



DHULI DANDA NATA OF KANDHAMAL DISTRICT-REFLECTION OF LIFE THROUGH VARIOUS PRANKS

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Abstract: Folk performances known as "Danda Nata," performed by rural farming communities and tribal people in Western and Southern Odisha, resemble religious festivals. It commences once a year, starting in the month of April (Chaitra), and continues for thirteen or twenty-one days that finish on Maha Vishuba Sankranti or Pana Sankranti. It comprises not just dance, music, theater, magic, circus, and stand-up comedy but also intricate rites and worships. It is a religious-theatrical performance done by the tribal or non-tribal people of Southern Odisha mainly Kandhamal district without any caste prejudice. The devotees of Danda Nata are named Dandua or Bhokta, and the head of them called Pata Dandua or Pata Bhokta. The thirteen Bhoktas conducted all ceremonial tasks in Danda Nata. It was also separated into four stages, i.e., Dhuli Danda, Pani Danda, Agni Danda, and Suanga Danda. The Dhuli Danda contains sixteen varieties of sand service, workout, theater, prank, etc. The Agni Danda and Pani Danda also cover all ceremonial procedures in Danda Nata. Lastly, the Nrutya Danda incorporates not only sixteen genres of dance, music, and band but also theater, stand-up comedy, mime, etc. The major gods of the Danda Nata are Lord Shiva and goddess Kali. It is also an amalgam of Hindu and tribal deities. In Danda Nata, a minimum of traditional musical instruments are employed. A broad range and diversity of fascinating music is generated by employing a dhol, a mahuri, a flute, a mardal, a ghanta, a ghungur, a tasa, a lishan, etc. This present Paper intends to study on the Dhuli Danda Nata and the ritual practices in Kandhamal district.

Key words- Danda Nata, Dandua, Bhokta, Suanga, Dhuli Danda, Pani Danda, Agni Danda, Mime, Flute etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

Danda Nata presented by rural farming and tribal people in western and south Odisha, including districts like Ganjam, Angul, Kandhamal, Boudh, Sonepur, Balangir, Sambalpur, Sundargarh, Kalahandi, and others, as a kind of religious celebration. It lasts for 13 days, culminating on Maha Vishuba Sankranti, and begins once a year at the beginning of April. Kandhamal lies between 19°34' North 25°54' North latitude and between 84°34' East and 84°48' East longitude with a total area of 8,021 sq.kms. consisting of 5709.83 sq.km forest area surrounded by Boudh on the north, Rayagada in the south, Kalahandi on the west

and Ganjam and Nayagarh on the east. The district is situated at a height of 300 to 1100 metres from sea level. This folk theatre incorporates a complex variety of rituals in addition to dance, singing, and acting. As a result, everyone, tribal and non-tribal, participates in this religious-theatrical event without regard to caste. There is much significance to the time of year that Danda Nata is performed. In India, the spring season known as Chaitra heralds a change in the social and cultural spheres in addition to the seasons. Following the harvesting operations that take place both indoors and outside throughout the winter months, springtime heralds a fresh rebirth in the natural world. Therefore, once agricultural operations for a year have concluded, it is the appropriate time for religious and cultural festivals to be celebrated outside. Once more, Chaitra is the month of the goddesses, who are worshipped in thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest and in anticipation of a bountiful crop the following year. Danda groups initiate Danda with a quite religious spirit on the first day of Chaitro and travel through villages barefoot for thirteen days performing Danda Nata.ⁱ A day's performance comprises five different phases of danda or punishment or penance, namely Dhuli Danda, Pani Danda, Agnidanda, Bana Danda and Suanga Danda. Scholarly opinions on the genesis of Danda Nata are contradictory and ambiguous. As a result, the history of Danda Nata remains obscure because, while researchers attempt to speculate using historical data, poets and danduas trace the legendary origins of the poem. It lacks any written records or text. It is a wonderful custom that has always been passed down from generation to generation. The very devout rural agricultural people have been doing it as an osha for millennia, hoping for the well-being of the entire cosmos. Because of the songs, dialogues, and proverbial expressions that the characters of the suangas employ, Danda Nata has had a huge literary impact on the evolution of folk literature. Danda Nata is a distinctive kind of folk theater that incorporates many different dance styles, musical styles, costumes, and makeup artistries. In various locations, this event is observed for 21, 13, 7, or 3 days.ⁱⁱ However, it is celebrated for 13 days in the majority of the Kandhamal area. This festival has moved. It originated as a result of Ganjam, Boudh and Sonepur cultural impact. In this district, the celebration has barely been around for a century. Everyone is welcome to attend this celebration, regardless of caste, with the exception of female participants.

Nomenclature of Danda Nata

Danda can imply a lot of different things, such as stick, pole, staff, club, rod, chastisement, subjugation, control, restriction, exercise, yama/control, time unit, penalty, and more. In Danda Nata, the term "Danda" refers to a "stick" or cane stick. It may also refer to a 'pole' that is worshipped during the Danda Nata performance and is sometimes depicted as Shiva and Shakti. The worship of a wooden pole has its origins in the Stambeswari cult, an old religion still followed by the indigenous tribes of Odisha.

Danda Nata in Kandhamal District

The Balaskumpa Danda Yatra Group is thought to be the first group in this district. Because Usata Sahoo of the hamlet of Balaskumpa wrote the songs chanted by various groups during this yatra. The final verse of a Danda yatra song demonstrates this.

“Iswar Parvati Dhyai
Usata Sahu Kahai
Balaskumpare Ghar
Shyam Sahura Kumar.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Time of the Performance

13 days before to Mesa Sankranti, also known as Maha Bisuba Sankranti (Solar Month Mesa), this celebration takes place. There is a song sung in this yatra that describes how the two main deities and significant figures of this festival, Iswar and Parvati, used to talk about the guidelines and norms of this festival.

Kumbha ante mina masa
Bhoga satara dibasa
Dakae asta sambhunku ,jiba panitolibaku
Gaurilo, danda magi barunaku.^{iv}

DHULI DANDA

The danduas travel from village to village for 13 or 21 days. While going through a village, if a villager wants them to host in front of his home, they build a circle of mud and dung and pour out the water from a brass pot. The danduas see it as an invitation to perform Danda Nata there in that village in front of the home of the host or in a proper position on the village street. After offering a small devotion to Lord Shiva, the band of danduas moves with the umbrella, Prabha, Champabara, and other holy items to a sacred site on the outskirts of the hamlet where water is available to take a few hours of rest. Just after midday, they arrive in the hamlet, banging dhol and blowing muhuri, and they pause for Dhuli Danda in front of the home of the host or any other specified site where 5 or 6 wooden pillars have been put on the ground. *Dhuli Danda* consists of a sequence of worships, physical exercise, miming and expressive pranks. Apart from little variations in the performances of different Danda parties, observed during field study the actual sequence of events of Dhuli Danda that lasts for about 3 hours is observed mention bellow:-

1. **Opening Puja** - The metal idols of Shiva & Parvati, the Prabha, Umbrella, Banners, Gouribeta are worshipped with offerings of flower, milk, lamp and incense. Besides, Shiva and Parvati and other 9 gods and goddesses like Kalika, Dakshina Koli, Rudrakali, Ranaghanto, Bout Kshetrapala, Chandi, Bhairavi and Bhubaneswari, are worshipped. Out of these Goddesses of which Dkshinakal, Rudrakali, Bhoiravi and Bhubaneswari belong to ten Wisdom Goddesses and Ranaghanta. Bauti and Kshetrapala are local folk deities of Odisha, particularly of the Western Odisha. Along with the Minor deties of local primacy are also worshipped together with them like Budho Gosain, Kandhen Budi, Panther etc. They are worshipped in the way that it seems to be an admixture of both Brahminic and indigenouse folk tradition of worship.
2. Danduas stand in front of the sacred objects like umbrella, prabha. Staff etc with hands folded and heads bowed.
3. Danduas forming rows put two or three steps forward and backward several times singing and dancing.
4. Danduas kneel down in a row and touch the earth with their foreheads.
5. Danduas lie stretched out in the dust with faces down touching the earth.
6. Danduas lift their right legs and hold them with their right arms while at the same time they grasp their noses with their left hands and hop on the ground.
7. Danduas dance with simple steps singing 'Kala Rudramaniki Bhaje' and keep on clapping hands.
8. Danduas listen to the various admonitions of the Pata Bhokta and other priestly Bhoktas.
9. Danduas lie stretched out in the dust, very close to each other side by side, with btheir faces downward, arms and heads stretched out towards the prabha.
10. Danduas lie stretched out in dust with faces turned up towards the sun.
11. Danduas lie with their heads raised and hands folded towards the sun.
12. Danduas mime sowing.
13. Danduas stand in front of the sacred objects with hands folded and heads bowed.
14. Danduas mime sweeping.
15. Danduas dance with simple steps singing 'Kala Rudramaniki Bhaje' and clap hands.
16. Danduas listen to the various admonitions of the Pata Bhokta and other priestly Bhoktas.
17. Danduas mime planting and watering plants.
18. Danduas stand in front of the sacred objects like umbrella, prabha. Staff etc with hands folded and heads bowed.
19. Danduas lie on the ground all rolling backwards and forwards.
20. Danduas dance with simple steps singing "Kala Rudramaniki Bhaje' and clap hands.
21. Danduas listen to the various admonitions of the Pata Bhakta and other priestly Bhoktas.
22. One of the Danduas rolls over others who lie on the ground.
23. Danduas roll forward and backward on the ground.
24. Danduas roll forward and backward on the ground forming pairs, one holding the legs of the other and pressing his face on or between the other's feet or legs.
25. Dandas dance with simple steps singing "Kala Rudramaniki Bhaje" and clap hands.

26. Danduas listen to various admonitions of the Pata Bhokta and other priestly Bhaktas.
27. **Champabara Puja^v**- This ritual lasts for 10 to 15 minutes. The danduas lie in front of the sacred objects stretched out on the ground with their faces down ward. The bhokta in- charge of Champabara kindles a small fire in front of Prabha with the smouldering end of the haystack called Champabara. This fire is nourished with straw and small pieces of wood. The four dandas or the earthen torches are lit with that fire. Then the Champabara is brought by its bearer, solemnly pointing its smouldering top towards the fire and the prabha for some time while dhole and muhuri are played and devotional songs are sung. The bhokta then turn clockwise with the champabara briefly pointing to other three directions. Smoke is spread in all four directions. Once the circle is completed, the rhythm of the music Increases, and the bhokta wildly swings the smouldering top of the champabara up and down, so that the movement of air sets its fire ablaze. Devotees with deep devotion stand all around and bowed the champabara with folded hands and offer gifts of money to goddess Kali.
28. **Temple Prank^{vi}** - Ten to fifteen danduas form a circle, standing with their arms around their neighbours. One of them sits inside the circle holding a long stick with a red flag on its top, which is waved over the bodies of the danduas. In some groups some danduos stand on the shoulders of those forming the bottom circle. These human circles are meant to depict the temples meant for Shiva and Kali.
29. Danduas stand in front of the sacred objects like umbrella, prabha and staff etc with hands folded and heads bowed.
30. **Well Prank^{vii}** - Ten to fifteen danduas sit close to each other in a circle to depict a well. One or two other danduas mime to draw or pull water from it.
31. Danduas dance with simple steps singing "Kala Rudramaniki Bhaje" and clap hands.
32. Danduas stand in front of the sacred objects like umbrella, prabha. Staff etc with hands: folded and heads bowed.
33. Danduas listen to the various admonitions of the Pata Bhokta and other priestly Bhaktas.
34. **Ploughing Prank^{viii}**- Four danduos form a rectangle with their bodies by lying down on the ground in a criss-cross pattern with their faces turned downward and touching the legs or feet of the other. Several such human rectangles are formed to depict fields. Two or more pairs of danduas, holding sticks over their neck like a yoke run over and around these rectangles driven by a priest hitting them on their backs with a stick, as if they are bullocks yoked to a plough.
35. Call of Dhuli Danda.
36. Farmer and wife out in the field prank.
37. *Danduas* lie stretched out in the dust with faces down touching the earth and the priest holding the swing of Lord Shiva and Parvati walks over the bodies of the *danduas* being assisted by two priestly assistants.

The exercises are done to the continuous pounding of the dhol and blowing of the muhuri. Standing in front of the *danduas* with a cane stick, priestly assistants observe the performances with great attention. Occasionally, they tap a *dandua* with the stick to remind him to complete the exercises more correctly. Nevertheless, the danduas undertake the exercises with enthusiasm, viewing them as a spiritual duty to complete despite the heat of the summer sun above and the earth below.

But the practical pranks are delivered in satirical fashion, resembling farces with lots of improvisation, slapstick, foolishness, and even light profanity. While *danduas* utilize no language at all in basic activities, language plays a far larger role in the pranks. The prank actors have roles to play and stories to tell. Funny wordplay and banter are key components of the pranks' atmosphere. Every prank has one thing in common: two players who are often in a hierarchical relationship oppose and converse with one another. The Brahmin priest and his subordinate priestly aide quarrel in the temple courtyard over how a certain worship service should be performed properly or how much it should cost.^{ix}

The pranks progressively go from the most basic to the most elaborate, using every facet of theatre, including music, dramatic finale, clothing, and conversation. These jokes are all social dramas that portray both familial and societal life. The various conflicts portrayed are a metaphor for the lively, humorous, and

community-oriented village life. On the other hand, these provide viewers a humorous portrayal of their own daily existence. *Dhuli Danda* is essentially a mime of different types of agricultural operations, such as worshipping the soil, preparing the ground, ploughing, and planting, in addition to rites and worship. Weeding, fertilizing, harvesting, reaping, husking, and so on. And all of these actions are carried out in honour of Lord Shiva throughout the sweltering summer. Ultimately, the lord's temple is constructed. Occasionally, the bhoktas sing at the *Dhuli Danda*, signifying their devotion to Lord Shiva.^x

Conclusion

Dandanata exhibits the life of a farming community with its diligent agricultural occupational activities along with the hardship and frustration, enjoyments and mirth of the common peasants. As a whole *Dhuli Danda*, depicts the life of the peasants who believe in a life of extreme pain and pleasure. One of the most well-known celebrations in the Kandhamal District is this one. The whole district anxiously awaits these days. It fosters amicable relationships and a joyous mood across the area. Even though it is a borrowed event, the tribal people engage in it with great fervour, dedication, and enjoyment. The celebration has now been tribalized, with the tribes taking it over as their own. *Danda Nata* is a mobile dance festival. The *Danda Nata* troops stay in a particular place for a day and night only. In less 24 hours staying at the night time they perform *Nrutya Danda*. The *Nrutya Danda* after *jhuna khela* the first ritual of the night and after that *suangas* beings and perform one after another till the morning and ends with the dance of *Binakara*. *Danda Nata* is one among the cultural heritage of Kandhamal whose evolution is unknown but with passes of time it became the major folk festival of this area.

ⁱ Bhagaban Sahu, *Folk life and culture of Odisha*, Kaberi books, New Delhi, 2015, p-113.

ⁱⁱ D N Pattnaik, *Folk Dance of Odisha*, Odisha Sangeeta Nataka Academy, Bhubaneswar, 1991,p-1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Data collection from Balaskumpa village of Kandhamal District on dt-15-04-2022.

^{iv} Data collection from Damodarapur village of Boudh District at the time of Danda Nata on Dt-5-4-2023.

^v Ananda Kabichandra, *Dandanata*, Dasarathi Pustakalaya, Kataka, 1974, pp-17-23.

^{vi} Minaketana Bag, *Dandanata: Representation of the Socio-Cultural Life of the people of Western Odisha through Performing Art*, International Journal of Development Research, Vol- 9 No. 9 Jan 2015,P-6.

^{vii} Basudeb Patra, *Dhulidandara Lokanatya Riti(Odia)*, Mohatshava Smaranika, Boudh Cultural Fouram, 2014,p-33.

^{viii} Ibid. p-36.

^{ix} Minaketana Bag, Op.Cit,p-7.

^x Sanyasi Nayak, *Kamanadanda*, Santoshi Prakashani, Brahampur,1984, pp-21-26.