

Unveiling the Art of Acting in Danda Nata: Embodying Tradition, Strength, and Performance

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Abstract

Danda Nata, or *Danda Nrutya*, is a revered folk theatre form deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Western Odisha. Originating from the ritualistic dances of Lord Shiva, this ancient art form has evolved into a vibrant theatrical performance that combines dance, dialogue, and music. Serving as both a religious festival and a medium for social awareness, *Danda Nata* holds significant cultural significance in the region. This paper provides a comprehensive examination of *Danda Nata*, delving into its origins, significance, performance structure, and artistic elements while highlighting its role in promoting cultural harmony and collective brotherhood in Western Odisha.

Introduction:

Danda Nata stands as a cultural gem of Western Odisha, reflecting the region's rich heritage and traditions. Rooted in religious reverence and social consciousness, this folk theatre form has captivated audiences for generations with its dynamic blend of dance, drama, and music. Despite its prevalence in various parts of Odisha, it is in Western Odisha that *Danda Nata* has flourished, carving out a distinct identity and garnering widespread acceptance. This paper aims to delve into the depths of *Danda Nata*, unravelling its intricate layers of history, performance, and artistic expression.

Origin and Evolution:

The term "Danda" carries multifaceted meanings, symbolising both a physical object and a form of punishment. Its association with Lord Shiva's cosmic dance, the *TandavaNrutya*, hints at its divine origins, while legends attribute its creation to various deities, including Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu. According to *ShaibaChandrika*, the progenitor of *Danda* is *Nirakara*, with Goddess *Hingula* residing within it. Over time, *Danda Nata* has undergone evolution, transitioning from ritualistic dances to a full-fledged theatrical festival. Its journey spans ages, from the mythical epochs of *Satya Yuga* to the present-day *Kali Yuga*, reflecting its enduring significance in Odia culture and spirituality.



Danda Nrutya at Bhabanipali Sambalpur,2017

Performance Structure:

Danda Nata unfolds through a meticulously structured series of performances, characterised by both daytime and nighttime acts. The daytime rituals encompass a diverse range of activities, including acrobatics, processions, and symbolic rituals, while the nighttime performances focus on storytelling and dramatic enactments. The five units of performance—*Bhumi Danda*, *Pani Danda*, *Bana Danda*, *Agni Danda*, and *Danda Suanga*—each hold symbolic significance, contributing to the immersive experience of the festival. From *Dhooli Danda's* awe-inspiring acrobatics to *Agni Danda's* ritualistic trials, each segment showcases the dedication and artistry of the participants, drawing spectators into a world of myth and magic.

Dramatic Elements:

Central to the allure of *Danda Nata* are its expressive forms of physical acting and dialogue-based performances. *Aangika Abhinaya*, or the portrayal of emotions through bodily movements, encompasses both simple physical actions and nuanced gestures. Characters such as *Kali*, *Shiva*, *Radha*, *Krishna*, and various social personas infuse the performances with distinct styles and movements, adding depth and authenticity to the narrative. *Vachika Abhinaya*, conveyed through poetic verses and prose dialogues, further enhances the theatrical experience, allowing characters to express their innermost thoughts and feelings with eloquence and passion.

Angika Abhinaya - an expressive physical appearance.

In the expressive forms of physical exercises, the *Danduas* mime certain everyday activities like sweeping the floor, sprinkling plants with water, sowing seeds, forming a *Kali* or *Shiva* temple, forming a well, depicting a weaving loom or agricultural field, or ploughing. Likewise, the different characters of *Danda Nata* in *Ratri* (Night) *Danda* perform different roles. In this act, we may find different dance steps, movements, and physical acts. Through *Aangika Avinaya*, the *Danduas* have been using their *Anga*, *Pratyanga*, and *Upanga* in a stylized and expressive manner. In *Parva* dance, the character who performs the role of *Kali* (in some places recognised as Lord Shiva) uses a special and unique type of movement and dance step. The *Binakaria* of *Danda Nata* also acts in a special step and movement. Likewise, characters like *Hadi-Hadiani* and *Julha Nartaka Parva-parvani, Iswar-parbati, Chadheia-Chdeaiani, Fakira-Fakirani, Nabachhnik, Sali Nabachhnikibhinoi, Kela-Keluni Bhalua-bhaluani, Jogi-jogiani, Deara-vauja, Baidhana, Patarasaaura-Saourani, and Beenakar-beenakaruni* use their special dance styles to perform. In *Leela Danda*, characters like *Radha, Krushna, Bishakha, Lalita, Chandrasena, and Duti* also use *Aangika Avinaya* in their performances.

Bachika Abhinaya: Expression conveyed through speech

Bachika Abhinaya refers to the expression conveyed through speech, prominently seen in drama and music, where emotions are conveyed through dialogue or singing. In theatrical performances like *Danda Nata*, there are two main types: *Suanga Danda*, focused on *Hara Parvati*, and *Leela Danda*, centered around *Radha* and *Krishna's* divine love. *Vachika Abhinaya* in these performances involves dialogue-based acting, utilizing poetic verse or prose to express characters' views, emotions, actions, and reactions.

Satwika Abhinaya (Use of Emotion and Different Rasa)

Satwika, the utilization of emotions and different *Rasa*, plays a crucial role in *Danda Nrutya*. This art form encompasses eight *Rasas*: *Srungar* (love), *Hashaya* (humour), *Karuna* (compassion), *Roudra* (anger), *Veera* (courage), *Adbhuta* (wonder), *Bhibastya* (disgust), and *Shanta* (peace), excluding *Bivatsha* *Rasa*. Beyond dialogue and acting, gestures, makeup, and costumes are integral to amplifying these emotions. In the *parva* dance of *Danda Nata*, emotions like *Adbhuta*, *Veera*, and *Viraam* are evident, whereas *Danda Suanga* and *Leela*

Danda exhibit Rasas such as *Srungar*, *Karuna*, *Hashya*, *Roudra*, and *Shanta*, tailored to the characters and circumstances portrayed.

Aharya Abhinaya (use of makeup and costume)

Another means of representation of the play is indeed the costumes and physical decorations of the actors and the theatre. In dramas and dance dramas, costumes and make-up are characterised by the sex, race, sect, class, or social position of the characters, giving the representation some semblance of reality. The decorations of the stage theatre, including lights and accessories related to the scene of the depiction, also enhance the relationship between the audience and the artist. In the ritual part of the *Danda Nata*, we find the *Bhoktas* (devotees) wearing Dhoti and *Gamuchha*. It is also vital to wear the holy threads, and in *Ratri Danda*, or the performance part, the characters wear costumes and makeup themselves as per their roles. Like the mythological characters:

Siva, Parvati,

Kali, Kartika,

Ganesha,

Binakaria,

Radha,

Krishna,

Chandrasena, etc.

They wear mythological costumes, and in social characters like *Hadi-Hadiani, Deara-Vauja, Sali-Bhinoi*, etc., they wear costumes like *dhoti, ganji, sarees*, etc. When the performer represents the animal characters, he wears costumes according to the animal, like *Bhalu, Brushava*, etc. Likewise, the performer also wears costumes according to the character.



Danda Nrutya at Bhabanipali Sambalpur, 2017

Conclusion:

Danda Nata stands as a testament to the rich cultural heritage of Western Odisha, embodying the spirit of religious devotion, artistic expression, and social cohesion. Through its diverse performances and artistic elements, it continues to captivate audiences and preserve Odisha's cultural legacy. As custodians of this ancient tradition, it is incumbent upon us to document and celebrate the legacy of *Danda Nata*, ensuring its preservation for future generations to cherish and enjoy.

Reference

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