

Orissa

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Tribal Music

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The state of Orissa is located in eastern India, bordered by the Bay of Bengal to the east and by the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh to the north, west, and south, respectively. Its physical features range from a plateau in the north and river valleys (the Mahanadi, Brahmani, and Vaitarini) in the central region to the mountainous area in the south. Forty-two percent of the land is jungle. In 300 B.C. the emperor Ashoka conquered Orissa, then known as Kalinga; the land was considered to be beyond the pale of Aryan civilization, which had been introduced by Indo European-speaking peoples entering India in the second millennium B.C. It was here that Ashoka, realizing the futility of war and violence, embraced Buddhism and began a campaign propagating both the Buddhist religion and nonviolence. The later Jain, Satavahan, Gang, Bhaumakar, Soma/Kesari, and Surya dynasties ruled over the territory until 1568, when the Afghan sultan of Bengal took power and introduced Islam to the region. Thereafter the Mughals gained supremacy, although the Europeans began establishing trading centers in the early sixteenth century; British rule came in 1803. Until the recent past, the southern parts of Orissa were influenced by the Dravidian culture of the South Indian states.

Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam have all played significant roles in Orissa's history. After Ashoka's conversion, Buddhism held sway until the seventh century. Even the Hindu lord Jagannath was considered to be a reincarnation of Buddha, until followers of Vishnu assimilated the deity. The Kesari kings, rulers from 940 to about 1100, were staunch followers of Shiva. From the fifteenth century, Vaishnavism became Orissa's main religion, influencing every aspect of life and culture. The coastal city of Puri is not only the center of Jagannath worship but a focal point for the cultural life of eastern India, encompassing the arts, philosophy, religion, and literature.

The language of Orissa, Oriya, dates back at least to the early centuries C.E. and is mentioned in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* as Odraja. Language scholars claim it evolved

from a combination of Sanskrit, Bengali, and Mundari. From A.D. 1000 it was used as a literary language in the *boudha caryāgit* 'Buddhist devotional songs' composed in ragas, and from the fourteenth century there survives Oriya poetry as well as translations of the Hindu Puranas (sacred writings of A.D. 300-750) and epics. The bhakti cult, dating from the fourth and fifth centuries in South India and the fifteenth century in the North, produced an abundant literature of love and devotion. Theater and music also experienced parallel growth and development. The Hindustani or North Indian classical music system is predominant in Orissa, although vocal styles and vocalization patterns often remind listeners of Karnataka or South Indian classical music practice.

Tribal Music

Orissa's sizable tribal population has contributed much to the state's musical heritage. Of the many distinctive musical forms, two are mentioned here.

Members of the nomadic Kela tribe sing keluni songs. Kela men catch snakes and birds and earn their livelihood as snake charmers. Kela women are experts in tattooing. They sing songs describing female beauty and about how tattoos bring good luck. At one time the Kela used to play the guduki, a chordophone, to accompany their wives' singing and dancing.

Karam dance songs are performed by many tribes to propitiate either the male deity Karam Devta or the female deity Karamasani. Known especially among the Binjhal, Kisan Kol, Bhumij, and Santal tribes, karam songs vary from one group to another, with more or less scope for individual singers.

Folk and Devotional Music

The corpus of Orissan folk music consists of songs described broadly as devotional, mythological, festal, and community songs, dances, and ballads. Among the common forms of devotional music, *janānā* (literally 'to inform'/'') refers to solo songs sung by a Hindu devotee. The content of the songs is personal, informing God about the devotee's woes and miseries and seeking redress. Most *janānā* are addressed to Lord Jagannath, the ruling deity of Orissa.

The most popular devotional songs meant for group expression are *kāñjani bhajans*. The *kāñjani* is a frame drum held in the left hand and played with the right. Three other song forms also take their names from instruments associated with them: *kendra gīt*, *dundhuki gīt*, and *daskathi*. Most villages have small shrines dedicated to the trimūrti trinity--the three major Hindu deities Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva and these

are usually centers for bhajan singing groups. In addition to Hindu groups, Mahima Samaj, a Buddhist sect that worships *śūnya* 'the void', also sings its own bhajans.

Kīrtan is an important devotional song genre in Orissa connected with an ecstatic Vaishnav cult introduced from Bengal by Sri Chaitanya Deva. All villages have *kīrtan* groups that accompany the singing with a khol 'double-headed clay drum' and kartāl 'cymbals'. Special sessions of *kīrtan* singing known as *aṣṭ prahaṛ* last twenty-four hours without interruption.

Professional balladeers sing chanda, a section of an epic tale in Oriya, along with some dance steps. Chanda songs are rhythmical, are set to a raga, and employ themes from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, or the Puranas, and occasionally from love stories. The most popular of these ballads are daskathia and pala. Ballad singers perform daskathia (also called rāmkaṭhi) in pairs, accompanying themselves with two wooden clappers fitted with a bunch of ankle bells. The witty main singer narrates stories from the epics, which can last for hours. The assistant, known as the palia, repeats the refrain and participates in near-prose dialogue sections.

Another important variety of ballad is the pala, associated with the worship of Satyapir ("Satya" Hindu god, "Pir" Muslim saint), a synthesizing deity created during the seventeenth century to evoke Hindu-Muslim unity. A group of five to seven singers present the ballads. The main singer is known as the gāyak, the rhythm accompanist (bāyak) plays the mridang drum, and the remaining chorus (palia) provides vocal accompaniment and plays minor instruments such as the cymbals (kartāl).

A typical chattīs song consists of thirty-six stanzas, each beginning with a different consonant in the Oriya language. Folk singers and village elders sing these songs of mystical and didactic content.

Caupadi are four-stanza love songs describing feminine grace, charm, and the pangs of separation. They are commonly sung at village gatherings.

In the latter part of June, girls sing songs of fertility during the three-day Raja Sankranti festival. Swings are installed in every house and girls sing ḍoli gīt 'swing songs'. At the Kumārapūrṇimā festival on the full moon day in October, unmarried girls worship the sun god in the morning and the moon in the evening. Wearing new clothes, the girls sing kumārapūrṇimā gīt in chorus, adding and changing stanzas as they see fit.

Cowherds in Orissa perform songs and dances on various occasions, such as Giri Govardhan Pūjā (celebrating Krishna's lifting of Govardhan Mountain to save the people of Gokula, whom the god Indra tried to drown with torrential rains), Dola Yātrā (associated with Krishna and the festival of swings), and Gahama Purnima (a Krishna

festival for young people). These dance-songs (naudi gīt) tell of Lord Krishna and his exploits and are accompanied with hand-held rhythm sticks.

Nirguṇ gīt are theological riddles in question-and-answer form, with more melodic variation in the answer section. The songs are not associated with any particular occasion or singers.

Followers of the Nath cult sing yogi gīt to the accompaniment of a kendara 'bowed chordophone'. Itinerant musicians sing these mostly for audiences of women.

Various song and dance forms are associated with the Hindu Shakta cult. In the temples of the female deities Sarala Devi, Mangala Devi, and Karnika Devi, the patna jātrā festival dance is performed, while singers perform danda jatra songs in praise of Shiva. Instrumental accompaniment for these forms includes the mahuri 'double-reed aerophone', gini 'small cymbals', and khol 'double-headed clay drum'.

Chasa gīt 'cultivator's songs' are sung by laborers engaged in agricultural work; the lyrical content is often from the Ramayana or Mahabharata epics, or may be a narrative love song. Like chasa gīt, halia gīt are also songs concerned with agriculture, and are sung by bullockcart drivers and farmers.

Dandanata gīt are dance songs in question-and-answer form, sung by low-caste Hindus during the months of March and April. The singers perform intermittently during dancing accompanied by the dhol 'large cylindrical drum'. The song themes petitions are range from prayers to current affairs.

Dalkhai and rasarkeli are songs describing incidents from Lord Krishna's life or from the Ramayana, or humorous events from daily life. Sometimes competitions are held among youths who are encouraged to compose these polyphonic songs extempore. The large, sonorous mādal drum, often used by the Santals, accompanies these songs.

Other popular genres include the chaiti ghora nāc, a ritual dummy-horse dance of the fishermen community performed beginning on the full moon day of Chaitra (March) to propitiate the horse-headed deity Basuli; and desi karam, a solo male dance performed in western Orissa to the accompaniment of the mādal earthen drum.