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DANDA NACHA: AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL UNITY

ACHYUTANANDA BHUYAN

LECTURER, DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

KENDRAPARA AUTONOMOUS COLLEGE,

KENDRAPARA, INDIA

ABSTRACT:

This article makes a humble attempt to discuss on the topic: “DANDA NACHA: AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL UNITY.” For this purpose, the present study comprises four parts only. In first parts, it deals with the origin and significance of Dandanacha. The second parts deals with the suffering: the path of renunciation. The third parts deals with Saivism and its positive impact. Lastly, it deals with the concluding position of the essay. An attempt is made in this article to know how Danda Jatra is connected to various theories of punishment and especially Reformative and Preventive theory of punishment. A new terminology and theological theory of punishment is assumed to colloquial form of dance. Dandanacha is one of the most important traditional dance festivals organised in different parts of South Odisha and particularly in the Ganjam district, the Heartland of ancient Kalinga Empire. The Dandanacha is celebrated in the odia month of Chaitra (March- April) of every year. It's an ancient festival of the Kalinga Kingdom and still alive in and around the Odisha, particularly at Ganjam district. It is performed for over a period of 13,15 or 21 days.

KEY WORDS: Danda Nacha, Punishment, Saivism, Unity, Danduas, Social

INTRODUCTION:

Though dancing is an art, it's primarily for the sake of enjoyment and amusement of the individual performer and the audience. It (Dandanacha) serves as an instrument of social unity. Resting for about twelve months, spring season comes with pure joy, pleasure and happiness. Usually, spring arrives during the month of March and April with various fairs and festivals. The full of odisha dances various dances forms. Among these dance forms, Danda Nacha is one of the very popular folk dance in the Southern part of Odisha. Danda Nata of Odisha is also known as the 'Danda Jatra'. Danda Nacha is an unusual ritual performed by devotees in the Ganjam District of Odisha to appease Goddess Kali. Danda Nacha means 'Punishment Dance'. In this dance devotees inflicts pain on themselves.

At the time of Goddess Kali Chaitra Festival, this Danda Nacha is celebrated in a grand manner with much enthusiasm. Performed over a period stretching over thirteen days, Danda Nacha is a robust show of devotion to Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali. This dance festival is regularly held by an old traditional organization. People also celebrate Danda Brata, Rudrakali Brata, Rudrakali fasting, Meru along with Danda Nacha Jatra which are very popular among local audiences. It can be regarded as both traditional, modern and contemporary.

The opening ceremony begins in the middle of Chaitra (March-April) and continues till the Meru Sankranti which is variously known as Bisuba Sankranti or Pana Sankranti and etc. Goddess Kali is the main deity worshipped during Danda Nacha. So all the Shiva Temples of every village becomes the centre of all activities. All those bound by a pledge to join the Danda Nacha troupe gather at the Temple, dressed in white, orange or green linen/cotton, taking a silent, inner pledge known as Manasika. Beside the temple, there is a hall named Kamana Ghara or Danda Ghara. A yajna is conducted there with offerings to the holy fire accompanied by the chanting of mantras. When the yajna is over the priest offers a sacrosanct thread to each dandua.

MEANING AND ORIGIN OF DANDA NACHA:

The word Dandanacha is the combination of two words such as 'Danda' and 'Nacha' which means stick or punishment and dance or amusement. The origin of Dandanacha has been traced to the 8th century A. D. especially during the period of inception of Tantricism after degradation of Buddhism in Odisha. Dandanacha is an Indian dance festival that originated in the Ganjam district of of Odisha. It is a form of a religious festival that has theatrical and dance components. The dance is done mainly to worship Lord Shiva, the God of destruction of the Hindu mythology. There are other Gods and Goddess that are worshiped by the spiritual dance also, such as Krishna, Ganesh, Kali, Durga amongst others. It is evident that after degradation of Buddhism in Odisha, Saivism emerged as a popular religion, most particularly for the untouchables and low cast people into which the status of most of the Buddhism were relegated. Since

the upper-class Hindus monopolized the privilege of entry to the temple and debarred the untouchables and low castes from entering the Hindu temples, they began to worship Lord Shiva outside the Hindu temples. In due course of time they observed certain rites in connection with the worship of Shiva and Kali and started a festival, once a year, popularly called Dandanacha. Gradually these practices of the rituals and festivals become the integral part of Dandanacha and the practice turning to a tradition.

It is believed that the present day Danda nata is a part of the ancient chaitra Yatra festivals being celebrated every year at Taratarini Shakti /Tantra Peet. The Kalinga emperors organized this Chaitra festival for their Ista Devi, Taratarini. As per folk lore, during ancient period after 20 days of Danda practice the Danduas (Bhaktas) must assemble near Taratarini Shakti /Tantra Peet (Which is Ista Devi of the great Kalinga rulers) and with some herd rituals culminate their Danda on the last day. This practice continued for many years and chaitra Yatra which is still celebrated at Taratarini Shakti /Taratarini Peetha in the month of chaitra, is also another part of that old tradition. But later this Danda nata spread to different parts of UTKAL and Koshala. Now the old tradition was changed. Dandanacha groups increased abnormally and the Danduas culminating their Danda in their own Villages or locality instead of Taratarini Shakti /Taratarini Peetha.

While performing Danda Nacha musical instruments such as Dhol(drum), Jhanja(Cymbals), Mahuri or Kahali(Trumpet), Magaravina(a bow with a jingling bells), Mukhavina(a shahanai like wind instrument), Gini and Kartal etc are used.

Generally, Danda Nacha is performed in four phases namely, the Bandana(morning), Dhuli Danda(mid-day), Pani or Jala Danda(evening) and Agni Danda(mid-night). Once the performance is over, the Danduas leave the village in the morning in a procession while beating of the drums along with the images of deities to the doors of the next sponsored Bhakta where they would repeat the routine nata performance in the similar manner.

SUFFERING: THE PATH OF RENUNCIATION

People commit self-inflicted wounds to worship Lord Shiva because the philosophy or pathology of ancient Hindu says that for a person to be great, one has to have self - control over one's body (Kaya), mind (mana), speech (vakya). So, in order to achieve greatness, a lot of punishment i.e. Danda, to the individual must be undergone, so this is known as Danda Nacha. DANDA NACHA aims at arousing religious fervor as well as entertaining aesthetic pleasure among the spectators. The main aim of this type of folk dance is to promote spiritual upliftment through the self-discipline. People pay reverence to Danda dancers for their observance of religious rites during the course of their dance. According to the ancient Hindu philosophy, the greatness of an individual in this materialistic world depends upon his accomplishments of self – control over his own body (Kaya), mind (mana), speech (vakya). It takes tremendous amount of practice to gain this control and amounts to a lot of self – denials. Those who

achieve this are known as the Tri-Dandis or attainders of triple chastisement. Since this method of bringing purity of conduct involves a lot of punishment (Danda) to itself.

SAIVISM, DANDANACHA AND IT'S POSITIVE IMPACT:

It is mainly based on religious tradition of the worship of Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali. Odisha was a land of Saivism during the entire period between 500 A. D. to 1100 A. D. Most of the rulers of Odisha during the period were ardent worshipers of Lord Shiva. As a positive evidence of its popularity during the said period, we notice hundreds of Saiva temples scattered all over Odisha.

Under the Sailodbhavas, Saivism had become a state religion in Kongoda. The rulers of this dynasty were ardent Saivism who worshiped Shiva-linga on the summit of Mahindragiri. All their copper plate grants commence with invocation to Shiva. They assumed the Saivism epithets like Paramamaheswar, Nilakanteswar and Rudreswar in their copper plate grants. The archeological remains at Krushnagiri, Ganjam and Bhubaneswar bear testimony to the fact. Besides Kongoda, the whole coastal area considering of Kalinga and Utkala was strong hold of Saivism.

Origin of Saivism traced back to the period of Harapa and Mohenjodaro centered round with Vedic civilization. In India, it is one of the oldest forms of religions. From very early times, it would have existed in Odisha. As attested by archaeological monuments, origin of Saivism in the Odisha can be traced back to fourth – fifth century A. D. with its changing fortune in history. By the fourth – fifth century A. D. Saivism became the dominant form of religion of Odisha when both Jainism and Buddhism have receded back to the background.

In the Bhaskareswar temple at Bhubaneswar, it has been observed a huge Shiva linga which was originally a part of Asokan pillar built before Christ. From the close proximity of this temple a fragmentary lion Capital was dugout by the Historian Prof. K. C. Panigrahy now in the museum at Bhubaneswar. On the body of the Lingam and the lion Capital, there are ample evidences to prove that such destruction took place in the fifth century A. D. After heavy chiseling the pillar was converted into a Shiva linga. In front of the temple, the capital after deliberate breakage was buried within a very short distance from the Lingam. It appears that there was a violent struggle between the Buddhist and Shaivas during that period at the manner in which a Buddhist monument was converted into a phallic emblem. A tradition seems to have been found in Ekamra Purana where it has been described the history of Odisha from the orthodox standpoint. There was a dead fall war which said to have taken place between demons and Gods on the bank of the river Gandhapati. This river is now known as Gang flowing in the close proximity of Bhubaneswar. In this war demons were defeated and the Gods came victorious with the help of Mahadeva Shiva. By a traditional account, it is supported by archaeological evidence. If we said that the fifth century A. D. was the period of conflict, we shall not be far from truth that the Buddhism was

defeated by Saivism. Hence, there was revival of Hinduism in India in fifth century A.D. under the great Gupta Emperors of the North, and the same revival took place in the Odisha.

CONCLUSION:

This popular folk dance of Ganjam Danda Nacha is mainly based on mythological legends. It is influencing the society to a large extent by creating the sense of patriotic spirit, love for anti-caste, love for literature, love for self, beliefs in God, taste for music, for form of theatre and dance. It serves as an instrument of social unity. Punishment is the form of dance. Associated with ritualistic service, Dandanacha forms an institution of dance, music and dramatics blended with religious social reformation. It is an association of Universal Brotherhood. Mainly a worship of Lord Shiva, the God of destruction of the Hindu mythology, who is also the Lord of histrionic arts (Nataraj). This theatrical form brings into its fold a harmonious feeling of co-existence between followers of different philosophical doctrines between political principles and set of opinions.

Dandanata is a first vanishing performing art; it is unique as it involves dance, drama, music and sociology in a perfect blend, displays an unbounded creative energy that continues to be a vital force even today in a global perspective. Dandanata is a kind of 'brata or osa' in which the participants(*danduas*) observe with strict discipline. This is always preceded by a vow made to acknowledge a wish already fulfilled or to get rid of a misfortune or disease suffered by any member of the *danduas* family or expecting a wish to be fulfilled in future often birth of son. Apart from this spiritual reason, participation in *dandanata* is considered to be a religious or spiritual act. *Danduas* participate in it out of their devotion to Lord *Shiva* or Goddess *Kali*. Thus, the primary motives for one's participation is said to be removal of sin and attainment of liberation, fulfilment of desire in life here or here after. All those physical exercise, no matter whether of the expressive or of the pure and simple take place under the hot sun on hot ground for a period of two hours and more putting great strain on the energy and physique of the participants. For these reasons, it is also counted as punishment. The close physical contact between the *danduas* that is required in performing these exercises can be seen as an expression of the egalitarian ethos of the dance. Within the community of performing *danduas*, notions of purity stemming from caste distinctions are extinguished. However, with regard to persons, animals, food and things (such as friends, dogs, meat, modern thing), the need to avoid them and even the danger of becoming polluted by them, have increased. Again, *dandanata* is more a social messenger than a source of entertainment. In Odisha, It is perhaps the only form of performing art that is deliberately performed and participated by different communities. Though most participants are usually from a low-ranking caste, their social background has no meaning as there is no caste or class among the *danduas* during the *dandanata*. This egalitarian character of *dandanata* is also expressed quite over by the fact that all *danduas* dress in the same way, undergo some penances and observe the same restrictions. That is perhaps the reason, why people, even

philosophers or historians believe that it originated post Buddha to counter his spread. *Dandanata* is a secular institution having egalitarian ethos with traces of anti-caste and anti-Brahmanism conducted by member of sub-altern group.

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