

Folk Dances of India – Part 2

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Abstract

India with its vast geographical and cultural diversity, is home to a rich tapestry of folk traditions that captures the vibrant spirit and rhythm of rural life. Amongst all these, folk dances hold a significant and unique part of this cultural expressions of joy, devotion and everyday experiences. Passed down through generations, these dances are deeply embedded in the customs, festivals and social rituals of the regions from where they originate.

Keywords

Folk dance, music, musical instruments, vibrant movements, social rituals, deity, harvest, community, colorful costumes

History

The history of folk dances in India is as ancient and diverse as the land itself. It is deeply interwoven with the country's socio-cultural fabric, tracing their roots to the earliest settlements - the agrarian and tribal societies. These dances have evolved over centuries as an intrinsic part of the everyday lives of people across regions. Each region developed its own dance style, closely aligned with language, dress, music and daily life. They emerged as a natural form of celebrations and rituals and served as a powerful medium to express joy, devotion, storytelling and community harmony an identity.

Folk dances faced neglect, suppression, or misinterpretation during colonial era. The urbanization and influence of western world led to a gradual decline in folk dances in many regions. However, it was due to the efforts of some reformers and cultural revivalists who realized the folk dances as essential to India's cultural identity, documented and worked towards preserving them.

Post independence there was a conscious effort to support, rediscover, and celebrate folk dances as expression of the nation's diversity.

Introduction

The rich cultural canvas of each region comprises many hues and is reflected in its folk dances. The folk dances characterized by vibrant energy and enthusiasm celebrate the traditions and way of life of common people. Each dance form reflects the unique identity and history of the region or community it originates from. These dances have been more than just forms of entertainment. Many of these dances were closely associated with indigenous deities, ancestral spirits and animistic practices. Performed during the sowing, harvesting, marriages, birth, and religious festivals. These dances were integral to both seasonal cycles and social customs of the place of origin.

It began as a ritualistic movement tied to early forms of worship and nature veneration. Dance was a way to invoke fertility, ensure good harvest, ward off evil, and celebrate seasons.

Types of Folk Dances

Folk Dances of Odisha

Deeply influenced by the local traditions, several indigenous dance forms took birth in the land of Odisha. Some of the popular folk dances are Ghumura dance, Sambalpuri, Chaiti Ghoda dance, Ranappa dance, Gotipura dance, Ruk Mar dance, Chhau dance and Mahari dance. Each dance form from costumes to footwork to gestures and expressions differ from one another.

Sambalpuri Dance: The colorful costumes, rhythmic beats and earthy elements combined make this folk-dance form stand out. Various dance forms such as Jaiphula, Dalkhai,, Dula Biha, Ghudka and Korma are categorized under this dance.

Dalkhai: This dance form is performed by the tribal women of western Odisha during the festivals like Nuakhai and Dussehra. They sing songs in praise of Lord Krishna and dance on the rhythmic beats of the drums. The dancers move in a circular pattern.

Chaiti Ghoda Dance: This dance form, also known as Godha Dance is popular among the fishing communities residing in the coastal belts of Odisha. The dance performance is held during the festival and begins from the full moon of Chaitra and is performed throughout the month. Deeply rooted in the Shakti cult this dance is precisely a dance drama. The dancers wearing elaborate attire come mounted on dummy horses.

Ranappa Dance: Lord Krishna's childhood stories are enacted through this dance performed on the stilts. It is popular in the rural areas of Ganjam district.

Gotipua Dance: Regarded as the precursor of the classical Odissi dance, Gotipura dance is performed by young boys who get dressed up in female attire. This dance is usually performed in the temple premises to entertain the deities. This dance form is characterized by acrobatic movements involving rhythmic footwork and balancing act.



Image 1: Gotipua Dance

Mahari Dance: The dancers belonging to the Devdasi community perform this dance and the costumes of these dancers have vibrant colors. Dancers wear heavy intricately designed jewelry. This dance form is practiced in the temples especially the Jagannath temple.

Folk Dances of Assam

The rich culture of Assam a rare fusion of Indo-Aryan, Indo-Mongolian, and Indo-Burmese influence and is evident in its various folk dance forms. Its folk dances reflect the vibrancy and diversity of its people. The various folk dances of the state are Bihu, Jhumur, Bagurumba, Deodhani, Ojapali, Satriya, Ankiya, Ali Ai Ligang Dance and Dhulia and Bhawariya.

Bihu: Celebrated during the Bihu festival this dance form primarily performed by young men and women is the most prominent folk dances of Assam. It is an energetic, rhythmic dance with rapid hand movements and brisk footsteps. The musical instruments used include Dhol, Pepa, Toka, Tala and the Gogona.



Image 2: Bihu

Jhumur: Jhumur dance locally termed as ‘Cha Baganor Jhumur Nach’ (dance of the tea gardens) is dance of the tea-growing community in Assam. The performers hold each other’s waist and dance in a rhythmic manner with amazing footwork. The name Jhumur is on account of the sound of bells tied around the ankles of the dancers.

Folk Dances of Andhra Pradesh

Lambadi: The Lambadi tribe commemorates the planting season and successful harvest by performing the Lambadi dance. During festive time a group of 15 -20 nomads dressed in colorful garments embellished with beads, needlework, and lace, adorning jewelry, bangles and anklets, perform this dance.

Bonalu Dance: This dance is performed in honor of Goddess Mahakali. The dancers balance pots on their heads. Rhythmic sounds and melodies praising the Goddess are used to balance the pots.



Image 3: Bonalu Dance

Veeranatyam: This dance form is performed by the Veerbhadra community in Shiva temples. The dancers carry a plate filled with camphor fire from their hands to their elbows and continue dancing until the fire is put out.

Folk Dances of Meghalaya

Meghalaya also known as “Abode of Clouds” is home to three tribal communities and each community has its own traditional music and dance. Deeply linked to the nature, harvest, religion and social rituals the dancers wear traditional costumes. Shad Suk Mynsiem Dance, Jhumair, Nongkram dance, Phagua and Karma are the folk-dance forms of this region.

Shad Suk Mynsiem Dance: This dance form performed by men and women belonging to Khasi tribe is a tribute for the bountiful harvest. The dancers wear traditional attires and dance gracefully to the drums and pipe music. The dancers make two different circles with girls dancing in the inner circle and boys in the outer circle.

Nongkram Dance: The dancers of the Khasi tribe perform this dance during the months of May and November to pay respect to the deity worshipped by the tribe. This dance form requires tremendous skills and energy and is performed by boys and girls.

Folk Dances of Tripura

Hojagiri Dance: The hojagiri dance is performed during Laxmi Puja, Durga Puja and the third day of Dusshera. Men play music while the women dance gracefully balancing the bottles or earthen lamps on their head. The dance is a symbol of femininity, grace, and resilience.



Image 4: Hojagiri Dance

Folk Dances of Manipur

Manipur, a culturally rich state in the Northeast India is famous for its unique and graceful folk and classical dance traditions. They are deeply rooted in the religious beliefs, nature worship and community celebrations.

Dhol Cholom: This dance form is performed during Holi festival and the dancers display acrobatic moves while playing dhol – a large drum, one of the instruments that dominates this dance forms. Men perform this dance and usually begin with a slow pace that gradually gathers pace

Conclusion

Folk dances are an integral part of India's rich cultural heritage, and vibrancy of its people, traditions and regions. They are more than just performances; they are vital cultural expressions that encapsulate the essence of the country's rich cultural diversity, history, passing on traditions to next generations and strengthening the community bonds. The folk dances of India reflect its soul and by celebrating these traditions, we honor the past, promote social harmony and ensure the continuity of India's rich cultural tapestry for future generations.

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About the Author

Dr Aparna Pradhan, doctorate in Zoology is an artist, bilingual writer, author, poetess, and moderator. She has authored nine books and has contributed to around 60 National and International anthologies. She is recipient of Prestigious Rabindranath Tagore Award for outstanding contribution in the field of Literature, Panorama Golden Book Award, Orchid Women Achievers of Goa Award, Savitribai Dada Saheb Phalke Women Achievers Award, Asia's prestigious Golden Book Award, Indian Women Achievers Award in Literature and Arts.

