

Mughal Tamasha: A Distinctive Folk Dramatic Tradition of Odisha

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Abstract

The present study focuses on the folk dramatic tradition of Bhadrak District of Odisha. It highlights communal harmony and established cultural, social, economical, and administrative condition of the then Mughal-Maratha rule in Odisha, especially in the coastal belt of the state. It also gives glimpse of folk dramatic tradition in India. There are different types of folk drama have been performing by the people of India in general and Odisha in particular. Despite ample doses of entertainment and creativity, this folk art form that grew and flourished mainly in Bhadrak district is now on a fast decline. Mughal Tamasha is a unique folkart that is symbolic of the state's rich cultural history. The play that was performed dates back to 18th century and was a classic case in point of Hindu-Muslim unity. The dramatised version bore ample testimony to the fact that both communities co-existed peacefully. Odisha, then a part of the Bengal-Bihar province rich with indigenous culture was free from communal tension. Mughal Tamasha brings under focus the influence of Muslim rule in Odia culture. Folk art that is on the verge of extinction, was also a major attraction of the elite people those who want keep alive old culture and tradition.

Keywords- Tamasha, Mirza Sahib, Doodhwali , Chopdar, Bhadrak, Sebat, Coomunal Harmony, Elite people.

Since time immemorial, Odisha was drawing attention of many rulers across the globe for its scenic beauty and treasure of golden knowledge and wealth. Its soul touching tradition culture, literature, art, craft and architecture have been giving immense ecstasy to the implorer and path finder. Like other state it has an amazing folk culture which has been inspiring people not only of Odisha but also of the world. When we turn the pages of its glorious past, we get our self in a very subtle plane. It's culture closely intact with folk literature and folk drama. There are different types of folk drama have been performing by the people of India in general and Odisha in particular. India is

a basically famous for its rich and diversified culture. Many states of India have been performing various folk dramas in different colours and themes e.g. Folk theatre of Karnataka highlights the rich tradition and culture of the state in dancing. This form of theatre is also known as "*The Village Theatre*", "*The People's Theatre*" and "*The Rural Theatre*". The folk theatre mainly marks on the past of a nation's theatre and also forms the basic structure of amateur and professional theatre of urban areas. Folk theatre acts as a live spring and recurrently supplies all the essential ingredients to other forms of theatre. It preserves, rejuvenates and also inspires cultural achievements of the people. It forms the supplies and source resources for the progress of theatrical art. "*Real India lives in her villages*", because the village houses the folk with all its "*soft green of the soul*" of culture, art and tradition. The folk theatre of Karnataka - music, dance and drama, is mainly preserved and protected by the people of villages. *Yakshagana* and *Sannata* are some of the prime examples of folk theatre in Karnataka. Folk theatre of Kerala, as generally believed, evolved out of religious ceremonies. However, there are evidences to prove that theatre is indeed older than religion. Tamil Nadu has also a rich heritage of dramas as a medium of entertainment. The inhabitants of Tamil Nadu have themselves also developed various dramas of their own. Several types of dance-dramas were frequently staged in temples. Almost every temple had a theatre or at least a stage attached to it, which was meant for different forms of entertainment. These dramas are generally performed during religious festivals. The present day folk drama called *Therukkuthu* was earlier presented with music, dance and long drawn speeches in Tamil Nadu. The folk dramas of Tamil Nadu involved the musical instruments such as the *Harmonium*, the *Mridangam* and the *flute*. The *Therukkuthu* is performed during the annual festivals or to invoke rain. This is presented with stories based on the themes like *Valli Thirumanam*, *Pavalakkodi*, *Arjuna's Penance*, *Nallathangal*, *Madurai Veeran*, *Padmasuran*, *Kathavarayan*, *Ramayanam* and *Harishchandra Mayanakandam*.

Folk Theatre of North India is the celebration of the northern Indian culture and the folk ways. *Nautanki* consists of folklore and mythological plays blended with folk songs and dances. The melodies accompanying the songs and the dances have obtained from various forms akin to the mass. The themes for the dances are sometimes derived from the episodes of struggle between the benevolent and malevolent forces of nature. They also evolve from the religious epics or heroic deeds from historic traditions, such as Allah and Udal. Quite often the "Nautanki" players enact plays based on the day-to-day problems of social life. Karyala is a prominent folk form of Himachal Pradesh. Bidesia is the most prominent folk drama of Bihar. Like above states folk dramatic culture, Odisha has also glorious folk dramatic tradition in its origin. Folk drama of Odisha consists of number different types of theatrical performances. These are mainly meant to regale rural audiences with their various entertaining as well as religious themes. The various types of folk drama of Orissa include *Suanga*, *Leela*, *Mughal Tamasha*, *Jatra*, *Danda*

Nata, Sakhi Nata, Dhanu Yatra and more. The word "*Tamasha*" is originally from Persian, meaning a show or theatrical entertainment of some kind. The word has spread to *Hindi, Urdu and Marathi*, to mean "*fun*" or "*play*". Colloquially the word has come to represent commotion or any activity or display with bustle and excitement, sometimes ironically in the sense of "a tempest in a teacup".

Among all the folk dramas, *Mughal Tamasha* has placed itself in the heart of people of Odisha. This dramatic form initiated with a distant vision to harmonised communal differences. Moreover, it emphasises atrocities of rulers on the people. Before two hundred years Mughal Tamasha was performed in the coastal belt of North Odisha especially in the Bhadrak District. Bhadrak is the epicentre of trade and commerce during Mughal and Maratha rule. Literary, culturally Bhadrak occupies a valuable space in the geographical map of Odisha. With the rapid Urbanisation accelerate by Modernism and Globalism forcing the rural people to get themselves in a hi-fi society and sophisticated atmosphere. Still people of Odisha have a thirst for their folk dramatic culture through which they find their root of their rich culture. Adaptation of Western Culture and propagation of various Media, folk dramatic culture is losing its value day by day. Expansion of modern entertainment deviating common peoples attention from their original indigenous culture. So, it is a proper time to preserve our folk culture before them extinct. To encourage and enthuse the shining form of folk culture social and institutional support are very much indispensable. **Figure-1(Chopdar, Zamindar & Mirza sahib)**



Mughal Tamasha is such a folk dramatic form which commensurate during Mughal period. The Mughal Tamasha mainly intends to entertain audiences. It is said that Late Bansiballav Goswami had initiated the Mughal Tamasha in 1728 A.D. The Mughal Tamasha is divided into two parts, i.e., '*Badasahi*' and '*Soudagari*' Tamasha. Nowadays only the Badasahi Mughal Tamasha script is available and being staged. It is a folk play. The dialogue is in a hybrid language of Oriya mixed with Urdu language and Persian. *Violin, Pakhavaj, Jodinagara and Kubji (Gini)* were the main instruments used in the mughal Tamasha. The Tamasha begins with a prayer to God or Goddess and is followed by group dance. There is innocent parody of Muslim rulers in these plays. These plays went a long way to establish communal harmony. Bhadrak is the only district where the performance of mughal tamasha has been



maintained for the last two hundred years. This unique tradition performed in *Sangat, Banka, Gardpur, Kuansa, Mirzapur, Chhadaka, Mahala, Santhia, Sapur, Jhauganja, Agarpada, Charampa* villages of Bhadrak District.

Figure-2 (Scene of Mughal Tamasha)

Mughal Tamasha is a pure interpretation of the then governance of Mughal and Maratha. It is unique way of satire to the ministers. Tamasha gives a vivid picture of the social, political and religious condition during the Mughal period. When disintegration, disharmony, un-equanimity had set in and there was no discipline in social, political and administrative label, the Mughal, Maratha officers were very much corrupt and addicted to various intoxicants by which they failed to execute their due duties. Their torture and maladministration threat the higher human values which causes anarchy and discontent. The role of Mirza Sahibs and their blind folded imitation of administration of their ancestors provoked the renowned Tamasha writers. Mughal Tamasha consists of *Urdu, Hindi, Odia and Bengali languages*.

The main theme of *Mughal Tamasha* is very much exiting and thought provoking which binds audience till the end. It begins with *Chopdar* and end with *Doodhwali (Milkmade)*. Other characters are *Sebayat (the person who render personal service)*, *Vestwalla(waterman)*, *Jhaduwalla(sweeper)*, *Farras (person arranging beds)*, *Hukawalla (person who arrange huka for smoking)*, *Pankhawalla (one who fans)*, *Bhatta (person who praises the Mirza)*, *Nanaksahi (follower of Guru Naank)*, *Daptari (peon)*, *Khansama (cook)*, *Zamindar (land lord)*, *Gumasta(manager of the land lord)*, *Bhandari (hair dressers)*. All these characters enter to the stage one by one with singing song introduce themselves and their professions with farcical and humirical gesture. Unlike, all other folk theaters the costumes are very much significant for the Mughal Tamasha. Mirza Sahibs costumes are royal style which is decorative and gorgeous. The *Chopdar, Vestiwalla, Farras* are dressed with Muslim tradition. Zamindars dress is very simple like Vaishnavite Hindu. The costume of all attraction dudhwali is very typical and simple.

It is the significant of Indian folk drama which has been performing in a religious place attached to the temple. So also *Mughal Tamasha* of Odisha is being performed in a pendal facing towards main gate of the temple. It is also perform under the open sky having no screens. The throne build for the Mirza Sahib decorated with colour cloths, flowers and leaves. Unlike the modern *Yatra Pandal (Stage)* audience occupies three sides. **Figure-3 (Mirza sahib)**



Before the commencement of Tamsha there is loud tune of music played with *Sahnai, Dhola and Jodi Nagara*. The music continues for an hour to attract or keep engaged to the audience. After orchestral music is played a long delineative song is sung in chorus in praise of lord Shiva. Thereafter, *Chopdar* enters with *shouting Dabe Khade Ho (stand still), Hat Khade Ho (stand at distance)*. This indicates *Mirza Sahibs* arrival. After *Mirza Sahibs* led to the throne made for him chopdar salutes. Thereafter *Sebayatas* are summoned one after another and then Tamasha begins. Apart from *Mirza Sahib* and *Chopdar* all other characters sing as well as dance. They indulge themselves in prose dialogue which is prepared with mixture of *Persian, Urdu, Hindi and Bengali language*. Only *Zamindars and Dudhwali speak Odia language*. At the end of Tamasha every character asks for *Baksish (tips)* from *Mirza Sahib*. While they exit they ask the leader of orchestra what is going on. The leader replied the festival of *Lord Shiva* is being celebrated. Then he starts singing in praise of *Lord Shiva* and departs. Under current of this Tamasha reveals linguistic, cultural and social integration which is more relevance for all era. Ultimately, it promotes communal harmony and social integration between the inhabitants and migrants. The most vital message is that Tamasha critically analyse the state of affair existing at that time. After everything else, *Dudhwali (Milkmade)* enters to the stage, *Mirza Sahib* get magnetise with her beauty and proposes her. But, she does not give consent. When *Mirza Sahib* fascinating her good life and wealth she objects and tells she is married and instantly leaves the stage. *Mirza Sahib* gets thwarted then the Tamasha is stopped up.



Figure-4 (Doodhwali & Mirza Sahib)

The first and foremost acclaim goes to *Late Bansi Ballava Goswami* for his creation of an indigenous dramatic form. In other words, *Bansi Ballava Goswami* paved the way to go against traditional and ornamental literature of that time. The delineation of realistic picture of his contemporary society certainly indicates the modern outlook of *Bansi Ballava* in the 18th century which is an exceptional deviation from the literary practice of his time. He is the only inculcator of *Mughal Tamasha of Odisha*. His fertile imagination created seven works of Tamasha. The most outstanding and unique Tamasha is *Mughal Tamasha*. Others are *Bhila Tamasha, Radhakrushna Tamasha, Chauda Tamasha, Jogi Tamasha, Fakir Tamasha, Lolin Mazabai Tamasha*. Only *Mughal Tamasha* has been struggling for its survival in the present context. It needs institutional and social patronage. To give more idea it keeps awaited a deep research and analytical study. The



famous Prof. Krushna Charana Behera of Odia literature has collected the scripts of this Mughal Tamasha and printed in 1966. **Figure-5**

Odisha Sangeet Natak Academy, tried to revive the old folk tradition and interpreting in the modern context. Despite ample doses of entertainment and creativity, this folk art form that grew and flourished mainly in Bhadrak district is now on a fast decline. About three decades ago, there were a number of troupes who performed Mughal tamasha. Now, there are perhaps a couple of active troupes. It's a unique folkart that is symbolic of the state's rich cultural history. The Odisha Sangeet Natak Academy is doing its best to save the art with support from the Union ministry of culture and various other organisations. The play that was performed dates back to 18th century and was a classic case in point of Hindu-Muslim unity. The dramatised version bore ample testimony to the fact that both communities co-existed peacefully. Odisha, then a part of the Bengal-Bihar province rich with indigenous culture was free from communal tension. Mughal Tamasha brings under focus the influence of Muslim rule in Odia culture. The dresses, ornaments, food habits, art and culture of the Odia people were deeply influenced by Islamic culture. Folk art that is on the verge of extinction, was also a major attraction of the elite people those who want keep alive old culture and tradition.

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