

# CONTEMPORARY ISSUES OF SASTRA IN THE CLASSICAL DANCE OF ORISSA

---

SHARON LOWEN

Dance is a movement art, transmitted as an oral, or rather aural-visual, tradition. What then is the relationship of shastric texts on dance to the actual performance practice, with particular reference to Odissi dance? Shastric texts have become a major reference point and validating factor of “classical” dance in India since the 1930’s, in Orissa since the 1950’s, and are increasingly used in the training of today’s educated students of the dance.

Did these texts play a central role in the development of the Odissi dance tradition as we know it today, or have they been used after the fact in a quest to capture and codify a tradition? What are the consequences of using textual codification as a starting point in classical training? To what extent has Odissi dance gelled into a distinctive form as it passed through generations of dancers up to the present and how much latitude still remains for innovation within the tradition?

What texts play a role in Odissi dance and what is that role? To what extent do contemporary practitioners of Odissi base their work on shastric tradition?

What are the problems of textual representation of a three-dimensional art form functioning in time and space translated to two dimensional paper and word symbolization? What are the difficulties of taking a fluid tradition in art and categorizing its elements in narrowing definitions, definitions which can intrinsically exclude nuance and variation, and lose its channeled logic in tangents? Does the quest for codification threaten the fluidity of tradition, tying teaching to text in future?

And finally, what role has shastric text played in bestowing legitimacy of recognition to Odissi dance as a classical tradition?

Focusing on the dance emanating from what is now the state of Orissa in order to examine these issues, we find a form of dance which has undergone tremendous development in the past thirty years in technique, repertoire, sophistication, Sanskritization, popularity and recognition. The 1930’s brought a renaissance of dance in India for the educated, literate class as part of a developing sense of national identity and search for indigenous cultural values, which was given further impetus by western interest in Indian dance, such as that shown by the ballerina, Pavlova, during her tour of India, which spurred many pioneers of this century’s Indian dance revival. During the period of revival, four forms of dance came to be recognized as distinctive classical Indian dance genres: Bharata Natyam, Kathakali, Manipuri and Kathak. Odissi joined the ranks in the fifties when it was accepted as a distinct form.

Archaeological evidence from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. cave complex of Khandagiri and Udayagiri near Bhubaneswar gives evidence of King Kharavela providing dance and music for his subjects in the Hathigumpha inscription. Within this complex, the Rani Gumpha, an excellently well preserved Sanskrit theatre, the *vikrsta-madhyama-preksya-vesma* (middle Rectangular Theatre) described in the *atyasastra*, has reliefs displaying dancing girls and musicians as well as a scene depicting the king and queen at a performance; evidence in stone confirming the importance of dance in ancient Orissa and the royal patronage it enjoyed.

Dance is represented in sculptural form in the Buddhist monasteries of Ratnagiri (5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), numerous Saivite temples of Bhubaneswar (6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. to 12<sup>th</sup> century

A.D.), the temple of Jagannath at Puri (12<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), and profusely at Konarak (13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) where a comprehensive vocabulary of Odissi poses can be found on the Natamandira.

Although archaeological evidence supports an ancient tradition of dance in Orissa, discerning the links to today's performance practices on the modern stage is difficult. Besides this tradition as perceived through the sculptural sources, Odissi dance as it is practiced today has been influenced by the *devadasis*, known as *maharis* in Orissa, *gotipuas* or boy dancers, court dancers and shastric texts on dance and music.

Dancing girls were dedicated to the service of the gods during the Kesari dynasty (9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.)<sup>3</sup> and by the 12<sup>th</sup> century, *maharis* of the temple of Lord Jagannath in Puri were singing Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda* accompanied by dance.

Under the influence of 16<sup>th</sup> century Vaisnavism, dance outside the temple sanctum flourished through the *gotipua akhadas*, where young boys were trained to dance and perform dressed as girls. The tradition of *mahari* dances for the sanctum sanctorum, *rajadasi* or *Magana nrtya* for the king's court, and the *gotipua* dances for the festivals outside the temple premises provide, in varying degrees, the guru-sisya parampara origins of the Odissi dance of today. There is considerable disagreement as to how much any one of these traditions may have been a dominant force in shaping the present form of Odissi.

There are virtually no Odissi dance gurus today coming out of the mahari tradition, with the partial exception of Guru Pankaj Charan Das, who, while trained as a gotipua, is related to maharis and is knowledgeable in their traditions. Sadasiva Ratha Sharma, editor of the controversial *Abhinaya Chandrika* mentions the names of several Sastras spoken of by maharis, (*Devdasi Nrtya Paddhati* – for example, or *Niladri Naca* of *Mukta Mahari*) but states that none of the manuscripts have been seen, neither does he date them.

In the *Sri Caitanya Caritamrita*, it is mentioned that the great Vaisnavite, Rai Ramananda, had relinquished a governorship in the southern kingdom of Orissa to become a disciple of Sri Caitanya. He "trained the devadasis in the sanchari and satvik abhinayas and bhava also". Ramananda enacted the *Gitagovinda* in the Odissi dance tradition with the help of the maharis and composed another drama on the same lines. It seems logical that Ramananda's foundation for this activity would have been textual, as his background clearly was that of a scholar rather than a traditional actor/dancer.

There are no maharis dancing in the temple of Jagannath Puri today, though singing of *Gitagovinda* is remembered by many. Consensus is that mahari dance was slow compared to the tempo of Odissi dance today. Being wholly devotional, the emphasis was on expression of sentiment rather than precision of technique. It was completely *lasya* feminine, in character and the tradition was passed down from mahari to mahari as far back as living memory serves.

"Whatever we see now from the maharis we can't tell whether they were doing it according to the Sastras because they have discontinued it for so many years. They never realized that they were doing it according to the Sastras because they were only doing their traditional things."

All of the dance gurus who have taught and revived Odissi were trained as *gotipuas* and later were members of various theatrical groups before finding it possible to teach Odissi dance exclusively. The *gotipua akhadas* (teaching centers for the Odissi Nata) gave boys training in the

intricate footwork, bhandas (acrobatic and tantric yoga asanas used in the dance) and singing in self-accompaniment of the dance. The technique included both tandava, masculine and lasya, feminine movements. In the late 1930's and 40's.

“There was' a general hatred towards this Odissi Nata by the so-called intelligentsia. The Odissi Nata was considered low and unsophisticated because it was taken to be rural, rustic, crude, ancient and very much conventional”.

As late as 1972, Dr. Charles Fabri, the noted dance critic who early acknowledged Odissi as a classical form, was unaware of the importance of the gotipua tradition and believed that the current revival marked the “first time that Odissi has come out of the temple and appears on the theatrical stage”. The Sastras presently considered relevant to Odissi dance include Bharata's *Natyasastra*. Nandikesvara's *Abhinaya Darpana*, and Sarangadeva's *Sangita Ratnakara*, all virtually unknown in Orissa in this century until the post-independence dance revival. An important shastric reference for the recognition of Odissi as an old classical form is the *Natya sastra* mention of the abhinaya (dramatic expression) of the Odra Magadhi style, the dance of Odra Des (comprising th lands now largely within Orissa). The most notable treatises with particular reference to Odissi are the *Abhinaya Candrika* of Maheswar Mahapatra, variously attributed to the 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, or 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and under a storm of controversy regarding its authenticity, and the *Abhinaya Darpana Prakasa* by Jadunath Ray Singh of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (possible also known as *Sangita Abhinaya Darpana* by the same author). These three texts are in Sanskrit and written in Oriya script. 18<sup>th</sup> century Oriya treatises which refer to dance include *Sangit Narayana*, *Sangit Kalpalata* and the *Natya Manorama*.

It is generally accepted by most authorities that modern Odissi dance is a reconstructed form. Kapila Vatsyayan argues that, in her opinion, most classical dance in India is not classical in the purest sense, but neo-classical, i.e. new forms based on old models. Inspired by Rukmini Devi Arundale's visit to Cuttack, Orissa in 1957, Dhirendranath Pattanaik went to Madras to learn how the advocate, E. Krishna Iyer, revised the devadasi tradition.

“He collected all the materials from the hands of the Devadasis when Dasi Attam was forbidden by legislation. He learnt from them. Then he chastises them (i.e. the materials be purified) and reformed them according to the *Natyasastra*. The repertory was also built accordingly and named Bharata Natyam”.

At the time pioneers in the South, like E. Krishna Iyer and Rukmini Devi Arundale, were reviving or reconstructing the dances of Tamil Nadu into the form called Bharata Natyam. In Orissa, respectable families were beginning to break tradition by sending their daughters to learn dance from dance teachers associated with the theatre. Priyambada Mohanty Sanjukta Panigrahi, Minakshi Nanda, Jayanti Ghosh, followed by Kum Kum Das and others, were learning Odissi in the late 40's and 50's.

Sanjukta Panigrahi recalls that people would express their censure of a Brahmin girl dancing by spitting as they passed her door. In 1951, at the age of seven, Sanjukta Panigrahi won the first prize at the Calcutta Children's Little Theatre Festival after convincing the secretary that the hitherto unheard form of Odissi should be included. The encouragement from

press and eminent people of Calcutta, combined with a desire to have their daughter get an education along with dance, led Panigrahi's parents to send her to Kalakshetra near Madras for six years.

Their decision had a major impact on the development of modern Odissi and its relation to shastric texts. Kalakshetra offered girls of high social status the opportunity to learn a refined and codified form of dance in a disciplined environment as shaped by Rukmini Devi Arundale. From 1952, Sanjukta returned to Orissa each summer to study Odissi and share what she had learned of the Abhinaya Darpana and Natyasastra with her guru, Kelucharan Mohapatra and others. This actually introduced the performing artists of the Orissa stage to the movement classifications and viniyogas (usages) of gestures, Sanskrit slokas on dance, angaharas, etc. of the Abhinaya darpana. The recently established Kala Vikash Kendra (1952) in Cuttack was motivated to send one of its teachers, Mayadhar Rout, to Kalakshetra for training. Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, accepted today as the major architect of the present Odissi dance, was in the process of studying the sculptures and palm leaf manuscripts to regain the technique he had learned as a child. Along with Sanjukta Panigrahi returning to Orissa with her disciplined shastric training in dance, Guru Mohapatra introduced and gradually increased sastra into his teaching of dance from the elementary level, systematizing technique and exercises to be understood and hopefully mastered before going on to complete dances, essentially the traditional starting point. Year by year this developed as Sanskrit names from the Abhinaya Darpana were assigned for mudras, sirabheda, drstabheda, grivabheda, padabheda, carts, karanas, bhangis, etc.

At the same time, new choreography expanded the scope far beyond the recent past when a complete performance was less than thirty minutes. According to Dhirendranath Pattanaik, "When Mayadhar (Rout) came from the South after his training in Bharata Natyam and Kathakali, he gave them the clue how to compose dances. The samcari bhava were not there at the time. He introduced it" The only Gitagovinda item in the Odissi repertoire was Dasa Avatara which had been composed for the theatre. The next was Lalita Lavangalata composed by Kelucharan Mohapatra, Mayadhar Rout, and Dhiren Pattanaik for Sanjukta Panigrahi. In 1958, Sanjukta Panigrahi presented a repertoire expanded to two hours at the Annapurna Theatre, Cuttack, after working with several artists and scholars.

Guru Mayadhar Rout and Sanjukta Panigrahi, having returned from their training at Kalakshetra, were instrumental in applying shastric texts to Odissi dance.

*"The whole world of shastric dance opened before us and with their cooperation and the cooperation enlisted from Kavichandra Kalicharan Pattanaik, this Odissi dance gradually got a metamorphosis. The use of shastric foot movements, hand gestures, the gestures of the neck, the eyes, torso and the rasa abhinaya developed on the basis of Natyasastra and Abhinaya Darpana."*

Whereas previously the traditional dance terminology was in colloquial Oriya, Sanskrit equivalents were introduced where possible. As various gurus worked independently on evolving Odissi dance in the modern renaissance of interest in classical arts, the need for consensus was felt by those interested in the future of the form. In 1959, a group called Jayantika was formed which included the eminent gurus and scholars of Odissi, including Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Guru Deva Prasad Das, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and his wife Laxmi, one of the first females to dance on the stage in Orissa, Guru Mayadhar Rout, Sanjukta Panigrahi and scholars Kalicharan Pattanaik, Dhirendranath pattanaik and lokhnat Mishra. The decision was taken to base the pattern of development of the Odissi dance on first the Sastras, secondly the gotipua tradition and thirdly, the temple sculptures.

Jayantika brings to mind the Council of Nicea convened by Emperor Constantine in A.D. 325 to codify Christianity. Although the religion had already been in existence for over 300 years and had developed rituals and religious practices before there was consensus on accepted texts and important facts, it was still felt necessary to establish a canon of accepted texts and recognized rituals to legitimize it as the new state religion. Jayantika considered the “Odissi repertoire and what it should be if they completely follow the Sastras, what should be changed, what should be kept and how it should be performed.

At Kalakshetra, the Abhinaya Darpana was used as a manual for practical study and usage whereas the Natyasastra was reserved for advanced study and comparison in the final sixth year, according to Sanjukta Panigrahi. She says of this period in Orissa,

“Gurus started following Natyasastra and correcting the gestures and footwork ... Slowly we started realizing that we had everything but some of them were traditionally handed down... we had Oriya names or no names but after studying the Sastras we could fit the names and see how they matched ... they had to exclude some things, some are now coming back (into the movement vocabulary) year by year we added, we are going on adding ... From time to time we get old books like Abhinaya Darpana Prakasa ... and again going into it, check what we have, what we can use. I think it is a nonstop procedure.”

Regarding the focus of the Jayantika group, Sanjukta Panigrahi recalled that “besides the repertoire, they started concentrating on the hand gestures. Which, where and how to use them as this was not codified. For instance mayuraksa (the thumb touching the bent third finger) might be held so softly (loosely) that it could be mistaken for other mudras.”

As an example of how sastra influenced the technique of Odissi, a reading of the Abhinaya Darpana shows that the first viniyoga (usage) of the pataka mudra (the flag, held flat) is natyarambhe used in the opening of the dance. This had not been the usage in Odissi up until Jayantika decided to conform to Sastras. They established that after the dancer enters the stage, she should begin the performance with an invocation to Mother Earth, Bhumi pranam, accompanied by pataka hasta, and this has become canonized into the stage choreography of every Odissi guru. Traditional gotipuas still begin with ardhapataka or other mudras.

Odissi dance is especially noted for the lyrical, sculptural curve created by the deflected hip in the triple-bent, asymmetrical tribhangi position. Jayantika debated whether the hips actually move or only the torso should shift side to side while the dancer is in motion. It was felt that Sastra dictated against hip movement and so the technique was corrected to control the actual movement of the hips while dancing. Torso and counterpoint neck movement of the hips while dancing. Torso and counterpoint neck movement were emphasized to maintain the same graceful effect, without risk of “vulgarity”. One guru in the group, Deba Prasad Das, well known through his famous disciple, Indrani Rehman, disagreed and retained hip movement in his technique.

As mentioned earlier, up to the early 1950’s, the entire Odissi repertoire could be performed in less than half an hour with the various pure dance components and expressional dances delineated very concisely by today’s standards. There were only two pallavis, the lyrical, pure dances of Odissi which develop theme and variations of particular ragas, talas and movements; the Vasanta and kalia pallavis in much shorter versions than today. Since that

time, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra has expanded these and choreographed a dozen new pallavis for the permanent repertoire, Guru Pankaj Charan Das several, and all the major new gurus have contributed at least one or two.

In 1953, the Odissi dance repertoire was defined as follows:

1. Ranga Pravesa or Patra Pravesa (entry of dancer to stage)
2. Puspanjali Pradana (offering of flowers)
3. Ganapati Vandana (prayer to Lord Ganapati)
4. Sabha Anumati Prarthana (seeking permission of gathering)
5. Bhumi, Guru and Yantra Pranama (salutations to Mother Earth, the Guru and the instruments)
6. Nataraj Bhairava Abahan (invocation to the Lord of Dance)
7. Batu Nrtya (worship to please Nataraj)
8. Pallava Nrtya
  - a) Svara pallavi (based on melody of sentiment)
  - b) Svara Vadya Pallavi (based on melody of musical notes)
9. Sabhinaya Nrtya (the dance of dramatization)

This pattern strictly follows the tradition of gotipua dance of the gotipua master, Mahadev Rout, who offered systematic training in dance for the National Music Association, Cuttack, in the early 1950's. It is a more refined form of the old Odissi Nata of the gotipuas, subtracting the self-accompanied singing and the bandhas.

The repertoire accepted by the Jayantika in 1959 turned the first six items into one continuous invocatory dance, mangalacarana. The others are almost intact, except that the Svara pallavi based on melody of sentiment, sometimes accompanied by song, has been generally eliminated leaving only the Svara Vadya Pallavi based on raga alone. The Sabhinaya Nrtya is simply called Abhinaya and the name of the concluding Ananda nrtya is now elevated to Moksa, liberation. The positioning of Mangalacarana, Batu and Moksa in a programme is invariable, though Batu is sometimes left out. The number of Pallavis and Abhinayas can be increased within the structure to extend the length of a performance as desired. In the Mahari tradition, this sequencing is not found.

“No mahari dance is performed with a Mangalacharan and ending with Mokshya. There is no Batu Nrtya in the Mahari Nrtya and it is because of this that some Gurus call it Sthai Nrtya and not Batu.”

At the first seminar on Indian classical dance forms held by the Sangeet Natalk Akademi, New Delhi, in March 1958, attended by Balasaraswati, Rukmini Devi, Guru Kunju Kurup, Kalicharan Pattanaik, Mohan Khokar, Sunil Kothari, et al., “Everyone got overwhelmed by the sheer vitality and sculptural beauty of Odissi” With demonstrations supported by the shastric evidence to back up the form, Odissi was granted classical dance status, though as a regional variation of Bharata Natyam.

In the changing perceptions of Odissi as a classical form, it is interesting to note that the dance critic, Charles Fabri, considered that

“Odissi is the purer and older form of Bharata Natyam. The Madras form, recently rescued from oblivion by such pioneers as Mr. E. Krishna Iyer and Mrs. Rukmini Devi Arundale, is more elaborate, hence later; is more punditic, hence later; is evolved in detail on the basis of a learned study of the Sastras, hence it is later.”

The efforts during the late 1950's to present Odissi dance before the important audiences, critics and scholars of India were accompanied by papers and lectures to lend weight to Odissi's claims to independent classical status. The Abhinaya Candrika was said to have been discovered during the 1950's and much quoted before its publication in 1967 by Pandit Sadasiva Ratha Sharma, a former tathyasiromani of the Jagannath temple, Puri, who is famous for having co-edited the Silpaprakasa with the Swiss scholar, Alice Boner. Sharma claimed that the publication was based on two palm-leaf manuscripts, one of Pandit Harihar Mishra of Rejendrapursan in Ganjam district, and the other, the illustrated Nrtyakhanda, was said to have been discovered from the collection of Kunjabehari Mohanty of Kodala.

According to Pandit Sadasiva Ratha Sharma, the Abhinaya Candrika had been accepted the world over as an ancient authoritative text on Odissi which formed the basis of modern day Odissi dance.

Sunil Kothari and painter Ghulam Sheikh, met Pandit Sadasiva Ratha Sharma in 1962 and took photographs of dance illustrations accompanying the text and used these in many seminars, studies and publications. However, the original palm leaf manuscripts cannot be found in the Raghunandan Library and Sunil Kothari now believes the manuscript was a fraud.

Pandit Nilamani Mishra, now retired head of the manuscripts section of the Bhubaneshwar Museum for 32 years and a reputed scholar, feels that the published manuscript of Abhinaya Candrika was the fraudulent handiwork of an intelligent scholar and beses his opinion on the numerous errors in the text and the fact that no one has seen the original palm leaf manuscript. He points out that any manuscript written in Orissa at the presumed time of the Abhinaya would soon be found all over the state because pilgrims from different parts of Orissa would come to the Jagannath temple in Puri where the Puri Mukti Mandap Sabha would review all manuscripts and then authorize pandits from different areas to take their copies. There are over 500 palm leaf Gitagovinda written in Oriya at the Bhubaneshwar Museum, yet Mishra has never seen one Abhinaya Candrika in 30 years of search.

We have many 18<sup>th</sup> century treatises ... they were not published but were known. This is the one (Abhinaya Candrika) that became known outside Orissa as the text of Odissi dance because he (Sadasiva Ratha Sharma) published it ... By this way he gained popularity and even the famous dancers of India, those practicing Odissi dance, etc., accepted it”.

Mishra found a peculiar mix of unlikely Sanskrit and Oriya and even 20<sup>th</sup> century terms, such as “Bowri”, a government records classification of an aboriginal tribe of Orissa coined within the last thirty years, Mishra also notes that Sadasiva Ratha Sharma has misunderstood accepted forms of

“how to write the date of the scribe, the month, the year, the ‘sambat’ or the ‘satabda’, etc. In the calculation there will be the

fiftieth Anka era of Virakishori Devak, for example, which will fall approximately on 1752, but Pandit Sadasiva Ratha Sharma did not know the truth so he put in a date which does not tally ... Suppose December 20, 1987 fell on Monday, but he does puts it in such a way that it falls on a Friday”.

Mishra also feels that Sadasiva Ratha Sharma’s published Silpaprakasa and Pikekheda are also fraudulent.

Two other Oriya scholars, the late Kalicharan Pattanaik and the present secretary of the Orissa Sangeet Natak Akademi, Dhirendranath Pattanaik, have also claimed to have in their possession manuscripts of Abhinaya Candrika, yet when the late Kalicharan pattanaik’s collections were passed on to the Bhubanshwar Museum the manuscript was conspicuously missing. Dhirendranath Pattanaik has been working on an English translation for years and states “the Odissi which you are seeing today is entirely based on this text”. Yet he admits that he presently has only a transcription on paper of the manuscript and is vague regarding the whereabouts of the original. None of the scholars, critics, or artists that I interviewed had ever been able to see his copy or any other.

Nilamadhava Bose believes “that the future of Odissi dance lies not in the Abhinaya Candrika, but with the temple sculptures. It is wastage of energy to search for the Abhinaya Candrika. If really found, we will accept it, but now some claim to have a translated copy and it is probably a fake”. When asked his opinion of why the long awaited English translation was not yet out, Nilamadhava Bose expressed the feeling that Dhirendranath Pattanaik could not be sure that his copy was authentic and “perhaps it is too complicated to sort out because it is mixed up, full of grammatical mistakes and words not Sanskrit at all. A Sanskrit pandit told me it could have been written by anyone who knows Sanskrit as there are no rules of grammar. It has many colloquial expressions that make the reader disbelieve its authenticity”.

Some gurus and scholars

“Point out that the present Odissi style is not entirely based on Abhinaya Candrika but on the tradition of the gurus. Of course, after the book was published many modifications were made, but the contribution of the book to the art form in general is only peripheral. At the same time, many critics say that the new generation of artists have almost totally relied on Abhinaya Candrika.”

Discovering sastras on Odissi dance may no longer be necessary to add validation to its classical stature, yet the use of sastras in the development of Odissi continues.

Nilamadhava Bose recalls a late 1950’s conversation with the critic and scholar Mohan Khokar who advised against imitating the formulas or techniques of Bharata Natyam in an effort to bring it on par, as Bharata Natyam itself had changed vastly since the 1920’s and 30’s. Khokar appreciated bose’s idea that Odissi was “not imprisoned by principles, rules and Shastras”, with “some freedom of its own and scope for more spontaneity”.

Odissi dance in the 1980's has established its own identity firmly in the pantheon of Indian classical dances, yet the "principles, rules and Shastras" have come to play an increasingly central role in the teaching and exposition of the form. While Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra now has years of security and the assurance of Odissi's stature to allow him to bring back the form elements which were earlier eliminated or played down, ranging from "rustic" poses, torso undulations seen enlarged in the "brother" style of Mayurbhanj Chhau in northern Orissa, and variations of traditional mudra usage, to an increased balance of Oriya abhinayas to Sanskrit astapadis even outside of Orissa, the urge to further define and analyze the form has led the Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar, to work at creating a new sastras. This major work to codify and give Sanskrit nomenclature to Odissi dance as it is practiced in the present is an interesting and important effort, as well as shedding light on the process of creating sastras in any time period.

The Odissi Research Centre (O.R.C.), an autonomous body of the government of Orissa, was the inspiration of its present chief, Kum Kum Das Mohanty, equally respected as an Odissi artist and senior government administrator. The O.R.C.'s purpose is the codification, documentation and dissemination of the Odissi dance form and to develop the Odissi repertoire. It has just brought out the Odissi Nrtya, Odissi Pathfinder in the English version, as an elementary grammar containing new nomenclatures for various positions and movements of the body not found in classical texts. It attempts to standardize basic techniques through consensus arrived at by interaction of leading gurus drawing on gotipua, mahari, sculptural and shastric traditions. Meetings and seminars to arrive at consensus have been videotaped and signatures taken to all written proceedings to stem future criticism of what was agreed to by whom.

Taking padabheda foot positions, as an example of the development of the new sastra, we see that traditionally four were defined in Odissi up to the 1950's: samapada, feet parallel together, kumbhapada, feet turned out with heels raised and knees slightly bent, dhanupada, one foot crossed in front of the other and resting on the forestep with sole facing outward (Krsna's flute-playing pose), and mahapada, one foot raised up in front of the opposite knee. By the 1970's, my training included four more based on text and tradition. The O.R.C. has now identified and given Sanskrit names to twenty-eight in their first manual.

As an example of the naming process for new padabhedas, Kum Kum Mohanty explains bilagnaparsni as referring not only to the fact that one heel (parsni) touches the floor, but that it takes half the weight of the body and so firmness (bilagna) is emphasized in the name. An example of potential for confusion in the new terminology arose when Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra was explaining a pada, kuncita, in a master training course for gurus in June, 1988, at the O.R.C. Previously called asrita or suci, kuncita is now the name for one foot pointing down with the toes pressing on the floor at a slight diagonal out from the supporting foot. Guru Mohapatra explained kuncita as the foot placed with toes on the floor with arch raised, but with unfixed placement, i.e. not only at a few inches diagonal from the supporting foot, but at other distances and positioning relative to the supporting foot. When it was pointed out that this makes certain other old and newly named padabheda mere variations of kuncita, he agreed to define kuncita by placement as well as shape. Although one of the foremost contributors to the new codifications, his creativity as an artist constantly breaches the perimeters of classifications and definitions.

The next manual is planned as a "higher form of codification", concerning what is called angahara in the Natya sastra. Forty-eight "still points" in pure dance sequences, stances, or than! In Oriya, have been identified and named by the O.R.C., each comprised of positions of the

body, neck, foot, eye, and hand nomenclatures in the first manual. Fifty six “mobile points”, the movement transition between “still points”, have been labeled with the intention of adding fifty to sixty more names in both categories to reflect as fully as possible the Odissi dance vocabulary.

The third phase is to codify the viniyogas (usages) of hand gestures based mainly on Abhinaya Darpana and Abhinaya Darpana Prakasa. Kum Kum Mohanty points out that while the Abhinaya Darpana is applicable to all forms of Indian classical dance, it sets out “what can be done, what are the things that can be represented, but not how to do it. In different styles of dance there are different ways and we want to specify in Odissi what should be done in Odissi style. Ofcourse, there are many gurus and if you take ten gurus they will show ten types of usages”.

In response to the question of how practical it is for a student of dance preparing for a performance career to learn hundreds of technical terms in the process of practical training, Kum Kum Mohanty feels confident that it will be very useful for students, teachers, and audiences. Creating Sanskrit names to identify the technique and formulating classifications is

Basically for teaching beginners, mostly between the ages of ten to fourteen who will then have ten to fourteen years experience, so these things will occur so many times they will be really useful to a dancer. The still points will be very useful for the art critics and audiences to judge real or fake Odissi. Nowadays about thirty girls are dancing Odissi and who can say who is doing the pure Odissi? Codification will help onlookers judge form as is done in sports or gymnastics. In Odissi, we have specifically found out the particular foot movement, padasanchari, of chari in Natyasastra, which are used in Odissi and named so that the teacher can dictate the dance from the name and say to a student “Enter in that movement in four turns by doing number three footwork’. It is difficult to codify everything, so Abhinaya Darpana and the Natyasatra have codified nearly seventy percent. Our improvement is to add the thirty percent from tradition which is necessary while teaching dance and we have specific illustrations of each and every part of the body. Our aim is to bring uniformity at the basic level, not in a higher level. Also, our translations of the original Sanskrit texts are different than those done by pandits as they have no idea about dance and it is sad that no dancer has ever translated them. When a dancer does the translation or interprets the Sanskrit texts, it will definitely be different from a theoretical man who does not do it physically, the whole thing has to be danced and then you know the defects of it.”

As the O.R.C., moves purposefully ahead, with all the advantages of modern technology and financial backing of the Orissa government, even well-wishers voice concerns regarding the total acceptance of the end results. Nilamadhava Bose says, “It will not have universal acceptance because all of the performing gurus of today are not coming together. I also told Kum Kum (Mohanty) but she said “Someone has to do something, if others don’t come forward and join hands I

can't sit idle. Let others who don't agree do something in their own way, but someone has to do something'. She is also right.” Sanjukta Panigrahi, a member of the O.R.C. board shares this concern.

“Great gurus have been teaching for so many years things traditionally handed down and now they cannot tell their students that it is wrong. I feel we have to incorporate everything. They (the gurus) say that traditionally people have known these names and it is very difficult to change. It is very good to set a pattern (of teaching) as now everybody has started teaching Odissi, everywhere it has become so popular and people do not know what they are teaching, If you find three gurus you will find three different types of training, but it is also essential to consult these eminent gurus, incorporate their ideas also, otherwise they will never be able to accept this.”

The teaching and performance of Odissi dance have expanded across state and national boundaries creating a desire and even need for clarity and consistency in maintaining stylistic standards. Yet there are some problems in creating a modern sastra for a dance form that is still actively growing. While intended to codify the technique on a lower level without circumscribing the creativity of senior practitioners steeped in the style, the specter of ossification is raised. If the next generation of gurus should be less dynamic than the present one, codification could limit future perspectives for the art. There is also a pedagogical problem if the detailed nomenclature requires students to memorize extensive categories without an organization in terms of genus and derivations to enhance understanding through the process.

The remarkable difference between the new sastra of the O.R.C. and the traditional ones of the past is not so much the approach to the subject as the methods employed. The written word has been superseded by audio-visual materials illustrating and documenting the dance in ways only recently made possible by modern technology: photographs, audio recordings, videotapes and films. These audio-visual materials are used to document everything from actual performances to specific movements, still points, group discussions, etc. Thus the shastric tradition in classical Odissi dance continues, but has entered into a dynamic new phase transformed and amplified by modern technology.

### **References:**

1. The classical dance of the state of Orissa is called Odissi, or alternatively, Orissi.
2. Dhiren Dash, 'This ... Odissi Dance', Kala Vikash Kendra Journal 1981pp. 87-100.
3. Madala Panji (Daily Chronicle of Jagannath Temple, Puri).
4. Maheswar Mahapatra, Abhinaya Chandrika, ed. Sadasiva Ratha Sharma (Puri: Jagannath Historical Research Society, 1967)
5. Sadasiva Ratha Sharma, "The Mahari", Kala Vikash Kendra Souvenir 1958, pp. 37-42.
6. Interview with Dhirendranath Pattanaik, Secretary of Orissa Sangeet Natak Akademi, December, 1987.
7. Dash, "This /// Odissi dance".

8. Interview with Nilamadhava Bose, Head of Research Section and General Secretary of Kala Vikash Kendra, Cuttack, Orissa, December 1987 and June, 1988.
9. Dash, 'This ... Odissi Dance'.
10. Charles Fabri, 'An Introduction to Odissi Dance', Kala Vikash Kendra Journal 1972.
11. Natyasastra, c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. to 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.,  
Abhinaya Darpana, c. 12<sup>th</sup> century,  
Sangita Ratnakara, c. 13<sup>th</sup> century.
12. Interview with Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, New Delhi, June, 1988.
13. Pattanaik, interview.
14. Interviews with Sanjukta Panigrahi, foremost Odissi dancer, November and December, 1987 and June 1988.
15. Pattanaik, interview.
16. Pattanaik, interview.
17. Panigrahi, interview.
18. Bose, interview.
19. Bose, interview.
20. Panigrahi, interview.
21. Panigrahi, interview.
22. Panigrahi, interview.
23. Kavichandran Kali Charan Pattanaik, Odissi Nrutya, (Cuttack: National Music Association, 1953)
24. Dash "This ... Odissi Dance".
25. Dash, "This ... Odissi Dance".
26. Interview with Sunil Kothari, Chairman of Dance Department, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, May, 1988.
27. Charles Fabri, 'Thoughts on Odissi Dance', Kala Vikash Kendra, Souvenir 1969.
28. 'What's This Thing Called Odissi?', The Week (Kerala) July 5-11, 1987.
29. Nagesh Rao, 'Quest for Odissi's Roots', Indian Express (New Delhi), November 28, 1987.
30. Kothari, interview.
31. Interview with Nilamani Mishra, retired head of Bhubaneswar Museum Manuscripts Library October, 1987.
32. Nilamani Mishra, interview.
33. Pattanaik, interview.
34. Bose, interview.
35. "What's This Thing Called Odissi?"
36. Bose interview
37. Suci, in the new Orissa Research Centre nomenclature, refers more accurately to the foot pointing down in an unbroken line with only the tip of the toe, rather than the forestep, touching the floor.
38. Interview with Kum Kum Mohanty, Chief Executive of the Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar, November, 1987.
39. Kum Kum Mohanty, interview.
40. Kum Kum Mohanty, interview.
41. Bose, interview.
42. Panigrahi, interview.