

Course Name : Bachelor of Physical Education

Year : IInd(Part-3)

Paper Name : Skill and Prowess

Paper No. B

Lecture No. 29

Topic no. : Part-III(D)

Lecture Title : Indian Folk Dances

Introduction

Rajasthani Dances

Hello and welcome to yet another module on physical education. We had discussed something about the various folk dances in India and we will be continuing our discussion today also and we will try to bring in as many folk dances that we can in the limited time for your benefit.

Ethnologically, Rajasthan presents a varied picture: there are many tribes comprising of the Sansis, the hereditary criminals, the Kamaras, the Banjaras (the nomads) and the Gujjars, the Kathods, the Bhils (who are found in all parts) and the Rebaris. The agriculturists sow bajra, jawar and maize; many agricultural cults revolve around the harvest of these. Camel and sheep provide the basis of animal husbandry. Dance forms such as the Ger, the Gher Ghoomara, the Ghoomar, the Jhumar, are performed at both the tribal and village level: indeed, the Jhumar has travelled upward and has become the regional dance of the urban centres also.

Gher Ghoomar

The Gher Ghoomar of the Sansis is the simplest of the dances, both in content and form. It begins with a slow movement where men and women first dance in two separate lines and then form a circle with a man and woman alternating. The tempo of the dance increases gradually to a point where each person has both a rotating movement around his own axis, as also a revolving movement along the circumference of the circle. The hip movements are the most characteristic feature of this dance. There is both instrumental and vocal music

accompaniment to this dance.

The Sansi and Kanjars from Ajmer have their own variety of dances which are different from the Sansis of other regions of Rajasthan. Nevertheless, these are also mixed dances which are performed on festive occasions to the accompaniment of a dholak, jhalar and algoza. As a particular dance develops, it gains in tempo and the women's movements have an unbelievable swiftness. Pirouettes, circle rotating and revolving movements abound. In all these the torso is used as one unit, so are the lower limbs. Movements are circular. The Bhils of Rajasthan have a variety of dances, which correspond to the agricultural cycle.

Ghumer

The Ghumer dance is the very life-blood of the Bhil culture. Performed at all seasons, it is always accompanied by songs of love, glory or defeat. Men and women move in a circle, one half of men and the other of women. This Ghumer dance should be distinguished clearly from the dance of the same name prevalent in Rajasthan amongst the members of urban society; today the latter is a popular ceremonial dance amongst the aristocracy of Rajasthan. The Ghumer dance of the Bhils is a much more virile dance and is like the Ghumer dance of the Sansis. Ghumer of the urban centres becomes a political social dance of women.

Raika

A mixed martial dance is the Raika. Men and women start in two rows. The men hold swords. Men sing, invoking the gods to grant them strength in order to defeat the enemy. Men and women then form a circle and move in steps, which are characterised by a sliding movement of one foot and a shifting of the hip girdle from side to side. The dance begins slowly but reaches a climax, when the men brandish their swords in a frenzy.

Jhoria

Amongst the dances which revolve around the life cycle is a marriage dance called Jhoria. The Jhoria literally means a wooden stick. The men form one circle, the women another one and they perform a vivacious dance to the accompaniment of the dhol, shehnai and nagara. Other dances are also performed on the occasion of marriages. The gait of the women in all these dances, is the characteristic feature of the Bhil dancing of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. The body is held relaxed, the torso is used as one unit, but there are some curved movements demanding the use of upper chest and lower

waist separately. While the tempo is fast, there is little use of strong energy. There is hardly any instrumental musical accompaniment; only the song of the women forms the constant base of the dance. They perform a Garba dance on the night of Navaratri. A pitcher, beautifully decorated, is placed in the centre and the women sit around clapping. Gradually, they get up and walk in unison round the pitcher.

Gauri

Gauri is a religious dance-drama of the Bhils : it is performed by the Bhil men in the months of Sawan and Bhadon. The dance revolves around the worship of the deity Bhairavanath. The chief worshipper is the Bhoya who goes into a trance while dancing: others dance in circles around a trishul while keeping time with the parat and thali. Many different types of dresses are worn by the dancers, representing different characters. In form and style this is a ritual dance-drama, rather an occupational dance.

Gher

The Gher dance is a favourite dance of the Mina tribe who are akin to the Bhils; this is performed during the Holi festival. As the dance gains in tempo, the dancers form themselves into circles. This is predominantly a man's dance. Also, there are the Bhil dancers of Jalore district, amongst which the Dhol dance is the most popular. Each dancer has a big drum (dhol) which he plays while dancing. Other dancers carry naked swords in their mouths.

Valar

Valar is a typical dance of the Garasias. Its song is woven round the beauties of nature, the starry night, the moon, the mountain and the restless rivers; it is an expression of romantic feelings and is in a lyrical mood. The sentiments of the song are presented through suitable gestures. Artistically, the dance is highly developed; unlike other tribal dances it seeks to establish a correlation between the word, sound and the gestures. Also the open strong movements of the men of the deserts give place to more languorous movements.

Tera Tali and Geeder

The Komar tribe performs the Tera Tali which is an elaborate ritual with many elements of dance. It is generally performed by two or three women who sit on the ground. Manjiras or small cymbals are tied to different parts of the body of the dancer. The dancer's face is covered with a veil and a naked sword is held between the teeth: a decorated pot is balanced on the head. The dancer holds a

manjira in each hand. It is said that there are thirteen different ways of striking the manjiras and perhaps thirteen manjiras are tied to the body of the dancer. Thus equipped, the women squat on the ground and produce a variety of sounds. Sometimes, in the course of the dance, many imitative actions signifying the grinding of corn, the milking of the cow are also portrayed. The sitting position does not change, but the women shift or slide on the ground. Movements of the upper limbs are intricate. The dance is accompanied by men who sing the song to the accompaniment of ek tara and manjiras.

In contrast are the dances of the sturdy tribe of Sidh Jats who live in the remotest part of the Thar desert. They are followers of Guru Gorakhnath and are famous for their yogic feats. A huge fire is lit, big drums and pipes play the music, and a song is sung. The dance is performed to this accompaniment. A group of Sidh Jats jump into the fire and dance vigorously in a normal manner for an hour or so. This fire dance takes place in March-April during a mela (fair) held in memory of Guru Jasnath.

Geeder

Geeder is danced by the tribes of the Shekhavari area. It begins fifteen days before Holi. In this, only men take part. Drums are kept on a raised platform and the dancers form circles. Sticks are also used. It resembles the Gher in many ways. In this and other dances, we observe the coalescing of the levels of agricultural functions and myth.

North East Dance forms

Now let's go to the North-East

Manipuri dancing developed in the North-eastern part of India, has two simultaneous traditions, namely, Animism and Hinduism.

Laiharoba festival,

Laiharoba festival, invoking village gods has mainly the dance of the priestess describing the primitive concept of cosmology. Since the last two hundred years, due to Gaudiya Vaishnavism, dance and music developed into a most stylised, classified and dignified art form around the theme of Lord Krishna and Radha. Dance and music were the integral parts of the religious lives of the people. Innumerable gurus and artists delved deep into the Vaishnavite Sangeet Shastras and literature as well as manuscripts available in Manipur on dance and music. Inspired by them, they increased the store-house of dance movements,

talas and rhythm patterns and musical compositions. They evolved their own system of music and dance and even wrote various manuscripts.

Throughout the year, each and every social and religious festival is celebrated with different forms of dance and music e.g. dances with drums like Dhol, Dholak, Dafat, Khajari in Holi festival, dance with claps in Ratha Yatra festival, dance with cymbals in Jhulan Yatra, dance with sword and spear in Durga Pooja, and dance with Kartal and drum in Natpala in different social and religious festivals such as birth, marriage, shraddha and before Rasleelas. The themes of childhood pranks of the Lord Krishna as well as the divine love of Lord Krishna and Radha pervade in most of these festivals. Rasleelas and Sankirtans are the highly developed dance-forms revealing the high aesthetic religious feeling of the people of Manipur. Rasleelas go on for 8 to 10 hours in the temple courtyard from dusk to dawn. The religious people of Manipur shed tears of joy experiencing it as the real spirit of the Lord. All the technical elements mentioned in the Sangeet Shastras are found in Rasleelas such as Nritya, (Pure Dance), Nritya (Interpretative dance) and Natya (Theme expressed through four kinds of Abhinaya).

The songs are sung in Padavali language such as Brajabali, old Bengali, Sanskrit, Braja and now into Manipuri language written by the devotional poets like Chandidas, Vidyapathi, Gyandas, Jayadeva, etc. They have a variety of talas ranging from four beats to sixty-eight beats and their various rhythm patterns as well as dances on Nritya and Nritya Prabandhas, Manipuri dance is one of the most graceful and lyrical dance styles of India. The swaying movements of the neck and torso are inspired from the bamboo trees tilting in the breeze. The movements are rounded, continuous mingling into each other like the waves of the sea. There is an equal emphasis on the movements of the different parts of the body. The meaning of the songs is conveyed through hand-gestures facial expressions and body movements in a subdued, dignified and suggestive way.

In the Rasleela, thirty to forty girls wear the gorgeous costumes consisting of a mirrored stiff skirt, upper half-skirt and a veil creating an ethereal effect. In Sankirtan, male dancers with Kartal and Mridang wear white dhotis and turban creating a serene and dignified atmosphere. In the festival dances, women wear the hand-woven and embroidered phanek with stripes and white thin scarf.

A traditional and classical Manipuri dancer has a great challenge to present these dances into the modern theatre having different demands. She should first have a thorough knowledge of technique as well as the traditional dance and its other related aspects and then should present it in terms of modern concept of recomposing and rechoreographing it, keeping the original form and spirit

intact. Such creative work within the tradition will enrich and strengthen the old classical tradition.

Assamese Dances

The heritage of classical dance in Assam is of remote origin. There is an intimate relationship between this style of dancing and the theory as propounded in Sanskrit treatises on Dances of India. These classical forms of Assamese dances are divided into many forms such as the Ojapali, Devadasi, Shri Shankari dance etc.

The Marga Nritya or the classical dance of Assam dates back to the age of the Mahakavyas.

The well-known Chinese pilgrim, Huen-Tsang, who paid his historic visit to Kamrupa, that is ancient Assam, during the regime of King Bhaskar Varma in the 7th century A.D. had referred to the dance which prevailed at that time. The existence of Dalutragana that is a temple danseuse or devadasi was distinctly mentioned in the copper plate of King Shri Vanamala Varma, who ruled in 9th century.

In Assamese dances, Hastas (hand gestures), Shirokarma (movement of the head), Padachari (foot-work), Karana (Posture), etc. are performed after the manner of Natya Shastra or Sanskrit

treatises on dance. The foot-work in an Assamese classical dance is extremely intricate and is called Gati or Bulan. It always reflects the theme of the dance in its infinite variation, speed and pattern. There are Hasti Bulan, i.e., the slow majestic steps of the elephant, Ghora Bulan, i.e., the swift galloping steps of the horse, Maira Bulan, i.e., the majestic steps of a peacock and so on. The dancer playing the role of the King moves his feet in a majestic grace. The sages move their feet in a way expressive of their being in meditation. The youthful princes move with rhythmic grace and a warrior moves in quick strides.

There are several kinds of Karanas or Bhangas, i.e., poses of the body in an Assamese dance. They are expressive of meaning and require to be mastered by long practice. These postures of the body accompany the movements of the head, neck, eyes and feet. The mastery of the movements is a matter of long practice under expert guidance. The hand gesture is called Hasta, commonly known as Mudras. They are performed either with a single hand (Asanguta Hasta) or with both the hands (Sanjuta Hasta). These gestures that are expressive of meaning are called Shree Hastas and those performed only for the sake of beauty and rhythm are called Nritya Hastas. The combination of all the Hastas will be nearly one hundred.

Ojapali

Ojapali dance is a prominent form of Assamese dance, and in this form, song predominates. Only small cymbals called Khuti Talas provide the musical accompaniment to songs. The Oja (Sanskrit Upadhyaya) who is the leader of the chorus and an expert in dance, dances with a song on his lips and dramatic movements of the body. Emphasis is laid on the Hastas or Mudras. His companions known as Pali (Sanskrit Palita) i.e., assistants repeat the song following the master closely. The Oja expresses the meaning of the song with synchronised movements of the hand, eyes, neck, head and feet. There are three kinds of Ojapali dances, namely-Vyasageet Oja, Suknarayani Oja and Ramayani Oja.

Conclusion

Ethnologically, Rajasthan presents a varied picture: there are many tribes comprising of the Sansis, the hereditary criminals, the Kamaras, the Banjaras (the nomads) and the Gujjars, the Kathods, the Bhils (who are found in all parts) and the Rebaris. The agriculturists sow bajra, jawar and maize; many agricultural cults revolve around the harvest of these. Camel and sheep provide the basis of animal husbandry. Dance forms such as the Ger, the Gher Ghoomara, the Ghoomar, the Jhumar, are performed at both the tribal and village level: indeed, the Jhumar has travelled upward and has become the regional dance of the urban centres also.

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So in this episode you have seen that we have so many beautiful folk dances in India and we have tried to showcase the unique element of each folk dance. I hope that the information provided was of some use to all of you. Thank you so much for watching.