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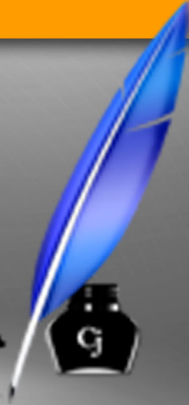
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## **Acculturation of the Folk Dances: Special Reference to Maharashtra**

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### **Abstract:**

Cultural Studies is an advanced area of research. With many other aspects, it focuses on Folk Culture of the ethnic society. Folk culture consists of folk tales, folk songs, and folk dances. Maharashtra has its own folk culture to represent. The folk dances of Maharashtra are popular not only in India but also in abroad. Although there were dynamic changes through the ages, the heritage of the folk dances were preserved and handed over from generation to generation. But the things are changing rapidly. Acculturation of the folk dances is taking place. Acculturation is the process of adaptation, admiration and merging of one culture into another. With commercial interests, amateurism, entertainment, status issue and glamour are the elements for such acculturation. Film Culture and Mass Media like Television are playing pivotal role in the acculturation. Actualities are sacrificed to satisfy the taste of the present generation. In the age of Globalization, Privatization and Liberalization, the acculturation is an inevitable process and it largely affected folk culture in general and folk dances in particular. The present article tries to draw attention to the elements responsible for acculturation of folk dances.

**Key Words:** Aboriginal, Acculturation, Commercialization, Culture, Ethnicity, Folk, Folk Dance, Mass Media, Multiculturalism etc.

### **I) Introduction**

India is a multicultural country. The term 'multiculturalism' implies the admiration, reception and endorsement of multiple cultures. It is applied to the demographic make-up of a specific place, usually at the organizational level. Multiculturalism represents the ethnic diversity. India is a unique example of unity in diversity. Every ethnic group has their own folk culture to present.

The Freedictionary defines folk as: 'The common people of a society or region considered as the representatives of a traditional way of life and especially as the originators or carriers of the customs, beliefs, and arts that make up a distinctive culture...'. In German the word 'folk' is used equivalent to 'volk' means people. William Thoms was the first to use the term 'folklore' for 'folk literature' in English. Folklore is divided into three major parts – Folk Tales, Folk Songs and Folk Dances. Folk Tales are imaginary tales and created to educate and entertain the masses. Fables, legends, fairy tales, allegories etc. are some of the examples of Folk Tales. Folk Songs reflect traditional life style and beliefs of the people

belong to certain class and category. Oral transmission, choral group singing, games etc. are some of the important traits of Folk Songs. Folk Dances are related to the collective physical movements. The term 'folk dance' is sometimes applied to the dances of historical importance in European culture and history, typically originated before 20<sup>th</sup> century. For other cultures the terms 'ethnic dance' or 'traditional dance' are sometimes used, although the latter term may encompass ceremonial dances. The term 'folk dance' is reserved for dances which are to a significant degree bound by the tradition and originated in the times when the distinction existed between the dances of 'common folk' and the dances of the 'high society'.

Maharashtra is one of the major states located in the Western region of India. It is the second most populous and third largest state by area in India. It is roughly divided into five major sub-regions – Western Maharashtra, Konkan, North Maharashtra, Marathwada and Vidharb. Every sub-region has its own social, cultural and lingual identity. The real commencement to preserve the folklore of Maharashtra has been started from 1916 by V. K. Rajwade. Various efforts have been made to preserve the cultural identity at different levels like regional, social, governmental, NGOs etc. Marathi is the regional language of Maharashtra with variety of dialects like Khandeshi, Kokani, Varhadi etc. Foods, music, dances, clothing, tools, and technologies etc. are the part of the cultural heritage. Various ethnic groups dwelling in Maharashtra since the ancient times are preserving their heritage.

## II) Folk Dances of Maharashtra

Maharastrian folk dances are simple dances, and are performed to express joy. They are performed for every possible occasion such as to celebrate the arrival of seasons, birth of a child, wedding and festivals, to perform rituals and holy ceremonies etc. The dances are extremely simple with minimum of steps or movements. The dances burst with verve and vitality. Men and women perform some dances solely, while in some performances men and women dance together. On the most occasions, the dancers sing themselves, while being accompanied by artists on the stipulated instruments. Each form of dance has a specific costume. Most costumes are flamboyant with extensive jewels but in some cases they are also made up from the natural resources available easily. While there are numerous ancient folk and tribal dances, many are constantly being improved. The skill and the imagination of the dancers influence the performances. Following are some of the examples of the folk dances of Maharashtra :

**Lavani:** *Lavani* is associated with *Tamasha*, traditional folk lore of Maharashtra. *Tamasha* consists of *Vagnatya* (Melodrama) and *Nritya* (Danc). *Lavani* belongs to the later. It is a combination of the traditional song and dance, with particularly performed to the enchanting beats of *Dholak* , a drum like instrument. This dance is performed by attractive women wearing nine-yard saris. The women swivel on the vivacious beats of traditional music. The word *Lavani* originates from *Lavanya*, meaning beauty. Earlier, this art form

dealt with different and varied subject matters such as society, religion, politics, romance, etc. Lavani was used as a form to entertainment and as a morale booster to the tired soldiers during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Maratha battalion. Many famous Marathi poets like Honaji Bala, Ram Joshi, Prabhakar, Bapu Patherao etc. contributed to the popularity of *Lavani*. *Lavani* is also called as the Queen of the Folk Dances.

**Waghya-Murali:** Lord Khandoba is the *Avatar* i.e. incarnation of Lord Shiva. His temple is located at Jejuri in Pune District. *Waghya-Murali* performs the special dance and sings songs to worship and please Lord Khandoba. They do all their pleading with their dance, song, reading, writing and everything for their own Lord Khandoba. Their performance consists of dance, witty remarks, sometimes *natikas* (short play), and marriage of Muruli to Khandoba. *Waghya-Muruli's* performance is also called as *Jagaran Gondhal* (Awakening).

**Povadas:** *Povadas* are Marathi ballads, describing the events in the life of the great Maharashtrian warrior and the founder of Maratha Kingdom, Shri Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. He holds a highly respected position in the hearts of the people of Maharashtra. Through these ballads they remember Shivaji, a great hero of his time. *Povada* commemorates the events of bravery in his life. *Povada* is the means to honor the courage of the great king Shivaji and his Courtiers.

**Bharud:** *Bharud* is one of the tools of social orientation and reformation. The social follies and mistakes are ridiculed through the performance by the trained artists. It has long medieval history and tradition since the time of Saint Eknatha of 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Maharashtra. *Vinchu Chavwala* (tr. Scorpio bite off), *Burkunda Hoyil* (tr. You will beget a thug), *Assa Dadala nako g bai* (tr. I don't want such a kind of husband) etc. are some of the famous *Bharuds*.

**Dhemsas:** *Dhemsas* or *Dhimsas*, an ancient traditional folk dance, is performed by the peasants of Maharashtra in Nadurbhar District. A group of 15 to 20 women form a chain and dance. *Dhimsa* is performed to honor to the local deity. Their costumes are like bark of the tree, leaves, sticks and feathers of peacocks.

**Dindi:** *Dindi* is a folk dance of Maharashtra that is usually performed during *Ekadashi* day in the Marathi month *Kartik*. Vitthal of Pandharpur is the deity of the Varkari Sect of Maharashtra. The pilgrimage to visit the deity take place from various parts of Maharashtra and thousands people participate in it. This religious devotional dance describes the lighthearted outlook of Lord Krishna. The dancers dance to the rhythm by surrounding the musicians, providing the essential musical background. *Ringan* is the largest circle and thousands of the devotees participate in it.

**Koli:** Maharashtra has 720 km sea-shore and the fisher folk dwelling near the sea-shore of the Arabian Sea are called *Koli*. These fishermen are famous for their distinct culture, costume and sparkling dances. Their dance reflects the essentials from their occupation that

is fishing. This dance form is performed by both men and women, who are divided in groups of two. Worshipping the sea as well as their Local Deity Goddess Ekvira, rowing of the boat, catching the fish, adoration of lover or beloved, marriage, birth of a child etc. are the themes presented through their dance movements.

### III) Acculturation of the Folk Dances

Acculturation is a dynamic concept and its interpretation changes according to the area of discipline and research. Redfield and others define acculturation: 'Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when group of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture pattern of either or both groups' (1936: 149)

Paul N. Lakey states the definition, as is stated by Social Science Research Council, in his essay 'Acculturation: a Review of the Literature' : '...culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of value system, the process of integration and differentiation, the generation of developmental sequence, and the operation of role determinants and personality factor' (2003: 947)

As above mentioned, acculturation is the process of adaptation, change and merging of values and patterns of one society into another. Such acculturation is dynamic and inevitable in the case of the folk dances and can be perceived in the process of Mise-en-scene, i.e., staging or putting it into the scene. The journey of folk dances from its original form to the present time forms is the cardinal part of such acculturation. The elements responsible for such changes are focused in the present research article.

Basically, every folk dance was related to a particular community – for example – *Koli* Dance to fishermen community, *Lavani* for Kolhati or Mahar or Mang community, *Dhemsā* for Adivasis at Nandurbar District of Maharashtra, *Dhanagari Gaja* for shepherd community etc. These dances were either the means of earning to them (e.g. *Lavani*) or they have to do different social, religious or spiritual functions by performing them (e.g. *Waghya-Muruli*). Most of the performers of the folk dances were either from the lower social category or untouchables. But now-a-days, people from elite class and high society are sending their children to the classes to learn the folk dances, for competitive purposes. Folk Culture has been replaced by the commercial interests with the ethnographical modifications and folk dances found the prior place. With larger financial gains, amateurism, entertainment, status issue and glamour are the other elements responsible for the acculturation of folk dances. Anonymous and collective choreographers are replaced by professional dance masters and specialists. Informal ways of learning the folk dances are converted into formal educational institutes. From primitive stage, the folk dances are getting the status of an industry.



Previously, the skills and performances of folk dance were transmitted as well as handed over from generations to generations. But now the means are changed. With emergence of Film Culture, the first break up took place. Television, Video Cassettes, CDs, DVDs, Internet and even mobiles become the means to carry the folk dance culture. Television is playing the key role in the process of acculturation. *Dhina-Dhin-Dha, Halla Bol, Dance India Dance, Ekapeksha Ek, Nach Baliye* etc. reality shows are the best examples of record dance competition of the folk dances. Various NGOs and Amateur Clubs in Maharashtra are organizing folk dance competition with huge money reward which is the sign of commercialization. From their survival stage, with these means, the dances are reached to revival stage and moving to the way of revolution. Mass Media played pivotal role in converting the traditional folk culture into popular culture. Barak Obama and his wife Michelle following the *Koli* dance steps had become the headline of the leading newspapers of the world.

Social and geographical barriers are on the way of diminishing and the folk dances are migrating from rural to urban areas. The infrastructure facilities, audience, money motivation and glamour are the factors responsible for such migration. The local distinctiveness of the folk dances is transformed into the identification of State or Country. Globalization is illuminating the identity of the folk dances but not without modifications. These modifications are leading the folk dances to acculturations.

Merely the indigenous musical instruments without electric supply were used to performance such folk dances. *Drum, Dholak, Mrudung, Duff, Sambal, Dimdi* etc. are the indigenous percussive instruments attached to the particular form of folk dances. *Dholak* for *Lavani*, *Dimdi* for *Vaghy-Muruli*, *Sambal* for *Gondhal*, *Mrudung* for *Dindi* – such kinds of allotment were followed by generation to generation. Harmonium was the common vocal musical instrument for all. Now it's amusing to watch the performances with Jazz and Pop instruments like synthesizer and electric guitar. Remix fashion and parody has also been intruded in the cosmos of folk dances. Actualities are sacrificed and hybridizations are taking place to get more and more audio-visual impact. To keep the stamina for whole day or night, the original folk dance performers used to dance slowly. For the sake of competition, the time has been compressed, synchronization has become more complicated and physical movements are intensified. Aboriginal dress coded is replaced by readymade drapery.

Thus acculturation is intruding in various ways and modifying not only the folk dances but also the folk culture.

#### IV) Conclusion:

Folk dances express enthusiasm and jubilation of the ethnic society. They platform regional lifestyles with a special flavor of a particular culture. The means, modes, mediums as well as ways of presentation have been highly modified and piloted the acculturation.

Thus the present research article attempts to unveil the characteristics in the folk dances of Maharashtra and paves way to the study of acculturation of folk dances.

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