

RELEVANCE OF DANDA NATA IN THE CONTEMPORARAY SCENARIO

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Abstract: In Ganjam district there is a gamut of folk art forms, one of the folk art form is *Danda nata*. It is very popular art form in this district, though *Danda nata* is performed in different part of Odisha, it is having some unique characteristics in Ganjam district, such as the time duration of celebration, rituals and presentation style. To understand the cultural, social and ritual importance of *Danda nata* the author carried a exploratory research study. In the research process the author followed interview technique for the collection of data and interviewed the exports and practitioners of *Danda nata*.

Key words: *Danda nata*, Ganjam district, exploratory research, interview technique, *Dholo* and *Bhukta*

Introduction

As per the Hindu calendar In the month *Chaitra*, when the temperature of earth is soaring to its pick and behaving like a furnace, and when by seeing the frightful calamitous appearance of the earth all living beings of the planet are praying for respite from this wrath of god. In the southern district of odisha known as Ganjam would be undulate and hover with a typical rhythm of *Dhola*(drum), *Mohuri*(traditional trumpet), and *Ganta*(babendil) *Gini*(Manjira) along with the rhythm you could listen a chanting slogan in regular interval “*Asila KalaPahada Bhangila Luhara Badha, piele mahandi pani, subarna Thalire hira parasile mukunda dev kan rani, Rudra Kaliki Bhoja Hai*”. When focus more into it you will witness a group of semi naked people worn saffron color loincloth with bare foot marching forward without caring the wrath of god, by waving the peacock feather broom in the air. Their each foot step moving forward spiritedly, adventurously and fearlessly as if the frightful behavior of the earth have no impact on them and their demeanor, is like they are predetermined to get anoint of the god by punishing themselves. It looks like to fulfill their wish they are ready to go any extent of self inflicting pain.

In fact these stubborn and self inflicting peoples are the devotee of lord Siva and goddess Kali. At present they are in penance to fulfill their wish, in local language they are called as ‘*Dandua*’, ‘*Bhuktha*’ and ‘*Sanayashi Putra*’. Right now they are performing a ritual of a age long tradition called ‘*Danada nata*’

and it is a folk art form of Odisha. The local meaning of *Danada nata* is, *Danda* means self inflicting pain or self punishment and *nata* means Dance. *Danda nata* is an age long tradition where they are putting themselves in a very tough and rigid lifestyle for some period, as they believe by punishing them self they can win the heart the lord Siva and with lords blessing they could fulfill their wishes. The peoples, those are perform this traditional art form are called *Dandua* or *Bhuktha* or *Rushi Putra* which means self flagellation. The folk art form *Danda nata* could be observed in many part of Odisha, but in Ganjam this art form is very unique and very popular.

Objectives of the study is-

- To understand the cultural importance of the this folk art form
- To understand the social importance of the folk art form
- To understand present situation of the folk art form
- To understand the use this folk art form for dissemination of social development messages.
- To understand how to rescue from present situation

Research Methodology

For this research, the author followed the interview technique to collect qualitative data from expert and practitioners. In the interview open end questions are asked by the researcher related

to the research problem and the research was conducted in unstructured manner. In unstructured method of interview the researcher asked the direct and open end questions to obtain required information about the research problem and the questions are framed to collect appropriate information only. This process is used in exploratory studies to obtain a clear and better understanding of the research problem.

An over view of *Danda Nata*

As per the Hindu calendar on the day, sun enters to the house of Pisces is called *Meena Sankranti*, on this auspicious day, the age old folk art form *Danda nata* kicked off. The name *Danda nata*, is derived from different sources according to expert's opinion, some say that the name is derived from two pair of sacred torch which is called '*Deepa Danda*' and it is one of the elements among the five elements worshipped by the *Dandau*(devotees). *Deepa Danda* are two pair of clay torch which is prepared in a sacred way by mixing five different kind of clay and for kiln they use five different kind of wood. Some experts say the name derived from the self flagellation life style of the devotees(*Dandua*), where they go through different rituals of self inflicting pain during the period of *Danada nata*, called *Danda*(means self punishment). They believe their magnanimous service to lord Siva will help in earning the

benediction of lord which could benefit them in fulfilling their wishes.

There are more than 100 *Danda Nata* groups are there in the district of Ganjam and every year the number is increasing gradually, some are even 500 years old. The different *Danda nata* groups follow different time period to complete their tenure, some follow 21days, some 18 days and some 13 days but the rituals of *Danda nate* are same for very group and they have to follow it very strictly.

In order to a *Danda nata* group it required atleast 13 members or devotees those are called *Bhuktha* or *Dandua*. Among the 13 the head is called as the '*Pata Dandu*' or '*Pata Bhukta*', others 12 *Bhukta* are companion to the *Pata bhukta*. The *Pata Bhuktha* or *Pata Dandua* is the main priest of *Danda* group and all rituals performed under his guidance. Generally the senior and experienced devotee of the group appointed as *Pata dandua*.

Believes and Rituals of *Danda Nata*

Danda nata is the mixture of *Siva*, *Saktha*(worshipped to Goddess Kali) and Jain cults, which can be observed in the rituals performed in *Danda nata*.

One day before the '*Meena sankaranti*' the *pata dandua* of the group will commission the devotees(*Dandua* or *Bhukta*) those will express their desire to be a *dandua* or devotee. In the village

temple the *Pata dandua*, takes the oath to maintain a hermit(*sanyashi*) or ascetic life style till the end of ‘*Meru Sankranti*’ and after the tread ceremony the *Pata Dandua* will commissions all the *Bhuktha* or *Dandua* or devotees to the group. During the period of ascetic life, they have to boycott all their relationship with family and other social life.

The part about *Danda nata* is, there is no social and religiosity discrimination, once a person become a *dandua* or devotee(*sanayshi*), all are equal and all will be treated as one. Another essential part of *Danda nata* is the *Dandua* have to lead an ascetic life, where they have to lead their life with minimum requirements, such as, a *Dandua* have to manage with two pair of *gerua dhati*(saffron color loincloth), walk with bare foot, remain empty stomach until dusk. They are allowed consume food only after sunset and while consuming food if they any other sound apart from *Dhola*(drum), *Mohuri*(traditional trumpet), and *Ganta*(babendil) *Gini*(Manjira), they would give up eating and wait until next sunset. During the period *Danda nata* they do not cut or clean or shave their hair and beard. The toughest challenge is they can’t sleep at night during the period of *Danada nata*.

Cooking food is another major aspect of *Danda nata*, where the food is prepared for *Danda group* under the guidance of a very

senior *Bhukta*(devotee). The traditional rituals strictly followed, where along with senior *Bhuktha* only few companions (not all) are allowed into the kitchen. The food should be cooked over the wooden stove and the food menu is very simple. It consist of Rice and *Dalma*(*Dalma* prepared with the mixture of moong pulses and vegetables),the vegetables are used for *Dhalma* are not chopped rather crushed.

It is the culture of *Danda nata*, the person who becomes a *Dandua* or hermit, one from his female member of the family have to follow similar discipline, it could be his mother if he is not married or it could be his wife, if he is married. The female member has to continue the same life style by staying at home.

In *Danda nata* they worship five important elements, they are *Patta. Bava, Dipa Danda, Gouri Beta* and *Dhola*.

Patta is a triangle temple structure, prepared with bamboo slices which is painted with a picture of kali and Siva hanged at the end of bamboo stick.

Bada is holy fire of *Danda nata*, it is thick coiled structure prepared by braided rice straws, which is used to ignite fire for all ritual of *Danda nata*.

Deep danda is holy touch (A clay torch have small handle with burning material)

Dhola(drum) is another element of *danda Nata*, finally the *Gouri Beta*(a bamboo stick with 13 knots, treated as body part of lord Siva)

To maintain a hermit life style, during the period of *Danda nata*, the group resides in a village temple or at a deserted place, which is far away from the crowd area. The *Dana nata* group spent their days by performing *Danda nata* rituals on the invitation of the devotees. These devotees have a common belief that by performing age long religious ritual at their place, lord Siva would be blessing them to fulfill their wishes.

There are 16 different kind of *danda* performed in a day by the *Dandua's*, one of it is *Dhuli Danda*(terra firma punishment). As part of self inflicting pain *Dhuli danda* is performed in the afternoon, in the courtyard of the invitee and it is performed on the terra firma. In this *Dhuli Danda* the *Dandua* perform 16 different kinds of *Danda*, if somebody watches it closely observe, one could find different kind of Yoga postures in their performance. In *Dhuli danda* they perform day to day life of a villager in the form of drama or act. The act starts with different kind of agriculture activities of a farmer, then in the next act they construction temple for community worship and to avoid conflict of religiosity discrimination. Further in their act they also show digging a well for the community. This gives the moral how to avoid the water scarcity problem in the village. Every element in their act like a well or temple or bunds of

cultivation land is exhibited through human structure which is constructed by *dandua*. Through *Dhuli Danda* the group tries spread different kind of social messages, such as information of contemporary agriculture techniques, social and demotic problems of a farmer and how to overcome from it and how to stay peacefully in a community by helping each other. All acts are performed in the form of musical drama and in folklore style with the companion of traditional music instruments like *Dhola*(drum), *Mohuri*(traditional trumpet), and *Ganta*(babendil) *Gini*(Manjira) and Rudra Vina(is a local manufactured instrument prepared with three feet long bamboo stick decorated with colorful velvet cloth and both the end of bamboo stick fixed with a set of small size ghungoor).

Another important *Danda* is *Pani Danda*(water punishment), this is performed after the completion of the *Dhuli Danda*, where they go to the village pond or river to perform the rituals of *pani Danda*. In this segment, all *Dandua* or *Bhukta* take 16 times dip in the pond or river and every time they come out from the dips they collect a handful of clay, with the collected they construct a Siva linga on the river bank and they warship it in form of lord Siva.

In the evening the *sandhy Arati*(evening religious ritual) is offered by the *Pata Bukhta*(head of the devotees) where they worship the five elements(contemplated god) of the *Danda nata*. Only after the *sandhya arati*, the *dandua* or *bhukhta* drink coconut water or lassie which is prepared with the mixture of

water, jiggery(*Nabata*), black paper, *Lia*(local staple food prepared from paddy rice)and the other fruits. It is the only time when they take some intake as a drink in the whole day.

The food preparation process start after the *Arati*, the diet of *Danda nata* is very simple and nutritious; the devotees eat only vegan food which is prepared by a group of devotees. The food menu is very simple, it is the boiled rice and ‘*Dalma*’(prepared with *Mooga Dali*(split mung beans) and vegetables). While having food the devotees follow some stringent rule, like the devotees can’t chow the food stuffs, they are allowed only to swallow it, the reason is they are restrict from touching the upper and lower jaws as a part of their *Danda*(punishment). The food which is skipped by the devotees is considered as Prasad (sacred food) for the common devotes. Another important event in *Danda Nata* is while they eating food the surrounding must be very calm and silent because while eating food if they listen any kind of noise or sound they will stop eating and desert the food for the day, to avoid the other sound they beat *Dhola*(drum), *Mohuri*(traditional trumpet), and *Ganta*(babendil) *Gini*(Manjira)

At midnight when they proceed to the residence of the devotee for the night ritual, another important *Danda* performed called *Agni Danda*(Fire punishment). The main attraction of *Agni Danda* is the fire work performed by the two *Dandua* or *Bhuktha*. By dancing on the rhythm of drums, they throw fire

balls to the sky, it done by throwing the inflammable rash powder (*Jhuna gunda*) on clay torch towards sky which creates fire balls.

Kali nata(Kali dance) is another attraction of *Danda nata*, for this dance the audience wait for hours. This dance is very horrified and attractive, it is performed by the *Pata Dandua* who dressed up with black coloured cloth and headed with the *Patta*(a triangle structure prepared from bamboo strips and painted with the picture where goddess Kali is crushing lord Siva) perform this dance on the rhythm of drum, initially it starts with slow rhythm and gradually the tempo rises and the dance gains momentum, the dance will continue until the *Pata dandua* gets fainted, it is believe that goddess Kali appears in the *Pata dandu* while performing the Kali dance. One can't feel the divine and spiritual atmosphere of situation, until he doesn't witness and experience it solely.

For the entertainment of the villager, guest and invitee, in courtyard of devotee the *Danda* group perform different folk dramas. The drama based on the story of *Chadheya Chadheyani*(those catch the wild birds), *DubuDubu*(the nomad couple), *kela Keluni*(snake charmer and his wife), *Dhoba Dhobuni*(washer man and woman) etc. the story of *Chadheya Chadheyani* is all about, after long austerity *Chadheya*(bird catcher) gets a divine birds catching net from lord Siva as a benediction. The *Chadhaya* starts killing all wild and rare birds by going against his commitments not to kill few rare birds. As

an initial warning lord Siva sends *Dubuduba* to warn the *Chadhey* but arrogant *Chadheya* didn't stop with that. Finally lord Siva sends *Naga Naguni*(snakes) to kill *Chadheya* as punishment for killing innocent wild birds. When the *Chadheya* was on the death bed due to snake bite the two wives of *Chadheya* worships lord Siva their husband's life, to save the life of *Chadheya* lord Siva sends *SapuaSpuni* to remove the Snake Poison. After rebirth the *Chadheya* takes oath not to kill the wild and rare birds and started protecting wild and rare birds.

In the story of *Dhaba bhobuni* they are trying to disseminate message of the danger consequence of alcohol drinking. All the stories dramatically presented in *Danda nata* are carrying social messages for the audience through simple form of presentation.

With time there has been many changes come in this performances, initially the *Danda* group introduced mythological stories like *Ramayan*, *Mahabharat*, *Kansha Babha*, etc. But now days they performing modern dramas and operas and with changing times in the name of entertainment the performances are becoming more vulgar, they are going far away from the real motto of *Danda nata* and the age long tradition is in danger of losing its identity.

Historical and Mythological Background of Danda Nata

It is believed that, once five sons of *Devaraj Indra*, five sons of Lord *Brahma* and three sons of *Kubera*, while returning home after having finished their education, found *Maha muni Katru* offering his prayer to the sun. The arrogant sons through animal flesh and bone to create disturbance in his prayer, after finishing his prayer when *Maha muni Katru* found the nuisance work of the *Devaputra*, he became very angry and cursed on them to get infected by the leprosy disease, then all 13 *Devaputra* got infected with the disease. The moment their parents were acknowledged regarding the incident they rush to *Maha muni Katru*, apologized for their children's mistake and asked for the solution of recovery. The *Maha muni* said lord Siva can help them in this regard and when the parents went to lord Siva and urged for his help, lord Siva said, all 13 *Rushi putra* have to worship goddess *Rudra Kali* for 13 days. After 13 days of rigorous worship the *Devaputra* will be unshackled from the curse. Since then the practice of worshiping of lord Siva and goddess Kili have been ensuing in the name of *Danda yatra* or *Danda nata*.

But historically there is no proper evidence about the origin of *Danda nata*, as per Dr. Pradeep pattanaik an eminent researcher and writer of social art forms of Ganjam, Dr. Pradipta Chandra Singh a researcher of folk art form of Ganajam and Dr. Joyti Ranjan pattanaik an eminent media person, the genesis of *Danda nata* may be found in the mid of 16th century, when few disciples of Jain and Buddha Sect., segmented from their parent

group and started worshiping Lord Siva and goddess Kali by adopting some rituals of Siva and *Saktha* cult. This practice later on accepted by common masses as *Danda Yatra* or *Danda nata* with adding some new activities of performing arts.

Finds and conclusion

As per the exports all rituals performed in *Danda nate* have lots of similarity to the rituals performed Buddha, jain, Siva and *Saktha* cult. The *Dhuli Danda* performed in the afternoon is similar to the Jain and Buddha culture, the *Pani Danda* performed in the pond or river in the evening is similar to the Siva culture and the *Agni Danda* similar to *Saktha* Culture where the devotees worship goddess Kali for sorcery or black magic. There are ample of evidence available in the parts of Ganjam where some section of Buddha and Jain cult started practicing sorcery and black magic towards end by self inflecting pain to please goddess Kali. And since inception it is considered that lord Siva is the worshiping god of downtrodden people.

As per eminent media personal of Odisha Dr. Joyti Ranjan Pattanaik the *Danda nata* is a revolt of the lower caste against the caste system or social stratification. As per his version that

we can witness it in the *Danda* group, where everyone is treated equal before the eyes of god, there no discrimination in name of religion or caste. So *Danda nata* practice is an openly revolt against the Brahman culture.

One more explanation he given as a evidence of revolt is the slogan the *Danda* groups are chanting, as per his version the slogan say's "*Asila Kalapahada Bhangila Luhara Bada, peile mahandai pani, suna thalire hira prshile mukunda deva kan rani, Rudra kali ku bhaja hai*". It means the highest power of Brahman, the mighty king of *puri Mukunda Dev* second is defeated by a Muslim invader know as *Kalapahada* and the Odia community is in danger, so it is time to seek the help of goddess Kali for rescue from the tragic situation. Here, as per Dr. Pattanaik the chanted slogan is surely a revolt against the higher caste and against the age long social domination of one community.

As per Dr. Pattanaik and Dr. Singh *Danda nata* were the best medium for them to disseminate different social, cultural and developmental messages among the masses. The different *Danda* performed by *Dandua* during the period of *Dhuli Danda* is carries a powerful message of how to lead a peaceful community life by helping each other, like for water scarcity they dig a well for the community use. To avoid religion discrimination they constructed a temple for community worship. Through the story of the farmer they tried to explain a

family life can be very smooth and pleasant with mutual understanding between wife and husband. Each act performed in the *Dhuli danda* was meant for the dissemination of social messages.

The acts performed at midnight, also carries a valuable message of conservation of wild life and environment protection through *Chadheya Chadheyani* story. Where as in the story of *Dhoba Dhobani* they trying to tell, how consumption of alcohol create problem in a family and in the human society.

Dr. Pattanaik and Dr. Singh both are very much disappointed as well as worried with the wrong practice in *Danda nata* such as the vulgar dance and the introduction of modern operas. They feel this practice can lead the age long traditional art form towards distraction. At the same time they expressed anger over the vulgar dance performance in *Danda nata*, as per their view on one hand they worship the woman form - goddess Kali, while on the other hand you enjoy the naked dance performed by another woman. But Dr. Joyti Ranjan Pattanaik have different opinion, as per his statement, the midnight performance were meant for audience, not for the devotees, if any changes comes in the form of social message it should be welcomed by the audience, yes regarding the vulgar dance he also expressed disappointment over the development.

Even after all these reviews, the exports have agreed at a point that this traditional art form still has lots of relevance to spread the development messages. It's true that today we have many

modern methods to disseminate the development messages but due to its simplicity in language and approach the age long art form *Danda nate* could be a very good tool of communication for the village audience, the fact currently near about 70% of population are living in villages of India.

It is true that there have been many changes and new things appeared in the *Danda nata*, but the religiosity value of this age long art form never degraded in the minds and hearts of the devotees. Mr Krushna Sahu a lawyer in profession has been performing role of *Dandua* since last 14 years and still not lost his faith in the age long religious practice, he believes because of the grace of Lord Siva and Goddess Kali he achieved many things in his life and he have full faith on the religiosity practice of *Danda nata*.

Another example is, Mr. Hrushi Kesh Mahapatra who is native of village *Galeri* of Ganjam district, since his childhood he used fumbling while speaking, but after joining the *Danda nate* he recovered very fast and now he speaks very fluently. As per Raghunath Mahankuda of berhampur city, who was once selling fruit on streets in a small amount, but the day he joined *Danda nata* he prospered like anything, it was all because of the grace of lord Siva and Goddess Kali, he believes.

Suggestions

It is true there have been many wrong practices entering in the *Danda nata* sacraments, but it happens only in some segments of the art form which are performed in the midnight. But there have been no change in the rituals of *Dhuli Danda*, *Pani Danda* and *Agni Danda*, and the sacrament of *Danda nata* still in intact. Here, the good news is every year the numbers of *Danda* group are increasing steadily; it means the faith of the people on this age long practice is not lost. The issue, envision of vulgarity, can be controlled by forming a self regulatory body by the *Danda nata* groups. But in the name of public demand or reformation it is unfair to allow the exploitation of nudity and vulgarity in to the age long art form.

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