



Choreography In Manipuri Dance Productions Based On Contemporary Theme With Special Reference To Poushali Chatterjee And Dr. Bimbavati Devi

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Abstract

This research focuses on the development of choreography in the context of Manipuri dance's evolution through the modern theatrical works of Poushali Chatterjee and Dr. Bimbavati Devi. Manipuri dance, a classical form from the northeastern state of India, is traditionally devotional and ritualistic. It has, however, undergone transformative change, through innovative choreography, in its socio-cultural, and political expressions. The research studies how both choreographers integrate dance forms of *Laiharaoba*, *Lasya*, *Tandav*, *Thang-ta*, and *Cholom* with thematic variations to convey strong statements in imaginative ways.

Chatterjee's works, such as *Sama*, *Pata-Katha*, *Parichay*, and *Malemgi Wari* have a focus on harmonious existence, environmental degradation, and reinterpretation of mythology. She commonly utilizes *Thang-ta* to express imbalance and destruction, whereas movements from *Laiharaoba* and *Cholom* symbolize hope. *Footprints in Blood* captures the essence of Manipuri dance as a mode of women's resistance, reclaiming the art from contemporary turmoil and historical violence. *Thang-ta* is employed for empowerment and justice, particularly when depicting female warriors and goddesses.

The paper closes by noting that both of the choreographers, in their individual viewpoints, have Manipuri dance expanded within its scope of expression, reaffirming its importance in contemporary societies and considering it a notable instrument for cultural critique and change.

Key Words: Chorography, Manipuri Dance, Contemporary Theme, Pata Katha, Footprint in Blood, Thang-ta, Cholom, Laiharaoba

Introduction

The term choreography is also considered as dance composition, and it refers to the arrangement of ideas in the form of bodily movements organized to music. Choreography, which is derived from a Greek expression that means 'writing a dance', is defining dance all over the globe as performances incorporate choreography. In this paper I will discuss the context of such choreography in the classical dance form called Manipuri Dance, which is from the Indian state Manipur located in the North Eastern part of India. Devotional themes are intrinsic to the art form and it is deeply rooted into the life of the people of Manipur.

As with other Indian classical dances, the choreography of Manipuri dance has been preserved and systematized by various eminent masters over many generations. Among others, Poushali Chatterjee and Dr. Bimbavati Devi have made exceptional contributions through their own unique choreographic innovations. Chatterjee's "*Pata Katha*" reproduces the vanished art of the ancient Bengali *Potuas*, while Dr. Bimbavati Devi's "*Footprint in Blood*" deals with social issues of today. Both use traditional Manipuri movements and artistic expression in these works.

This study attempts to describe the function of choreography in the context of Manipuri dance—its traditional aspects, innovative changes, and its relevancy in relation to contemporary issues. Through an analysis of selected choreographers and their productions, this study aims to foster the perception of Manipuri dance as an art form responsive to evolving times.

Methodology

This advanced research employs qualitative analyses regarding choreography and examines contemporary choreographic compositions of Poushali Chatterjee and Dr. Bimbavati Devi. The study utilizes a descriptive analysis of several chosen choreographic pieces, concentrating on the overarching ideas, stylistic components, and figurative use of traditional dances with elements of modern drama choreography.

The interviews, recordings of performances, and published articles regarding choreographers and their works provided the information necessary to gather primary data. If possible, the live or recorded performances of '*Sama: the harmony of life*', '*Pata-Katha*', '*Parichay*', '*Malemgi Wari*', and '*Footprints in Blood*' were studied to determine the choreographic structure and movements used, along with the traditional forms of Manipuri dance like *Laiharaoba*, *Lasya*, *Tandav*, *Thang-ta*, and *Cholom*.

Analysis of Choreography used in Poushali Chatterjee's Productions:

Chatterjee's well-known work '*Sama: the harmony of life*' revolves around the theme of the world. *Sama* refers to harmony which is steadily becoming less prevalent in today's world. 'In *Sama*', there is a message given to us that although we are apart and detached from one another, we can still strive to connect and nurture and sustain harmony'. In order to demonstrate this understanding, two distinct dance forms, Manipuri and Odissi are blended. The message of *Sama* is that there is a possibility of harmony being created in spite of using two different dance styles. In *Sama* the relation between 2 young lovers is being showcased in three different phases. In the first phase, we see two Manipuri dancers. The dancers exhibit

lack of cohesiveness as they, perform the same dance form. To showcase this conflict, there exists a chain tying them together. In the second phase, we can see two Odissi dancers. The dancers are separated by a frame of a mirror which denotes the lack of harmony among them. In the third phase, in the last scene of Sama, one Manipuri and one Odissi dancer perform together.

Two unique styles of dance coexist together in a single choreography. One dancer seems to be envisioning the second dancer. Furthermore, the bond that bound the two young lovers in the beginning phase of this work transforms into a cradle in the final phase, illustrating the complete harmony - 'sama' - between them. The choreographer has incorporated differing styles from the dances of Manipur and Odisha into this piece, which resulted in one work.

Poushali Chatterjee has also produced '*Pata-katha*'. In '*Pata-katha*' the dance forms of *Laiharaoba*, *Cholom*, *tandav* and *lasya*, *thang-ta* were utilized very powerfully and deeply. In one sequence of *Pata-katha*, the Potuas (the rural painters on Bengal), are drawing pictures with many colours. In this case, the audience is made understanding by different dance forms representing different colours. For instance, the color green which represents Earth is expressed through *Laiharaoba*. *Lasya* is also expressive of gentle colour blue. Because yellow is energetic, both *Krishna tandav* and *Cholom Tandav* are utilized. *Thang-ta* is used for red, which is a very strong colour. *Pata-Katha* has three parts. In the battle scene (war scene) of the story of Queen Padmini, *Thang-ta* is danced during the battle. In the scene of Jawahar Brata, the sword dance of *thang-ta* is mimed with sticks. The sticks are covered in loose orange ribbons at the top to represent fire. In the scene of 'tsunami', a group of dancers performed *thang-ta* and snatched a child away.

In the story of 'Behula-Lakhindar', Goddess Manasa's character dances with the moves of *thang-ta* while Behula performs *Lasya* and Lakhindar dances in a *tandav* style.

With "*Parichay*", Poushali Chatterjee has produced yet another work. In the *Nani-Churi* (butter stealing) scene, Krishna is dancing *Thang-ta*. While in the Radha character, she performs *lasya*. In the character of Chitrangada, *Thang-ta* is performed. To demonstrate the motion of 'Ta' (spear) a large stick is wielded. In addition to these, this production also makes use of *Laiharaoba*.

'*Malemgi wari: An Earth Story*' is yet another production by Poushali Chatterjee. The words 'Malem' and 'wari' in the Manipuri language mean Earth and Story respectively. In the '*Malemgi wari*' production, it was depicted that during the primitive age the bond of mother and daughter and that of Earth and the humans was one and the same. Both these relationships were very much interconnected. But alas! In modern times it becomes. For the early years mental age of *tandav* and *lasya* is employed and in the mental adolescent stage son's dance form of *tandav* is performed. In one of the scenes dice playing is incorporated. The child has grown into a young adult and his lover is portrayed as symbolizing modern technology. She is a young girl who dances in the style of *lasya*. Bold *thang-ta* is done in the background, which represents the destructive side of technology. In another scene, a large plastic curtain covers mother Earth - this outer layer is the symbol of pollution. When Mother Nature gets angry, disruptions in the form of earthquakes, raging storms, flooding, etc. violently ensue. For this bold *cholom tandav* is performed. Afterwards, the young man dies. To return to primitive time, *laihaooba* must be danced. This informs us that humanity

ought to return to the ancients and turn to earth. In Sama puppet is used. black *fetti* is used to show 'to follow blindly the evil things. In *Parichay* Chitrangada wears a turban and she rapidly takes off her turban and with white *uttariya* turns into Meera. In *Malemgi Wari* in the scene of cutting trees *thang-ta* is used.

Analysis of Choreography used in Dr. Bimbavati Devi's Production:

In Dr. Bimbavati Devi's productions of contemporary dances for theater, the power and the strength of women is profoundly and meaningfully illustrated.

Footprints in Blood intertwines three core stories. The first one is from 1939 '*Nupi Lan*' (Woman War) when fearless agrarian women fought to death in order to protect their household and livelihood from British exploitation and rice export.

The second one is of the bold '*Meira Paibi*' (torch bearer) who openly and defiantly march around in torches advocating against social injustices like family violence, substance misuse, and violation of one's human rights.

The last story depicts the nude shocking women's protest of 2004, where women fiercely fought the societal norms of rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama. Setting clues to the state's sentinels.

Thangak Lairembi, the other world goddess of the gates, while hearing *Meira Paibi*'s karmic tale symbolises her to Panthoibi who is a warrior goddess representing courage, energy and fertility along with love and peace. She states such women to be courageous affirm 'Vanquishing women of this sort are undying'.

The costume of the performance is an unbroken synthesis of folk and classical Manipuri dance and *thang-ta* giving reference to the '*thumok*' meaning basket strainer that is used for measuring rice in Manipur.

Bold *thang-ta* in *footprint* portrays is used to represent women's power. In one particular scene, the character Manorama is depicted as an innocent girl plucking lotus flowers from water. Subsequently, bamboo dance is used to portray that she was imbued in captivity, as simultaneously she was being bound by four bamboos expressing cords of rape and murder. While *Thangak Lairembi* was beating on her drum, we could say that she had stereotypically

"lost it", based on how all classical breakout practices term it. And at the same time the entry of *Nupi Lan* warriors in the middle of the stage, occurred. They were bearing long white cloth upon which many red prints of hand can be seen.

Conclusion:

In a variation of footsteps inspired by *Laiharaoba*, I could witness transformations similar to an impulsive controlled ode of flowing through the works of Poushali Chatterjee and restaged by Dr. Bimbavati to infuse breath and power into their movements.

Poushali uses choreography as one of the ways to deal with harmony, myth, ecological consciousness, and human relations. With *Thang-ta*, she usually depicts death and destruction while bold creative *Cholom*

movements stand for energy restoration. By placing Manipuri alongside another Indian classical forms like Odissi, she interculturally debates which, if not fostered, leads to emotional or aesthetic disequilibrium.

On the other hand, Dr. Bimbavati Devi Incorporates patterns of Manipuri dance to interpret the strength and supremacy of women. Her works such as *'Footprints in Blood'* where Imphal depicts historical resistance and modern-day protest are rich in symbolic and emotional expressions. In this case, *Thang-ta* represents strength and divine retribution, while ancient ritualistic dances depict the forces of unity that is transformative.

In both cases, we see they were able to show that Polynesian dance, although conservatively originated from one place, is not rigid. Their use of inovative methodologies has expanded the expression of the dance and created a means of narration in recent times. By addressing contemporary realities and employing older styles, they make sure that Manipuri dance is an art form that evolves and carries depth.

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