



## The Unique Features of Odissi Music: An Overview

Dheeraj Kumar Mohapatra  
Faculty Member, Odissi Vocal Department,  
Utkal University of Culture, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, INDIA

**Abstract:** Music plays a prime role in Odishan culture. Right from the birth of a child to marriage ceremony, thread ceremony or any such social ceremony, puja or worship of deities, festivals, functions, Yajnya rituals social traditions, agricultural events and in every other social event, there is involvement of music. The tribal life of Odisha is also said to be musical. Various (Natya-Mandap) dance stages built in the temples statues and sculptures of dancers found on the carving of temples, 'Akhadas' or gymnasiums, 'Bhagavata tungi' which were meant for the 'Purana recitals' are the evidences of Odissi music tradition. The culture of Odisha is Lord Sri Jagannath's culture which reflects in the people of Odisha. Like Hindustani and Carnatic systems, Odissi music is a separate system of Indian classical music and is having all the essential as well as potential ingredients of Indian Classical form. But it has not come to limelight due to apathy from the time of British rule in Odisha want of its proper study, revival, propagation, etc. Despite the fact, the traditional music form could be saved and maintained in its pristine form.

**Keywords:** Odissi, Sangeeta, Taal, Prabandha, Classical, Jagannatha, Gandharva.

The art of Indian music is said to have deep relationship with the Indian Hindu deities. As described in our 'Puranas' Gandharva, Apsari, Kinnar etc were experts in the art of music. In 'Valmiki Ramayana' it is mentioned about musical instrument 'Shilpadikaram', 'Tivakaram' were two such volumes where there are beautiful descriptions about the love and passion for the golden era music in southern India. We can have a clear picture about the age Aryan and Dravidian music from the volumes of Bharat Natya Sastra, Naradiya shikshya, Sangeeta Ratnakar written by thirteenth century author Sarangadev. There is ample evidence about the evolution of north Indian music during the period of fourteenth and fifteenth century.

Odra desha or the then Odisha had many similarities with the bordering regions of Odra- Magadhi countries (as called in the past). As such Odishan music is said to be related with the then Odra music. It is said that in second and third century Bharat Muni categorized Odisha under the 'Odra Magadhi' category on the basis of geographical, life-style of people, literacy, linguistic, interests of people, mannerism and behavioural point of view. 'Odra Magadhi' according to him this nature was unique in itself. According to him Odra Magadhi is aboriginal, independent and unique. Odia language has originated from Odra Magadhi dialect and Magadhi profession or vocation. The writing style and pronunciation of Odia language is one and indigenous.

Variations in pronunciation naturally result variations of voice and so also voice is considered as the root of music. Odishan art, industry and craftsmanship are quite unique. As the traditions and customs, lifestyle, rituals, ceremonies, puja, cookery, wears; food habits, social customs etc. are quite different from other state and regions. As such the style of Odia music is different and unique from other ones. The style of music refers to the expression style, singing style, lyrical style and composition of music etc. As there are diversities among the life styles of people, social traditions vary from one region to another, so the style of music coming spontaneously through emotions becomes unique naturally.

The lyrics of Gitagovinda were harmoniously orchestrated with 'raga-tala' as per the scriptures of 'Sangeeta Shastra' rule prevalent those days in Odisha. And these lyrical songs propagated 'rasa'. These songs were specifically of 'Ashtapada' or eight stanzas, 'Dhruba' or 'Panchali' or one of the four 'ragas' of Indian short songs that was of 'Chitrakala' class or category. These songs were composed according to the traditional rules of 'Utkalian' 'Sangeeta Shastra' scripture. Jayadev's 'Gitagovinda'nis also called as prose-music. Prose is referred as pure music. This is categorized as 'Nibandha', 'Geeta' or lyrics. 'Nibandha' means singing of 'Dhatubandha' Compositions used in classical music especially in vocal music, are known as Prabandha. The compositions of Shree Geeta Govinda & other Sanskrit works are categorized under two types of Prabandha such as: Divya Alikrama, Chitrapada and KsyudrageetaPravandha.

The evolution of Odissi music owes a lot to Jayadeva and his composition the "Geeta Govinda". The compositions of Geeta Govinda were written with an object to be sung. As such they were musical to start with. In addition he indicated the classical ragas prevailing at the time in which these were to be sung. Ingredients of classical music like Raga, Tala, Geeta, Chanda etc of Sri Geeta Govinda were introduced in the services of the

temple of the Lord Jagannatha and accepted as the temple music of Odisha. This, over a period of time, led to the culmination of Odissi that we know today. In Gitagovinda Sri Jayadeva has not only embellished his lyrical poems with music and melodious versifications but also with philosophy, metaphysics, ontology and mysticism. His music is meant not only for the purpose to please but to enlighten through entertainment creating aesthetic emotions, a sense of spiritual love, supreme beauty and perpetual peace. Therefore Gitagovinda has maintained ascendancy since it is written.

Like Hindustani and Carnatic systems, Odissi music is a separate system of Indian classical music and is having all the essential as well as potential ingredients of Indian Classical form. But it has not come to limelight due to apathy from the time of British rule in Odisha want of its proper study, revival, propagation, etc. Despite the fact, the traditional music form could be saved and maintained in its pristine form. Thanks to the musicians particularly of Jaga Akhadas of Puri district, who could develop and maintain the music. The music movement of Odisha (Formerly Odisha), however, took a different turn after independence.

Musical instruments used in Odissi Music are few in number. Some of the basic instruments which have been used in Odissi Music are the Ravan Hashta, the Harmonium, and the Veena or Sitar. Nowadays, a number of instruments are being replaced, but one instrument which stands out among all as typical and irreplaceable both in case of Odissi dance and Odissi music is the Mardal. Further details of this typically Odissi instrument are given below.

In Odissi Sangeeta Sastra it is mentioned that among all the skin percussions Mardal is the best. Its description is found in Charyagiti and various Sastra and Kavyas of medieval Odisha. In all Odishan temples also one finds the sculpture of Mardal players. Mardalavadini (the woman Mardal player) of Konark is famous. It is played during various Sevas (services) of Lord Jagannatha. It is played as an accompaniment both in Mahari dance as well as Gotipua dance.

The intimate relationship experienced between the poetry and music in Odissi is a feature on which the aesthetics of the style is built. Odissi music gives great importance to the lyric where words are required to be sung without fragmentation or distortion. All songs are required to be sung in specific 'ragas' and 'Taalas'. Typical Odissi Taalas have a different distribution of beat and pause from north or south Indian Taalas with the same number of beats. Odissi style of singing lays great stress on 'Prabandha' or 'text of the song'. All Odissi lyricists are renowned poets - Jayadeva, Kavisamrat Upendra Bhanja, Deenkrushna, Kavisurya Baladev Ratha, Gopalkrushna, Banamali etc. Odissi songs traditionally depict the love and frolics of Radha and Krishna. Odissi dance is usually performed to the accompaniment of Odissi music. Originally Odissi was sung to the dance of the 'Mahari' (Devadasis) at the Jagannatha Temple, and was later sung to dances by young boys, 'Gotipua' performing Odissi dance. The Odissi music of today has evolved from the style of 'Gotipua' music.

Odissi style of classical music has some similarity with Hindustani 'Dhrupad' style. 'Gamakas' is common to both, though Odissi also adopts the 'Tom Nom' sounds. The percussion instrument played with Odissi music is the 'Mardal', which is similar to 'Pakhawaj'. Temple sculptures in Odisha abound in statues of 'Mardal' players.

The traditional school of Classical music presently popular as Odissi was referred to by Bharat muni, Matanga muni, Sarangadev under an independent nomenclature Udramadhi Prabritti, which was once popular as Kalinga music, Utkal music or Jayadeva music in different periods. One does not require surveying the history, delving deep into texts and characteristic features of Odissi system to understand its classy style if he at least reads and listens to Gitagovinda of Sri Jayadeva. As this sacred piece of lyrical poem contains all the salient and distinguishing features of classical music, the reader or listener must appreciate the uniqueness and wholeness of Odissi as the third system of Classical music in the domain of Indian music. Associated with the popular dance form of Odissi, the Odissi music is a distinct form of Indian Classical Music. In fact, it is an outcome of the continuous evolution of earliest Indian classical music. Like Hindustani and Carnatic systems, Odissi music is a separate system of Indian classical music and has all the essential as well as potential ingredients of Indian Classical form. Another unique characteristic of Odissi music is the use of Chhanda. Chhanda (metrical section) contains the essence of Odissi music. The Chhanda are composed combining Bhava (theme), kala (time), and swara (tune). The Chautisha represents the originality of Odissi style. All the thirty-four letters of the Oriya alphabet from 'Ka' to 'Ksha' are used chronologically at the beginning of each line. A special feature of Odissi music is the Padi which consists of words to be sung in Drut tala (fast beat). Odissi music can be sung to different Talas: Navatala (nine beats), dashatala (ten beats) or egara tala (eleven beats). The evolution of Odissi music owes a lot to Jayadeva and his composition the "Geeta Govinda". The compositions of Geeta Govinda were written with an object to be sung. As such they were musical to start with. In addition he indicated the classical ragas prevailing at the time in which these were to be sung. Prior to this, there was the tradition of Chhanda which were simple in musical outline. Ingredients of classical music like Raga, Tala, Geeta, Chhanda etc of Sri Geeta Govinda were introduced in the services of the temple of the Lord Jagannatha and accepted as the temple music of Odisha. This, over a period of time, led to the culmination of Odissi that we know today. Odissi dance accompanied by Odissi music is a synthesis of four classes of music. The Dhrupada is the first line or lines to be sung repeatedly. The use of art in music is called Chitkala. Kavisurya Baladev Ratha, the renowned Odia poet wrote lyrics which are the best examples of Chitkala.

Chitrapada means the arrangement of words in an alliterative style. All these were combined to form the style peculiar to Odissi music. Chhanda (metrical section) contains the essence of Odissi music. The Chhanda were composed combining Bhava (theme), kala (time), and swara (tune) The Chautisha represents the originality of Odissi style. All the thirty-four letters of the Odia alphabet from 'Ka' to 'Ksha' are used chronologically at the beginning of each line. A special feature of Odissi music is the Padi which consists of words to be sung in Drut tala (fast beat). Odissi music can be sung to different Talas: Navatala (nine beats), Dashatala (ten beats) or Egara tala (eleven beats). Odissi ragas are different from the ragas of Hindustani and Karnataki music. The chief Odissi ragas are Kalyana, Nata, Shree Gouda, Baradi, Panchama, Dhanashri, Karnata, Bhairavee and Shokabaradi. Odissi music is sung through Raganga, Bhabanga and Natyanga Dhrubapadanga followed by Champu, Chhanda, Chautisha, Pallabi, Bhajan, Janana, and Geeta Govinda, which are also considered to be in the repertoire of Odissi or an allied act form of Odissi. In its present form, Odissi music gives great importance to the lyric, where words are required to be sung without fragmentation or distortion. All songs are required to be sung in specific ragas and Talas. Typical Odissi Talas have a different distribution of beat and pause from north or south Indian Talas with the same number of beats. The Odissi style of singing lays great stress on Prabandha or 'text of the song'. All Odissi lyricists are renowned poets — Jayadeva, Kavisamrat Upendra Bhanja, Deenkrushna, Kavisurya Baladev Ratha, Gopalkrushna, Banamali, etc. Odissi songs traditionally depict the love and frolics of Radha and Krishna. Odissi dance is usually performed to the accompaniment of Odissi music. Originally, this music was performed to the dance of the Mahari (devadasis) at the Jagannatha temple, and was later sung to dances by young boys, Gotipua, performing Odissi dance. The Odissi music of today has evolved from the style of Gotipua music. The Odissi style of music has some similarity with the Hindustani Dhrupad style. The percussion instrument used, the Mardal, is also similar to the Pakhawaj. The strong influence of the Carnatic music is also discernible in Odissi music. Odissi style of classical music has some similarity with Hindustani 'Dhrupad' style. 'Gamakas' is common to both, though Odissi also adopts the 'Tom Nom' sounds. The percussion instrument played with Odissi music is the 'Mardal', which is similar to 'Pakhawaj'. Temple sculptures in Odisha abound in statues of 'Mardal' players.

During the period of sixteenth century there was the reign of Gajapati Pratap Rudra dev. During the early days of his rule Gajapati promulgated the arrangement for singing of Gitagovinda in the sanctum- sanatorium of Sri Mandir known as lord Jagannatha temple. As per the historical findings, in 1499, during the rule of Gajapati Rudra Pratap Deva the epigrapher stone carryings made on the stone wall of 'Sri Mandir' (lord Jagannatha temple) stated about the Odissi group and tailangi group, chachuni seva (service) and 'khanja' system during the 'bhoga' ritual. Hence it is evident that the singing and dancing styles of 'Odissi' and 'tailangi' (Telugu) were quite different from each other. Because the artists from these two different communities were appointed by the then rules in service of lord Jagannatha temple.

Odissi Raganga is the main part of Odissi system of music. All the rules related to singing of 'Raga' are followed on the basis of any single 'Raga' and one 'Taal'. Generally all the 6 types of expansion acts in this part (from the beginning to the end) are as follows.

'Anibaddha Alaap', 'Prabandha', 'Nibaddha Alaap', 'Pada-Binyasas', 'Swara-Binyasas', 'Taan', Anibaddha Alaap. The movements in Odissi music has nicely been compared with a smooth flowing river. The main nature of our Odissi music is that, this is neither very slow nor very fast. It would be appropriate to say that this is music with balanced form.

The bases of Odissi music's movement and religion are, language and 'Raga', for which the performance of Odissi music is done through the medium of language and 'Raga'. Our music is entirely dependent on language and 'Raga'. Normally the role of language in 'Raga Sangeeta' has less importance. But the yet another speciality of Odissi music is that the language as well as the 'Raga' has an equal importance in this music. Before singing of 'Prabandha' 'Alaap' is done without 'Taalas' in an elaborate manner, with the help of 'Swara' which are used in 'Raga'. It is done independently according to the ability and expertise of an artist. During the performance of 'Anibaddha Alaap', 'Badi-sambadi', 'Alpatwa-Bahutwa', 'Nyasa-swara' etc. of 'Raga' is given much emphasis. Basing upon the moment of 'Prabandha' and singing style this 'Anibaddha Alaap' is done (performed) which is yet another speciality in the system of Odissi-music.

Odisha a land where, the sweet chirping sounds of birds amid the dense green forests here, the rhythmic sound beats produced by the waterfalls and rivers, the roaring sounds of sea waves exist only on this land and all these nature's gift's are reflected in the art, literature, music and dance of this land which is not found in other art forms. There is uniqueness in the development of Aryan, Dravid and austik. The sculpture of Kalinga is unique in itself varies from the sculpture of north India and south India. Accordingly the Odissi style of music has its own uniqueness and it is quite different from north Indian and south Indian music. Today the glory and fame of Odissi dance has spread across the world, because of its sublime and artistic nature. The inner voice of our history speaks a lot about the great music traditions of this country. In the second century A.D. king Kharavela, during his third year of rule, had taken several measures for promotion and propagation of music and dance education Gandharva vidya, music-dance, and instrumental music organized various cultural and musical extravaganzas throughout the state, which have been mentioned in the inscription of the stone carvings of 'Hati

gumpha' caves of Khandagiri, Udayagiri, these ancient pictorial stone carvings indicate that the music of then Odisha had a mass appeal among the people. The ancient monuments Lalitagiri, Ratnagiri, Pushpagiri built during the rule of king bhousha indicate about various music and sculpture of that era. As per the historical evidence, there was much appreciation for the music education and its propagation in the period of 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century during the rule of famous 'Somavansi' empire. The ancient stone inscriptions of various temples in those days indicated about the people's love for the music. In the subsequent period the king of 'soma-vansh', 'Ganga-vansh', 'Surya-vansh' were also said to have love and appreciation for the arts of music and dance. It is evident from the ancient traditions of 'Devadasis' dance, 'Gitagovinda' songs which were performed in those days on the premises of 'Sri Mandir' or lord Jagannatha temple. The kings from 'Bhanja-vansh' royal family were also fond of music and dance. The sounds or Odishan music also used to echo those days inside the temples of Parsumareswar, Mukteswar, Rajarani, Lingaraja, Kapileswar, Brahmeswar, Megheswar, and Sobhaneswar etc. situated in Bhubaneswar. The 13<sup>th</sup> century old Konark temple and its 'natyamandap' is the liveliest witness of music study and it stands as the pride of Odia's forever. Regular performance of dance, music and drama were facilitated then, on the premises of these above mentioned deities. Various musical instruments like 'Mardal', 'Veena', and 'Ghanta' were used during musical performances

The Devadasis used to display their musical expertise in the temples, as per their family traditions. The Brahmins and servants holding the honoured ranks called 'Sangeeta ray' along with 'devadasis' used to organize 'Sangeeta sabha' or musical conferences in the temples. The tradition of 'Devadasis- Nrutya' dance was prevalent during the rule of famous kings belonging to royal kingdom (families) of 'Somavansi', 'Ganga vansh', 'Suryavansh', 'Devadasis' then were held with dignity and prestige the music and dance loving kings used to honour and award 'Devadasis'.

There is an undisputed description of the then Odisha in the epic of 'Sarala das – Mahabharata' written by Sarala das. He had mentioned about the popularity of music in the regions of Odisha ranging from Chilka to mahendragiri. An Odia song featured in the 15<sup>th</sup> century old play 'parsuram bijay' by king Gajapati Kapilendra dev attracts our attention. During the period from 15<sup>th</sup> century to 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were many Odia poets and musicians who used the language of 'brajaboli' in their literary creations.

Ray Ramanand, Madhavi dasi, Kanhei khuntia, Rasikananda, Krushna das champati ray, chanda Kavi were the prominent ones. Then evidences about the traditions of music in Odisha have been found in the 16<sup>th</sup> century old almanac called 'madala panji'.

There is a clear mention in this, about the appointment of 'Veena kaars', 'nachunis', 'Sangeeta rays' who worked as servitors in 'srimandir' temple. A number of Odia poetry and 'chaupadi' poetic stanzas, written during, the period of 15<sup>th</sup> century till the 'Radhanath' era, were based on specific 'raga-ragini'. Some prominent temples in the ancient period were regarded as the centres of music-appreciation. Several musical conferences were held in the 'Natyamandap' on the temple campus. Besides this many courts of kings provided platforms for musical events. Debates and discussions about music were held regularly in the royal court of kings.

There were competitions among the poets in order to bring out a musicality in the literature. In course of time the epics like 'Mahabharata' and 'Ramayana' were composed with musical notes or physical stanzas called 'chauPadi'. Dramatic quality also made its way into music..

There were mentions about several 'raga-ragini' in every Odia poetry Debakri, Pattamanjari, Desakhya, Bhairabi, Ramakeri, Gundakeri, Ashabari, Malab, Basanta, Chokhi, Dhanashri, Shankara bhavana, Mukhari, Karunashri, Kalahansa, Kedar, 'Odissi kamodi', etc. Are some of the prominent ones. The direction of several 'tala' or tunes is found in musical compositions. The directions of 'Bani's are found in the Chhanda's of different poetry- like: 'Kalasa', 'Ashadha shukla', 'Gadamalia', 'Kedar Chakrakeli', 'Sangam tiyari', Nialigabha, Abakasha, Sapana chetia, Munibara, Bakrakeli, are worth mentioning. In this series of 'baani' it has been mentioned specifically regarding singing of certain songs, 'Chhanda' or 'Chautisha'. The Aryan culture of India is considered as the 'Rig Vedic' culture. Before that 'Dravidians' culture had expanded. 'Dravidians' culture is considered as the oldest culture of India.

After that, the Indian history was written serially which was started first by the great philosophers like Mahabira (the founder of Jainism) and Gautama Buddha (the founder Buddhism). Odissi music has been existing till date, since the era of these two great religious avatars. During the period of 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. the vast area ranging from the valleys of Kabul to the Godavari river, were inhabited by 16 human habitats, like 'anga', 'Magadha', 'kashi', 'koshal', 'bakkri', 'malla', 'chedi', 'vasta', 'kuru', 'anchhal', 'matsya', 'shurasen', 'Avanti', 'gandhar' and 'kamboj'. During that period 'Kalinga' was a vast and independent state. As mentioned in 'Natyasashtra', the inhabitants of 'tosaal', 'koshal', 'mosaal' were called as the people of Kalinga. Between the periods of 558 B.C. to 530 B.C. Persian emperor Cyrus, occupied the north-western region of India. When Greek warrior Alexander invaded India. During the period from A.D. 1000 to 1027 Mahmud of ghazni invaded India, seventeen times. In 1296, Alauddin khilji occupied the throne of Delhi. In 1526 moghal ruler Babar started moghal rule in India. Hence the cultures of Greece, Persia, Iran, mohammaden and moghal had eclipsed the indo-Aryan culture and impacted it. But, Utkal (Odisha) was independent till the year of 1568. No foreign

power except the Indian had its control over Utkal. So that naturally the Odishan culture that had no impact of non-Indian culture and music.

In 13<sup>th</sup> century during the rule of Alauddin khiljee, Kalinga was independent. Ameer khusro, a noted lyricist and musician who served then in the durbar (royal court) of Alauddin, had initiated a new musical trend by blending Indian music with Iranian and Persian music, which later transformed itself and was termed as the system of Hindustani music. Ameer Kushiro's musical trend called 'me' did not get the opportunity spread in Kalinga; rather it was the Utkalian music of Gopal Nayak which enchanted Ameer khusro.

'Udra' or Odissi music is not only ancient but classical and independent also. To prove this we need to debate on Odissi music's scriptures, its singing style and its difference from other systems of music. The poetry book 'Gita prakash' written by Krushna das dates back to the year 1565. After that many books on Odissi music have been written till date and we also come to know about the singing style of this music. Even before, 1565, there was a healthy tradition of Odissi music.

The land of Utkal, Toshal, Koshal, Kalinga is called as the land of artistic excellence. The music in Odisha has its own 'raga-ragini', 'tala', 'Chhanda' and the style in which 'Prabandha', 'Dhruvapada', 'chauPadi', 'Champu', Chhanda and Chautisha are sung is called 'uchaanga'.

Historian late Jagabandhu Singh had written as follows: "Gopala Odiara tappa Bangala bhashara pradhan pracheen sangeet". A man named as Gopal was Odia Karan by cast. He lived in Bengal (Banga formerly) and had earned fame as a litterateur. Gopal Nayak held a dignified position in the 'durbar' of king Krushna Chandra. The speciality and uniqueness of Odissi 'raga- ragini' has been mentioned in the writings of Gopal Nayak.

Naturally, in course of time music has some transformations under game. For establishing themselves, the musicians in Odisha also have been showing their musical prowess in various other states of India. The style of 'Udramagadhi' described as Bharat muni, long ago is prominently called as the Odissi style. Long ago the name 'Odisha' was not there. 'Udra' and 'Kangod' were known as the sub-states of Toshal state. The, Odisha we see today, has been formed with the combination of Udra, Kalinga Utkal, Kangod, koshal etc. Unlike the political and geographical partitions, there cannot be partitions in music. Culture and music have no barriers or boundaries. The cultures and music irrespective of region and state remain indelibly in the hearts and minds of Indians. There can be exchange of these two between the periods of 1205to1040, during the regime of king Jajati Keshari 2<sup>nd</sup>, Toshal, Utkal and koshal were combined together. And this combination during the rule of king Jajati led to the formation of Odisha. By that time Odia language had already come into existence. Odia language got propagated through folk music and literature. Hence it can be said undoubtedly that the Odia lyrical lines in Odissi songs have been in use since those days. After 'Keshari vansh' it was the 'gang vansh' and then came the 'Surya vansh' whose founder king was; Gajapati Kapilendra dev. It was during the rule of Gajapati Kapilendra dev, when Odissi music had already propagated to farther places. The geographical region which is now being called as Odisha and the tradition of classical music which had been flowing from the ancient era is known today as Odissi music and this was called as Udra Magadhi or Kalinga Sangeeta in the past. This had propagated between the era of Ramayana to Dandakaranya. In 'Natya-Shasta's the names of countries viz. 'Toshal', 'koshal' and 'mosaal' have been mentioned.

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