCE AND GENDER RELATIONS

The 'classical' Odissi dance, as it is defined, refers to that form and content, which adheres to the structure/grammar given in the normative texts on dance. The orthodox classicists, in their attempt to maintain the 'purity' of the dance have challenged any kind of deviation from the codified structure. They are totally silent about the possibilities of innovation within the existing grammar. They only recognize the style (usages) that evolved from the prescriptive structure, during the period of revival. Hence, the Late Guru Deba Prasad Das gharana, Late Guru Pankaj Charan Das gharana and Late Guru Kelucharan Mohanpatra gharana remain as the only 'authentic' schools of Odissi dance. Each of these had a distinct style of presentation, which they passed on to their disciples.

Over the years, with the demise of the pioneers of these gharanas and relatively less restraints, there has been an intermingling of the styles and mushrooming of dance institutes propagating this 'mixed style'. This hybridization, coupled with an urge for innovation has eventually led to many transformations within Odissi dance in terms of its themes, performances and gender relations.

This study is essentially an attempt to trace down the transformations within *Odissi* dance. The study highlights and explains the intricacies involved in the course of its thematic change, change in performance with declining patronage and interference with form and technique and gender relations within dance production and the changing representation of women in Odissi dance.

4.1 THEMATIC TRANSFORMATION

The thematic transformation highlights the changes that *Odissi* dance has undergone in terms its thematic content in response to the changing social conditions. It also draws

attention towards the ongoing debate on 'classical - not so classical' forms of *Odissi*. In addition it is also reflective about the experimental choreographies of the recent times.

The thematic trajectory of the *Odissi* dance tradition is very interesting. During the era of *Shaivite* dominance in Orissa beginning from around 6th century A.D. to 10th century A.D., the dance form bore strong resemblance with the *tandava* pose of Lord Shiva and it was performed by both men and women. This was a time of 'pure' dance sequences only. The sculptural evidences dating back to that time stand in support of this.

This era was followed by devotion towards Lord Vishnu and propagation of *Vaisnavism* from 10th century onwards. This period also witnessed a shift from 'pure' dance to 'emotive' dance or *abhinaya*. This trend further continued as the *Devadasi* institution was banned and the *Gotipuas* took up the dance tradition. The *Gotipuas*, in turn carried on this dance tradition, whose themes were essentially drawn from Oriya *Vaishnava* poetry. This kind of a thematic trajectory continued upto the late 20th century in Orissa.

After this, there emerged an inclination towards the *Shakti/Devi* themes during the 20th century. The point I want to highlight is that, this kind of a thematic shift is not just a mechanical change with the change of society's religious orientation, but is dialectic as V.Subramaniam has suggested. The relationship between art and religion, 'has always been dialectic, being governed by changing socio-historical patterns of confrontation, compromise and appropriation'(Subramaniam 1995: 4). If we try to look at the orientation of this art form prior to the period of *Shaivite* dominance, that is around 2nd century B.C., we do notice a kind of secular orientation. During this time period, there was the prevalence of *Buddhism* and *Jainism* in Orissa and there is the sculptural depiction of Buddhist deities in dance poses, nevertheless, their dances did not indicate a glorification of their religious faith. These sculptures only testify to the presence of dance during that age.¹ Here too, I agree with Subramaniam who feels that, 'the period before and around 6th century A.D. indicate strong secular orientation in music and dance' (*Ibid*: 4).

¹ These sculptures are depicted in stylized postures only. One actually does not find any kind of *Nrittamurti* during this time suggesting a glorification of a particular faith only. Dance crystallized into forms like Natraja, Ganesha posture, Krishna posture etc during a later time.

If one tries to build a framework for comprehending the thematic trajectory of the *Odissi* dance tradition, one is bound to be influenced by the dance scholar and former secretary of Orissa Sangeet Natak Academy, D.N. Patnaik's schema wherein he offers a simplistic representation of the evolution of *Odissi* dance marked by shifts in orientation during 6th century, because of *Shaivite* dominance, 10th century, due to *Vaishnava* dominance and late 20th century due to a possible linkage with the empowerment project of women going on simultaneously in the society.(Patnaik 2004)

He states in his argument that, 'during the propagation of *Vaishnavism*, Puri became the seat of *Vaishnava* faith...and with the Ganga dynasty ruler Narsingha Dev II's orders in the 13th century A.D.; performance to *Gita Govinda*. within the temple precincts became customary.' Then later, regarding the prevalence of *Shakti* themes he observes that apart from the influence of the empowerment project, 'there has been an addition of the *Devi* themes to *Odissi* dance to make it more vigorous and for the purpose of mass appeal to the foreign audience' (Patnaik 2004). However, a few other dance researchers like Rahul Acharya argue that the existence of the *Devi* themes is not exactly a new phenomenon or a recent discovery in *Odissi* dance. It has been a part of the Puri temple culture since time immemorial. Instead he feels, these themes have come into limelight lately because of the perspective of certain feminist scholars and some very gender sensitive masses who actually want to project and reinforce a particular viewpoint upon the society (Acharya 2004).

Whatever the case maybe, the instances of *Devi* worship in Orissa are quite ancient. Since *Odissi* dance owes its origin to the *Mahari* dance and subsequently to the *Gotipua* dance, its themes mostly hovered around the *Vaishnava* idea of "*Bhaktr* and comprised of exclusive Oriya compositions on Lord *Jagannath*. From the time of its revival in 1955, till the late 20th century, the maestros were basically concerned with the re-orientation and re- establishment of *Odissi* dance as an important form of classical dance in India. So, what mattered most to them was establishing a firm base for the dance form with the traditional themes. So, possibly it never occurred to them to modify the themes and incorporate the *Devi* themes. It was only towards the later half of the 20th century that the dance form carved out a distinct position for itself, that modification was introduced or thought of. It might have been a

matter of sheer coincidence that all this actually started happening around the 80s', which was also the time when womens' liberation movement gained recognition in the post independence India.

The *Gotipua* dance, one of the precursors of the *Odissi* dance tradition, interestingly was not simply a dance tradition by the males but a religious-literary movement in disguise. It came up during the later part of 17th century, a time when it was felt that there was an urgent need in the Orissan society to protect Hinduism from the onslaught of the Muslim invasion. Thus came up *Vaishnavism* and its propagation through simple lyrical Oriya poetry glorifying Lord *Rama*, *Krishna* and the like. Heavily loaded with the idea of "*Bhakti-Srungara*" and initiated after *Chaityana's* visit to Puri in the 16th century, the *Gotipua* tradition emerged as an alternative for the preservation of the dance tradition of Orissa. For this purpose, illiterate young boys from not so well-of families were inducted into the *akhadas* and taught these compositions verbally. They were expected to memorize these, understand its meaning and prepare for public performances in the evening. In due course, it not only enriched their knowledge but also catered as an effective medium for religious propagation. At the same time it provided a platform for the continuation of the dance tradition that had suffered due to *Afghan* interference. D.N. Patnaik, in his interview said that, 'after 16th and 17th century onwards, the temple of Lord *Jagannath* came under successive attacks from the *Afghans*. During that time, the rituals of the temple were badly affected. In a single instance, it was stopped for seven years at a stretch. No ritual could be performed' (Patnaik 2004).

Gradually with the passage of time, more variegated themes began to emerge in *Odissi* dance. There came about the idea of experimentation as the western practice of dancing came to be known to the Indian dancers. This, I feel, was essentially done to create a mass appeal since the mass of people witnessing the dance form were no longer from the homogenous background of *Rasikas*, and they had subtly absorbed the tastes and traditions of the British craft. Earlier the audience for *Odissi* dance comprised the *Rasikas* or intellectuals who made every attempt to understand the dance *abhinayas*. They were deeply involved in deciphering the meaning of the lyrics. They appreciated master pieces like *Gita Govind* but in modern times, the nature of the audience diversified and they are more

appreciative of the visual impact produced by a dance performance rather than the interpretation of meaning. This diversity and knowledge was taken into account and up came dance dramas like "*Aranya*", "*Kargil*", "*King-Lear*", "*Mother India*", etc. To quote D.N. Patnaik, 'the expansion of the themes in *Odissi* dance came out from the need to satisfy all kinds of people in the society from different religious sects and social background' (Patnaik 2004).

Not only have the themes variegated but the approach towards the traditional themes have also undergone a massive transformation. For example, the *Odissi* dance item '*Sri*' choreographed by Surupa Sen. *Sri* has been based on the *Satyavaan-Savitri* myth where *Savitri* is said to have challenged the God of Death and through her intellect ultimately managed to win back her husband. However, through her choreography '*Sri*', Sen has attempted a contemporary interpretation of mythology, by an exploration of the female energy within the framework of *Odissi*. Dance critic Rabinarayan Rathsarma states that, 'there are not only new themes emerging but the approach to some of the old ones have also changed giving them a now look' (Rathsarma 2004).

These arguments can also be understood in the light of the fact that *Odissi* in its earliest form as *Mahari* dance was a pure ritual where the *Devadasis/Maharis* danced exclusively for Lord *Jagannath*. But as the dance form came out of the temple, the *Gotipuas* were the first ones to perform publicly. Gradually it became audience oriented as a group of professional dancers emerged. These dancers were bound to consider the audience choice as this was the source of their earning. Mukti Pal, a professional *Odissi* dancer, feels that 'the audience is like a mirror for the artist, where an artist's performance is to be judged. We try to make all possible attempts to appeal the audience, because we basically dance for the audience' (Pal 2004). Thus *Odissi* dance ceased to be just a ritual anymore.

Another interesting aspect within *Odissi* dance has been the ongoing debate between the so-called '*classical*' and '*not-so-classical*' form of *Odissi*. The people who were associated with the revival of the dance form claimed that the structure/code along with the certain themes associated with it, which they had created and prescribed, was supposed to be "the

authentic" form of *Odissi* dance. They believed that their creation and compilation of the "authentic classical", was a kind of continuity with the historical past, reflecting the essence of the Orissa culture. They taught this "authentic" form to their disciples and this trend continued from different '*gurus*' to their '*shishyas*' from generation to generation. However in the process of transfer of this knowledge, there appeared certain laxity either due to the insincerity of the students or discontinuity of the training before a thorough completion etc. This kind of laxity, it is argued by dance scholars, in course of time gave rise to a 'not-so-classical' form or contaminated version of *Odissi*. Moreover, due to the death of some of the *gurus* involved in structuring *Odissi*, there were relatively no checks on the 'half-bred *gurus*' who in turn were willing to cater to the different needs in different contexts. As a result they continued passing on an "adulterated" form from generation to generation.

Yet another form of '*not-so-classical*' *Odissi* dance today, according to the advocates of the authentic form, comprises the recent dance dramas on unconventional themes. In order to cater to the thematic content, there has been improvisation of the music, costume and sometimes the dance too. Some dance critics in turn have criticized this as an "impure" form. They feel that this kind of a '*non-Odissi*' phenomenon is often being passed under the garb of *Odissi* for the audience to be fooled. In fact, the critics and some very senior dancers have serious objections to labeling such dance as "*Odissi*". However, Kumkum Mohanty, a senior *Odissi* exponent and director of Odissi Research Center, expressed in her interview, 'the point in every dance or "abhinaya" should be effective communication of the "*bhava*" or emotion to the masses and so one cannot be too sticky about the pure style. You cannot keep saying that there is only one particular way of conducting a particular movement and hence you cannot alter it. I think it is just not possible to depict a labourer working in the same style, using the same movement as the ones applicable while portraying a romantic sequence between *Radha-Krishna*' (Mohanty 2004). Hence she has introduced certain improvisations to cater to specific new needs of a particular dance item.

But here, the matter still remains unresolved as to what exactly is the authentic form of *Odissi* dance, whether it is a static category and whether the structure devised by the people engaged in its revival implies a kind of 'final say' regarding the code of dance; especially

now, when some kind of research is being carried forward in the faculty of dance. Adding another dimension to this debate, Oopalee Operajita, a famous *Odissi* danseuse, argues that *Odissi*, being a classical form in India, possesses a distinct structure or rules governing dance. 'In that case, taking off from the linguists who tell us that there is an infinite number of new sentences that the grammar of a language can perform, the structure or grammar of *Odissi* is also capable of producing endless number of new compositions and still be speaking the authentic language of classical dance' (Operajita 1987: 72-73). Since a certain structure of grammar allows a great variety of expressions and new additions without violating the rule, any addition to *Odissi* within its structural boundaries is not liable to contaminate or adulterate it. In fact, despite the claims that the *Natyaśāstra* is exhausted, there can be fruitful attempts of unearthing the various intricacies of dance from within the text, that might have been overlooked by the stalwarts of dance during its revival. It is In fact a sheer misfortune that while these texts are attracting the interest of the tourists, the people of Orissa are neglecting and turning a blind eye to its possible re-interpretation. (*Ibid.*: 71)

Regarding the thematic transformation of *Odissi* dance, there has undoubtedly been a steady change; but actually there hasn't been any kind of total replacement or displacement of the traditional old themes. In fact, there have only been new additions to the existing conventional ones. This directs us towards two possibilities:

- 1) The traditional structure of *Odissi* is so very rigid that it is just impossible to break away from it and still be known as *Odissi*. Moreover, the recognition of *Odissi* actually comes from the traditional structure of the dance. This tradition-bound practice is the basis of classicism as against the haphazard expressions of personalized feelings. As a result, the nature of *Odissi* dance performance cannot be altered at will. So, we have new choreographies performed along with the conventional ones. As K. Mohanty puts it, 'In a performance of an hour, you can have the liberty to devote 10 minutes to a new choreography and experiment it with the audience' (Mohanty 2004)

2) On the other hand, we have the experimental choreographies coming up that are quite appreciated by the masses. The success and appreciation of these choreographies can be attributed, to a certain degree, to the transformed nature of the audience. Firstly, these choreographies formed a departure from the old monotonous *Odissi* dance performances thus, imparting freshness to the masses. K. Mohanty is also of the view that, 'The audiences are always in a position to welcome changes which can take them out from monotony' (Mohanty 2004). Secondly, owing to their stressful busy schedule, the audience now longs for shorter energetic items instead of slow and lengthy recitals. Here one can refer to Richard Dyer, who opines that energetic performances and entertainment provide a route for "escape" and "wish-fulfillment", 'an answer to the inadequacies of the society, which is being escaped from through entertainment' (Dyer cited in During 1994: 277). These energetic items actually instill in the audience zeal to face the world. To quote K. Mohanty again, 'People now long for shorter items of 5-10 minutes duration, full of energy. But during the time of the earlier *gurus*, they preferred watching epic-items like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharat* etc. Moreover, these smaller items should be from a number of themes, so that the people can have the pleasure to witness a variety of items without any boredom or monotony' (*Ibid*). Thirdly, these experimental choreographies have a lot to do with the current events going on in the society. For example, the choreographies on *Cyclone*, *Kargil*, *Chipko-Movement*, etc, were all dealing with the existing societal conditions. Thus the audiences are now in a position to relate to the item and visualize it in a new light. Moreover for the choreographer, such themes become less cumbersome as the script itself is readily available from the current news.

Apart from fulfilling the expectations of the audiences, these experimental choreographies have come up as a result of cross-cultural interactions, as a lot of non-Oriya dancers started performing *Odissi*. They were not 'situated' within the ideological structures of the Oriya society and so brought out themes that had absolutely no connection with the conventional 'pure' ones. Illeana Chitrasti's choreography on "*Maya*", Jhelum Paranjpe's "*Leelavati*" and

Surupa Sen's "*Sri*" are a few noteworthy ones. That apart, many compositions of danseuses like Sonal Mansingh, Madhavi Mudgal, Kiral Sehgal, Sharon Lowen, Rekha Tandon etc. have also offered new dimensions to *Odissi*.

Yet another reason for these new dance compositions is also the rise in the literacy level of the people composing as well as the viewers of these performances. The more learned the teachers became, the more they tried to translate their knowledge into their choreographies. For instance, in 1993, K.Mohanty choreographed "*Yagnaseni*" based on the novel *Yagnaseni* by Prativa Ray. This item embodied the emotions of *Draupadi* as a woman and as the wife of the five Pandava brothers. Adapted from the *Mahabharat*, this item has been a departure from the conventional interpretation and presentation of the epic. Similarly, the "*Navadurga*", revolved around the projection of the nine-manifestation of Goddess *Shakti*. In comparison, the choreographers during the revival time were not so learned and this was reflected in their choreography too. They composed on the very old and conventional themes that had been passed on to them from their teachers. Thus the audience had no choice but to watch them.

That apart, to enhance the marketability of the dance, newer themes were taken into account for greater mass appeal both in India and abroad. All these were part of the effort launched to re-establish *Odissi* on the world map of dance. Rathsarma feels that "The themes of dance are decided depending on the segment of the population the dancers are addressing. If they go abroad, their themes and style of presentation undergoes a change, but if the same artists are performing in the temple, they try their best to maintain the purity of the *Odissi* tradition. While performing abroad, the artists try to bring in, as much as possible, individual expressions and liberty to actually make the dance more marketable and appealing' (Rathsarman 2004).

The introduction of new themes within *Odissi* dance can also be attributed to the exhibition of the dance form to the foreigners. Once exposed to the thematic content of *Odissi*, it became difficult for them to understand and appreciate many of the elements from Indian mythology. For example, they could not reconcile with the Indian explanation of *Draupadi*

having five husbands. Their unaware and unaccustomed minds started equating *Draupadi* with immoral western characters, while *Draupadi* occupies a much esteemed position in the Indian mind. According to *Odissi* dance scholar and performer, Rahul Acharya, 'somebody might have raised an objection and some people like Charles Fabre, a scholar on *Jagannath* culture might have suggested that these concepts are difficult for western people to digest' (Acharya 2004). So, certain thematic changes were introduced in *Odissi* dance also to make it worthy of global appreciation.

Another fact that my study reveals is that most experimental choreographies that have emerged in *Odissi* have actually been composed out of Orissa. *Odissi* dance exponents like Sonal Mansingh, Madhavi Mudgal, Sharon Lowen, Alola Kanungo, Surupa Sen, Jhelum Paranjape, Rekha Tandon have actually choreographed extensively on new and unconventional themes. Surupa Sen from *Nrityagram* has attempted '*Sri*' as discussed earlier in this section. Jhelum Paranjape heading *Smitalaya* at Mumbai has choreographed '*Leelavati*' showcasing the intelligent daughter *Leelavati* and the way she adeptly tackles mathematical problems posed by her father *Bhaskaracharya*. She has also choreographed '*Rasamanjari*', an *Odissi* choreography set to old hindi film music, depicting the emotions of women; and '*Rang-Tarang*' a melange of Marathi song set to *Odissi* dance. Another trend in experimentation tries to merge *Odissi* with the folk-tradition. 'Kolkata based dancers have started dancing *Odissi* in accompaniment of *Mridanga* and *Dhol* with *kirtan* music of Bengal', observes D.N. Patnaik. He adds, 'nowadays in Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata, the dancers have taken the liberty to some new themes, sometimes local themes too. I hear that in Delhi, they are dancing *Odissi* to *Ramacharitramanas*, in Mumbai there are similar attempts with Marathi songs and in Kolkata, and they have adopted the *Ravindra Sangeet* for *Odissi* choreography' (Patnaik 2004)

But in Orissa, it is only *Odissi* Research Center and very few other dance institutes that sometimes attempt these unconventional themes like '*Kargi*', '*KingLear*', '*Mother India*', '*Seasons*', etc. Here, it is interesting to note that, while the non-Oriya artists have spontaneously created these experimental choreographies out of their genuine interest, in Orissa, whatever experiments have been attempted, even by ORC, are on most occasions,

an outcome of external force or agency. K. Mohanty confesses that '*Kargil* was a pressure on me. The Chief Minister of Orissa wanted to raise some funds for the jawans struggling at the border. Similarly, the doordarshan wanted me to put up something on the Orissa Cyclone, and thus came up my choreography on *Cyclone*. I choreographed *Mother India* for an Independence day function that was allotted to me' (Mohanty 2004). However, these choreographies in Orissa though appreciated when first performed, have actually not been staged anywhere else due to reasons like unavailability of suitable stage craft, lack of funds etc.

Now here, if one delves deeply into the matter then one can possibly conclude that perhaps the people in Orissa are still very rigid about the conventional form of dance and would ultimately appreciate performances of *Dasavatara*, *Navadurga*, *Gitagovinda* and the like. In fact, many traditionalists and artists from the three authentic *gharanas*, to be discussed later in the chapter, despise such experimentation, justifying their distaste by saying that performing *Odissi* to these unconventional themes is like garbing up *Odissi* with modern-day outfit and make-up, which in turn will never be approved by the Lord. They can perhaps be labelled as "open conservatives or restrained rebels" who would welcome a change once in a while but would ultimately never compromise on tradition and convention. Such 'not so desirable' experiments can never replace the traditional form in the homeland of *Odissi*. Thus Rahul adds, 'where will we be if we leave our tradition? We should strive to keep up the tradition that forms the foundation of Orissa' (Acharya 2004).

4.2 TRANSFORMATION IN PERFORMANCE

From the time of its revival in 1955, the 'authentic-classical' *Odissi* dance has had only three distinct *gharanas*. Late Guru Daba Prasad Das *gharana*, Late Guru Pankaj Charan Das *gharana* and Late Gura Kelucharan Mohapatra *gharana*. In the professional sense, a *gharana* had some of the characteristics of a guild and was comparable to a "school" that perpetuated a particular style of singing or dancing or playing of instruments. *Gharanas* were usually named after its founding guru and were supposed to maintain its specificity even after the founder. These were often patronized by rich zamindars in the medieval period. But with the

abolition of traditional patronage system and the scope of intermingling provided by unrestrained communication, these gharanas declined.

Similarly, in case of *Odissi* dance, after the demise of the founding gurus, the 'authenticity' of styles was not maintained. Moreover, with the lack of patronage, people became lured by the money-making aspect of dance and in due course the dance declined in its quality. On the other hand, creative instincts forced some people to choreograph innovative, unconventional dance compositions within the coded structure. All these brought about transformation in the performance of *Odissi* dance.

It has rightly been said by Oscar Wilde that explanation of an art is sought in the social condition that produces it. (Wilde 1891) Similarly, in the context of *Odissi* dance too, its nature has largely been governed by the social setup of the artists. During the earlier times, when the artists in Orissa had royal patronage, they never needed to bother about their survival. All they required to concentrate on was the art form they were pursuing and so eventually produced masterpieces. Thus, Orissa witnessed a glorious period of excellence in arts.

But as we approach towards the 20th century, Orissa bears the brunt of the *Muslim* onslaught in the 16th century A.D. followed by the British oppression in early 19th century A.D. The cumulative effect of all these gradually transformed Orissa into poverty-ridden society. The once luxurious and glorious Orissa from the 10th, 11th till the 17th century became highly impoverished by the mid 20th century. Under such circumstances art was bound to suffer too. When artists could barely manage to arrange for a square meal a day, they couldn't possibly have been bothered about the preservation of the pure art forms like dance, music, etc. According to K. Mohanty, 'if your stomach is empty, there is no way you can cater to classical art. Classical dance or music always caters to a prosperous society. During the earlier times, the kings were able to maintain the art forms through their patronage. But later, as the times changed, no such practices existed any longer and the conditions became very difficult to handle' (Mohanty 2004).

Moreover, as revealed by many of the respondents in the course of my interview, dance has been a highly underpaid occupation. At the time of its revival, the dance *gurus* like Late Guru Deba Prasad Das, Late Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Padmavibhusan Late Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra had to undergo a lot of hardships in their attempt to pursue the occupation. As D.N. Patnaik puts it, 'they were paid hardly 10/- per month which was a very meager earning for survival of an entire family' (Patnaik 2004). Still they continued in their endeavors, as they were committed to preserve and propagate this dance tradition of Orissa and ultimately establish it as a form of Indian classical dance.

However, the zeal of the dance teachers does not seem to be the same these days. They are forever ready to compromise the essentials of the dance form for the sake of money in the name of innovation. According to K. Mohanty, one of her students currently teaching at Delhi had absolutely no guilt while sacrificing the most essential '*Chowka*' posture in order to meet the financial requirement of his family. She is of the view that her student quite unabashedly confessed that, 'when one of my students who paid me 1000/- per month found it difficult to dance with the '*Chowka*' pose and so decided to discontinue dance, I decided to eliminate the '*Chowka*' instead from the dance curriculum and be a little innovative. So, I continued teaching her *Odissi* sans the '*Chowka*'. I just couldn't afford to lose a tuition worth 1000/- as it contributed significantly towards my son's school fees' (Mohanty 2004). K. Mohanty continued that he was not the least ashamed when he said, '*maro goli chowka ko*'² This was a glaring instance of how economic needs could paralyse the technique and purity of the form. Similarly, in yet another instance, Mohanty observes that this kind of a technical discrepancy also emerges when the students, in order to support their family start opening their own dance institutes, much before the completion of their own dance curriculum. As a result they begin transferring half baked knowledge to their students interfering with the form and technique.

Pushing the discussion a little further, many of the senior *Odissi* dance exponents and critics are of the view that the economic needs of an individual teacher actually forces him to give in to adulterations and also produce '*Western-Classical Fusion*' dances. As the sanctity of

² Maro goli chowka ko- can briefly be translated to damn the posture of chowka.

any classical dance form lies in the type of music employed during the dance performance along with the posture and gestures, the entire 'classical aspect' of the dance is lost in these fusions. However the pioneers of these fusion forms claim that they are introducing the element of creativity and innovation to dance. But I feel creativity or innovation doesn't mean that there should be free imbibitions from other dissimilar forms. There is no bar for creativity or innovation, but it should be within the limit of style and form. If one attempts a fusion of all Indian classical dances, I don't think it will raise much objections as it does in case of western-classical fusion; the reason being, all the Indian forms emanate from a common root, following more or less the same principle.

Another instance of the money factor driving dancers to take up unconventional themes is a recent performance of '*Gotipua*' dance at the '*Kharvela Festival*' where a troupe of *Gotipuas* were found performing to the song "*Aame bira Odia*³". Traditionally, the *Gotipuas* performed to Oriya *Vaishnava* numbers only. But with the proliferation of *Odissi* dance today, the *Gotipuas* have been relegated to the status of dancing only during the "*RathYatra*" or the car festival of Lord *Jagannath*. They too require eking out a living and sustaining themselves in the present environment, and so have moulded themselves to be at par with the changing tastes of the people.

One of the key issues in technical transformation, however, is the distinction of the transformed style into '*creative experimentation*' and '*distorted experimentation*'. While the creative experimentation involves all the new choreographies, which to a large extent have followed the structure of *Odissi* dance, introducing new elements yet retaining its identity, the latter category comprises all sorts of distorted choreographies for commercial purposes often missing out the aesthetic element. Dance choreographies like *Sri*, *Rasamanjari*, *Seasons*, *Leelavati*, fusion of all Indian classical dances, etc can actually be perceived as out comes of a creative mind attempting innovation with the classical art, invigorating it. On the other hand, an *Odissi* dance performance without the *chowka* or

³ Ame bira Odia- can roughly be translated into 'we are brave Oriyas'

tribhangi, western-classical fusion, etc can be considered as distortions threatening the identity of *Odissi* dance.

The changes in the technique of *Odissi* dance are not entirely the result of economic motivation or innovation of the artists' minds. Certain other elements also have made contributions towards its transformation. Beginning from its revival in 1955, the authentic *Odissi* dance has had three *gharanas* headed by Late Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Late Guru Debaprasad Das and Padmavibhusan Late Guru Kelu Charan Mohapatra respectively. The presence of any other *gharana* or style, as one notices in plenty these days, is a product of 'hybridization' or mixture of two or three *gharanas*. This kind of hybridization is bound to produce a different style, distinct from the three traditional *gharanas*. Thus, we witness a change.

In a different context, change is also likely to be introduced or say, forced into a dance style when there is a kind of 'paradigm shift' within dance due to the death of the entire generation of the traditional dance authoritarians. In that case, the next generation comes to a position, where they can possibly make a choice whether to continue along the same trajectory or introduce new elements, now that there is no one to exercise a check and claim that it was not prescribed during the revival strategy. 'With the death of the pioneers of the three traditional *gharanas*, now there is absolutely no one to remind of a particular step that one might forget owing to lack of practice. So, this has brought about improvisations, filling up the vacuum created within a recital', observes Rahul. Just as a heightened crisis with in a science calls for a paradigm shift with new sets of rules, regulations, theories, etc., according to the Kuhnian model of the structure of scientific revolution, in the same way, it is possible that the structure of dance might undergo a massive transformation due to new interpretation and structural renewal of the technique. (Kuhn 1962) In this context, K. Mohanty opines, 'going by the present trend, I won't be surprised if the entire *Odissi* dance tradition will change its form in another twenty-thirty years.'

These days, one encounters some classical dances retaining their classical form and yet being involved in some kind of social messaging. Ananda Sankar Jayant, a leading

Bharatnatyam exponent's choreography of "What about me?" sensitizing the audience about the women's issue of dowry, female infanticide etc. is a bright example of this kind of social messaging. However, the senior *Odissi* dance exponents in Orissa as well as the dance critics and some upcoming dancers feel that *Odissi* dance is not yet ready for any such similar attempts. They feel that *Odissi* dance is in its infantile stage, having evolved as a classical dance over five decades only and still struggling with the 'Classical - Not-so-classical' debate. It is not all matured to handle such attempts of social messaging.

In addition, a senior *Odissi* exponent, Priyambada Mohanty Hejmedi feels that, *Odissi* dance is a distinct category with its own sanctity, which greatly differs from the other folk traditions like 'Pala', 'Daskathia', 'Danda Nacha' etc. The latter category, she thinks is better equipped for handling projects for social messaging. She says, 'The aim of classical dance has never been to transmit messages. When someone even selects a 'Shakti' theme, this is not done in order to convey any message but to glorify 'Shakti' in its historic perspective. On the other hand, all kinds of social issues can be projected wonderfully by modern dance and folk dance because of the freedom of movement that is allotted to them' (Mohanty-Hejmedi 2004).

Yet another dance critic, Rabinayan Rathsarma, believes that the fundamental aspect of *Odissi* dance since its inception was purely individual motive based. *Maharis* danced depicting their devotion to Lord *Jagannath*. Later on, when *Odissi* dance was revived and re-established, some people took up *Odissi* dance seriously and struggled to bring it to its present state. It became a source of their livelihood and also brought name and fame to them. Now, too, people have taken up a profession in *Odissi* and are earning from it. So, Rathsarma is of the belief that *Odissi* has never been groomed to address any kind of issue or create awareness in the society.

Thus, the performance of *Odissi* dance varies greatly in the contemporary era not only in themes but also in terms of its presentation. Economic factor has led to a dilution in the original style of *Odissi*. Nevertheless, innovation within the grammar of *Odissi* has enriched it making it a much-admired dance form.

4.3 REPRESENTATION OF GENDER RELATIONS

This section addresses the representation of women within the institutional arrangement of Odissi dance. Though Odissi dance is essentially inspired by the feminine grace but, women did not occupy the top hierarchies in the dance institutes until a very recent time. They had to be contented with their performer status only, which did not allow their creativity to come to the forefront. It was only in the later decades of the 20th century that women's innovation was given shape on stage.

Women's high profile in dance leads to the popular opinion that it is a female art form. But, if one looks at the structure within the institution of *Odissi* dance since its revival, one will notice a kind of patriarchal ideology being reinforced. *Odissi* dance, I believe, has been one of the areas where the Oriya males had been dominant, a sheer reflection of the colonial Orissan society. There has been a predominance of men as *gurus* while the women have often been given a secondary status as performers right from the time of its new found status. Priyambada Mohanty Hejmedi, a very senior *Odissi* exponent, is of the view, 'Ideally, in dance, the trainers and the performers should be given equal credit. But, we find that men as *gurus* frame and plan everything and women as performers only follow as instructed.' In fact, this scenario is very similar to the west, about which Baner comments that 'within dance production, the power relations are quite clearly not in the hands of women, despite many women's achievements in performance. It is a reality beyond doubt that there are more dance masters than mistresses in the dance institutions'(Baner 1998). Similarly, Adair observes that, 'women tend to interpret rather than create dance images' (Adair 1992: 17).

Justifying the patriarchal dominance in the field of *Odissi*, D.N. Patnaik, the scholar engaged in the revival project says that, 'females have mostly been performers. This is because females have not been very motivated to keep up their aptitude for dance. Most of the time, they have been engaged with their family and household affairs. This does not provide them with enough time to devote seriously towards dance and accept it as a profession.' As a result of this kind of an interpretation, women have been considered misfits as teachers.

However, with the passage of time, things have undergone some changes and nowadays we do notice women choreographers too like Kumkum Mohanty, Late Sanjukta Panigrahi, Late Protima Bedi, Illeana Chitrasti, Aruna Mohanty, Madhavi Mudgal, Jhelum Paranjape, Surupa Sen to name a few. But then, this is a recent phenomenon having gained prominence only since the last 2-3 decades. In the present scenario, women have not only established themselves as expert performers but also dance instructors of national as well as international repute. Though none of my female respondents in Orissa could link this kind of a trend with the project of women's liberation, nevertheless, I feel that somewhere it is the identification and recognition of the women's consciousness and their capability, during the 1980's that triggered off this syndrome.

One does not encounter a drastic change in the representation of women with the change in the social condition of women in the latter part of the 20th century, in case of *Odissi* dance, or for that matter any of the Indian classical dances, as all the potential for change has been subtly contained within the structure or code of dance. There is relatively no scope for the exhibition of the repressed or subversive potential of women by adopting athletic and vigorous dance steps, as in case of Western modern and post modern dances. These seem to have derived their energy, inspiration and imagery from the feminist movement. According to Adair, 'the Western modern and post modern dances are revolutionary and the women making these looked for new structures and tactics with which to inform their practices. So, the artists created their own movement forms and techniques necessary for their choreography. They were basically concerned with discovering their sources of movements often using personal experiences and emotions as starting points' (Adair 1992: 119).

However, in the case of Indian classical dance in general and *Odissi* in particular, the moment one incorporates this kind of an improvisation into the technique, one seizes to be recognized or identified as a classical form. The only scope for representational transformation of women comes from the themes selected for dance choreography. With the selection of women oriented themes like *Sri* and *Leelavati* the respective female choreographers have been able to exhibit the feminine energy.

Yet another interesting phenomenon in *Odissi* dance regarding the issue of representation of women is that, while *Odissi* dance choreographies composed out of Orissa comprises choreographies on women, which in a way reflects the empowerment of women, the ones composed in the home land of *Odissi* are oblivious of it. A lot of this kind of choreography is found in Kolkata dealing with various manifestations of goddess *Durga*, in Mumbai these kind of compositions are being carried forward by dancers like Jhelum Paranjape, in south India such attempts are being carried forward by Surupa Sen and a few others at *Nrityagram* and in Delhi too many non-oriya *Odissi* dance exponents have portrayed their innovation as discussed earlier. However, it is quite strange that in Orissa, though there was the prevalence of the '*Devi*' themes, one does not perspectivise these from this angle. They do not somehow interpret the depiction of women in these strong roles as a path towards empowerment.

In fact whatever choreographies have been produced to portray 'women of strength', have not been very popular until recently. K. Mohanty is of the opinion that, 'Pankaj babu composed "*Panchasati*" long back which was based on five *satis* of the Indian mythology like *Ahalya*, *Sita*, *Savitri*, etc, showcasing the strength and power of the Indian women. But it was not a popular item and people did not interpret this item as hinting at any kind of empowerment of women' (Mohanty 2004). Similarly, Rahul feels, 'nobody actually come to a dance performance to become socially aware. It is just a sort of enjoyment for the common masses. But, if it is a sociologist or a feminist like Arundhati Roy coming to watch "*Dasamahavidya*", an item on *Durga*, she would obviously look at such a powerful women centered dance as empowering women, conveying the message that women should break their confinements and come out and experience the power they possess. But if it's a normal Oriya person or someone from the dance faculty like me going to watch an *Odissi* performance, I'll never be interested in underlying connotations. It would just be the aesthetic appeal that I'll seek within the performance' (Acharya 2004). I feel that this kind of an attitude, which one encounters in an Oriya mind, is essentially due to the Oriya power structure and the power relations operating within the society which seldom allows the mind to open up and be analytical about the things going around. On the other hand, the

choreographers who live beyond the borders of the state have greater freedom of choreography, not being bound by the power structure.

As the review of literature suggests and as does my field work, during the beginning of the revival of *Odissi* dance, women learning dance and going for public performances was considered a taboo. Girls from families of high social standing were barred from any such preoccupation. It was the belief that girls' dance training would affect their chances in the "marriage market" negatively. As a result very few girls ventured into this field. But most of them who ventured discontinued their dance training a little before they completed their schooling. Within this kind of a social scenario, girls like Priyambada Mohanty, Late Sanjukta Panigrahi, Kumkum Mohanty, Susama Patnaik, Meenati Mishra, hailing from quite prestigious families dared to take up dance. In fact they were the ones who have paved a path for the later generation of women to embrace this art form. These women were pioneer performers and most instrumental in promoting *Odissi* dance and giving it its present status. They went abroad for dance performances and being academically sound, could communicate with the audience worldwide and explain the intricacies involved in the dance, thus enabling the people to appreciate it holistically.

As the time passed, gradually, the taboo associated with dance declined and vanished. Now, the condition in Orissa is such that every 4 out of 10 girls must have had training in *Odissi* dance. It is no longer seen as a hurdle for marriage. According to K. Mohanty, 'nowadays I find most female dancers are able to keep up dance after their marriage. There has been a change in the society, where the husbands and the in-laws no longer feel ashamed of their women performing. So, I feel that dance has definitely taken up a prestigious position in the society' (Mohanty 2004). Thus, many women have taken up dance seriously and have also opened institutes of their own. Having established a family of their own, they are now in a position to avail an economic independence which has really given them morale. In fact, when I asked a couple of women whether dance had provided them with any kind of empowerment, most of them said that they were happy with the idea of empowerment but had not really thought of applying the concept onto dance and choreograph something which reflected this freedom. At the same time, they did agree that dance had empowered them as

it had given them economic independence and the scope to give public performances. So, here we have an example of how the idea of women empowerment has merely been reduced to the ability and satisfaction to earn and perform on the stage.

Thus, one encounters in the sphere of Odissi, a mind-set wherein the idea of empowerment has not been conceptualized as offering new dimension into dance choreography. They have merely grasped the autonomous aspect of it that gives them the freedom of performing on stage but have not conceived of translating it into expression through dance.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: WILL THE 'CLASSICISM' OF ODISSI DISAPPEAR?

Art mirrors social reality in a complex way. Ideas and forces governing social life find an expression in every art form that is alive and dynamic. The transformation that the *Odissi* dance tradition has undergone is not merely a mechanical change. The shifts in its orientation have been in response to the social forces operating in a particular epoch.

The initial secular orientation of the dance tradition was due to the complex amalgam of the different schools of Buddhism, Jainism, and Tantrism prevailing during that era. This was succeeded first by the Shaivite dominance followed by the Vaishnavite ascendancy. This kind of a religious course not only transformed the nature of the dance from secular to religious but also led to a kind of crystallization of a structure of the dance. Works like the *Gita govind* gave a definite shape to dance through the ritual practices of the *Devadasis*. Later on, various other texts further conditioned the dance form.

This kind of a harmonious and organic growth of the dance tradition was disrupted by the Muslim invasion, which sounded the death knell for the technically matured and codified dance. In its place came the voluptuous dances of the *Gotipuas*. Interestingly, this was not simply a dance tradition but also a covert expression of religious propagation in an attempt to protect Hinduism and the *Jagannath* faith. In the midst of socio-political upheaval, the dance tradition degenerated as the British took control over the Orissan society.

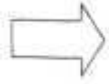
The 20th century saw a new dawn in the history of Indian dance. During this period, dance secured a new lease of life through reformatory efforts by key social figures. The nationalistic sentiments aroused an urge to re-discover their lost tradition. Thus revival and re-construction of *Odissi* happened as a neo-classical dance form.

Now, the question arises, does this resurrected form represent the 'authentic classical' *Odissi* dance? Is this form not subject to any change or innovation? The revivalists in their attempt to define and present the 'revived *Odissi* dance' had convinced the society that they had complied with the normative dance texts and had maintained a continuity with the past dance tradition of Orissa. Thus their definition of the 'classical' remained confined to the then existing *Odissi* form.

But this does not mean that this form should be frozen without any scope for innovation. This way it would become a 'dead' form, worthy of being preserved in a museum. In order to save the dance form from fossilizing, there is a paramount need for introduction of new choreographies. Several different changes were actually initiated into the dance form. Some were innovative changes limiting themselves within the grammar codified initially, while some others went off the track to introduce compromises with the essential components of *Odissi*, leading to adulteration of the dance form. At the creative front too, there emerged an argument between the question of adherence to the structure and the methods of effective communication of the expression. For some, the structure was limiting and did not allow for effective communication. For others, innovations could be attempted within the grammar and they felt that this would be a path towards the enrichment of *Odissi* dance.

Thus creative *Odissi* dance choreography emerged. Some of these operated with the traditional themes, but with variations in their approach. For others, innovation provoked changes in the content, choreography and execution of *Odissi* dance. Improvisations were introduced to cater to the changes. Dance dramas like 'Kargil', an Odissi Research centre production, are a bright example of such improvisation wherein the Indian soldiers were portrayed in typical *Odissi* choreography, while Pakistani soldiers' identity was constructed with Kathak choreography.

**Secular
(Buddhism,
Jainism,
Tantrism)**



**Religious
(Shaivism)**



**Religious
(Vaishnavism)**

DISRUPTIONS

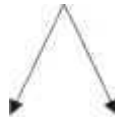


RECONSTRUCTION OF CLASSICAL FORM



Dead Art Form
(No change)

Alive (Changes)



Adulteration

Innovation



Within the grammar of Odissi

A break with the tradition

The experiments with unconventional themes essentially came up as the nature of the dance form began to transform - from ritual practice confined to the religious domain to enter the secular and the profane. When moved to the stage, this ritual dance underwent changes to make their effects carry across the footlights.

Dance choreography gradually came to adjust itself to contemporary tastes, as the audiences were no longer from the homogenous background of the '*Rasikas*' or very knowledgeable intellectuals, whose concern was to interpret dance in terms of its symbolic meanings. The present day audiences come from different social backgrounds and they tend to appreciate dance in terms of its visual appeal. Thus experimental choreographies with more or less secular themes were promoted to address the heterogeneity of masses. At the same time, attempts are continuously being made to 'classicize' these compositions in order to maintain its 'high' cultural status.

At another front, some *Odissi* dance choreographers, in the name of experimentation, took the liberty to deviate from the 'classical' standards. By compromising certain 'essential elements' of *Odissi* dance that distinguished *Odissi* from other Indian classical dances, they are all set to mint money by exploiting the art form. The 'classicists' have viewed this as a serious interference and contamination of *Odissi* dance. Hence, the argument between the 'classical and not-so-classical' forms continues.

While this kind of a discourse continues within the innovation strategy, it is interesting to look at the rate of success or failure of these experimental choreographies in Orissa. In spite of their energetic, fresh and novel mode of presentation, they have not been able to oust or replace the traditional format. There have only been new additions to the existing conventional themes. All this suggest the staus-quoists and orthodox mind-set of the people in Orissa. Unlike many other states in India, Orissa has not seen any major social movements during the 20th century, demanding a radical change in the traditional social structure.

However, the scenario outside Orissa is a little different. Being unfamiliar and unconstrained by the ideological structure of Orissa, the audiences in cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata are highly appreciative of the creative effort of the new choreographers. The choreographers, on their part have exhibited greater freedom of expression and introduced unconventional themes. In fact many of these experimental choreographies are the result of cross-cultural interaction that has offered a new dimension to *Odissi* dance.

Yet another transformation that has occurred in the domain of *Odissi* dance is the emergence of a 'hybrid' form - a form resulting from the mixture of the three 'authentic' *gharanas*. Over the years, the dancers are no longer concerned about maintaining the purity of a particular dance style. They have adopted an eclectic approach whereby they are in a position to incorporate the best components from each of the three schools of dance. Thus, in a certain sense, they have come to represent *Odissi* in its 'entirety'.

But, at the same time, this 'hybrid' form is not always a blend of perfection. The dancers, in their zeal to capture the distinct characteristics of each style, often forget or miss out a few elements, leaving behind a vacuum. This in turn is filled by 'suitable' steps according to the convenience of the dancer. So, what is projected as the 'perfect blend' of the three styles may not actually be so. In this way a change occurs in the presentation and execution of the dance form.

Over a period of time, there has been a 'paradigm shift' within *Odissi* dance with the demise of the pioneers of the revival project. This has aggravated the trend towards hybridization even more as there are very few 'checks' on the advocates of emergent trend. However, this kind of a shift has posed a threat to the structure of *Odissi* dance. It is now possible that the structure might undergo a radical transformation due to new interpretation and structural renewal of the technique.

Gender relations contribute very critically to the structure of dance. The patriarchal dominance that had for a long time been the dominant phenomenon, is now becoming a thing of the past. Women have now started occupying top hierarchies in various dance

institutes. Kumkum Mohanty is the director of *Odissi Research Centre*, Illearta Citaristi runs her own institute '*Art Vision*', Aruna Mohanty has her own training centre, Jhelum Parajape heads '*Smitalay*', Surupa Sen manages '*Nrityagram*' to name a few. Thus, women have finally managed to turn away from their secondary status as performers and emerge as a new genre of dance teachers. This was bound to have a serious impact on the structure of Odissi dance.

In light of the changing attitude towards women and the relationship between men and women in society, it is time for the classical *Odissi* dancers become more honest in their portrayal of women and their relationship with men. The archetypical monologue of the solo dancer as *nayika* addressing an invisible hero with a yearning prayer - the typical depiction of the love-lorn *Radha* pining for *Krishna*, requires some variation. Similarly, the depiction of *Sita* as the obedient wife, which in fact acts as a camouflage for male conspiracy to keep them subordinated to men forever should be overcome. Women actually need to move beyond these stereotypical representations in view of their rapid repositioning in the society's schemata. The image of women on stage needs to evolve as powerfully as it is happening in reality.

It is true that a high degree of realism cannot be expected from a stylized art form but a dignified naturalism is certainly anticipated. The depiction of goddess *Shakti* has presented many dancers with an alternative to a pining *nayika*. Similarly, the idea of *Ardhanareeswara*, the fusion of *Shiva* and *Shakti* is also catching up, giving today's women every reason to celebrate their power.

In case of Indian classical dance, as the potential for the exhibition of the repressed feelings or subversive tendencies are tactfully contained within the structure of dance, the only scope for showcasing their empowerment comes from the themes selected for dance choreography. With the selection of women centered themes like *Sri*, *Leelavati*, *Dasamahavidya*, *Navadurga* etc. there has been a demonstration of the feminine energy.

Nevertheless, in the Orissan scenario, both female dancers and choreographers have not been able to perspectivise these strong women centered themes in the light of the empowerment project. They have thoroughly misinterpreted "women's empowerment" in terms of economic independence and freedom of stage performance. They have not conceptualized the idea in terms of executing it on stage. They are yet to express their emancipation through the medium of dance.

Whatever the minor issues within *Odissi* dance, the central concern of this study has been an inquiry into the larger and more important question of how far can *Odissi* go with changes or innovations and remain 'authentic' while still operating in a new context? When do such attempts of creativity violate the identity of *Odissi* dance? There must be a point in time when the tradition of 'authentic' *Odissi* actually becomes irrelevant in the new context. In that case one needs to accommodate the transformed nature of the societal components. This new form might draw a lot from the existing *Odissi* and yet be different and more meaningful and communicative in a new milieu.

GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

Abhinaya- expressional or emotive dance

Aranya- forest

Ardhanareeswara- a dance portraying the fusion of Shiva and Shakti

Astapadis- song with eight stanzas

Baiji tradition- prostitution

Bandha nritya- the acrobatic traditional dance

Batu-Nritya- adopted from the movements of Shiva, this piece is usually the second item of the Odissi repertoire.

Bhakti Srungara- devotional eroticism

Bhava- emotion

Brahmin, Karan and Khandayat- local castes in Orissa

Chau dance- tradition of the martial dance

Chowka- quadrangle posture of the body created with the help of shoulders, hands, knees and legs.

Damru- a musical instrument

Dasavatara- dance based on the ten incarnations of Vishnu

Devadasi- female temple dancers

Ganika- women meant for entertainment of the public through dance performances

Gauni- singer

Gita Govinda- one of the greatest work of Sanskrit Poetry by Saint Jayadev

Gopis- friends of Radha

Gotipua- a class of male dancers in Orissa.

Jatras- theatrical performance

Karana- basic dance unit of *Odissi* consisting of a pose, hand gesture and movement

Kirtans, bhajans, padas, harikathas-

Lasya- graceful feminine movements.

Madal Panji - Jagannath temple chronicle
Mahari- local name for Devadasi in Orissa
Mangalacharan- an invocatory piece of Odissi dance
Maro goli chowka ko- can briefly be translated to damn the posture of chowka
Moksha- usually the concluding item of the repertoire symbolizing 'liberation'
Mridanga, Dhol- different types of drums
Nachuni- dancer
Natya- drama
Natyasastra- first Indian treatise on dramaturgy
Navadurga- dance based on the nine incarnations of Durga
Nayika- heroine
Nitis- duties
Nrittamurti- dance posture symbolizing particular gods or Goddesses
Nrityagram- a dance village near Bangalore
Pala, Daskathia, Danda nacha- folk traditions of Orissa
Pallavi- dance based on a particular raga.
Pataka and vardahasta- hand gestures symbolising blessing
Rasikas- intellectuals
Rath Yatra- car festival of Jagannath
Sakhi Sampradaya- a cult of transvestites
Salabhanjikas - the feminine figures called the alasa kanyas are carved in the temple
Samapada- an *Odissi* dance posture depicted by simple standing with the feet together
Sampradayas- family tradition
Tandava - vigorous and energetic dance of Shiva, usually performed by men
Tribhangi- triangular pose created by the dancer's hips, waist and head.
Trishula- trident
Veena- a stringed musical instrument
Vrittis- regional varieties
Yaksha and Yakshini- deities

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